



Business Solutions for the Global Poor

Book Review by Wayne Visser

Book details

Business Solutions for the Global Poor: Creating Social and Economic Value. V. Kasturi Rangan, John A. Quelch, Gustavo Herrero, Brooke Barton (editors). Jossey-Bass. 433 pages. Hardback.

Ever since C.K. Prahalad, Stuart Hart and Allen Hammond proposed the base/bottom of the pyramid (BOP) model five years ago – calling on business to tap the underserved markets of the world's 4 billion poor – we have had to be content with a handful of the same examples being endlessly cited to illustrate the idea (such as Hindustan Lever's single-use sachets in India).

Now, finally, here is a book which gives us more case studies to chew on. *Business Solutions* is a collection of papers that were presented in December 2005 at the Harvard Business School conference on Global Poverty: Business Solutions & Approaches. It comprises 32 concise chapters, organised into six sections: 1) Just who are the poor? 2) Meeting the basic needs of the poor, 3) Building the BOP value chain, 4) Business and leadership models, 5) The role of government and civil society, and 6) Measuring success.

Almost all of the chapters are case-based and together they cover around 20 countries, although more than half of these are focused on Central and South America. By implication, one of the weaknesses of the book is its poor coverage of Africa (other than South Africa) and Asia (other than India). Also notable is the lack of author reflexivity around the BOP model itself, which others have criticised for its neoliberal philosophy, potential environmental impacts and implications for governance and accountability.

Despite these limitations, I expect that any practitioners or academics working in the area of business in society – and more specifically looking at the role of companies in helping to alleviate poverty – will find this book an invaluable source of new ideas and fresh examples.

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