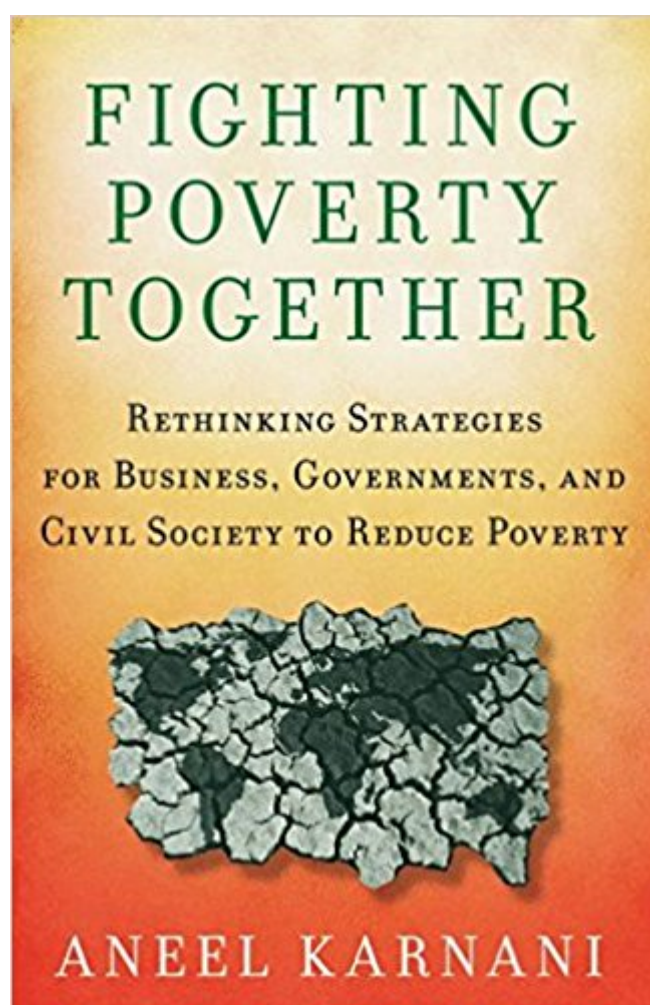


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Fighting Poverty Together: Rethinking Strategies For Business, Governments, And Civil Society To Reduce Poverty



Synopsis

In this hard-hitting polemical Karnani demonstrates what is wrong with today's approaches to reducing poverty. He proposes an eclectic approach to poverty reduction that emphasizes the need for business, government and civil society to partner together to create employment opportunities for the poor.

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Customer Reviews

"Fighting Poverty Together is a clear-headed, pragmatic and ultimately hopeful look at real solutions to the moral affront that is global poverty. This is a great book!" - Bruce McNamer, CEO, TechnoServe "Rejecting the market libertarian approach - including the microcredit and 'bottom of the pyramid' marketing fads - Aneel Karnani urges job creation, government social provisioning, and civil society advocates and watchdogs to reduce poverty. Instead of romanticizing the poor, the market, and business, his pragmatism deserves attention in an age when capitalism is the 'only show in town.'" - Jomo Kwame Sundaram, United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Economic Development "Aneel Karnani wields a scythe through the fuzzy thinking and well-meaning but ineffective anti-poverty programs that continue to divert valuable time and money. His new book is must reading for anyone trying to create solutions to global poverty that actually work." - Eric Nee, managing editor, Stanford Social Innovation Review "A provocative, sober, and balanced assessment of the formidable challenges of improving the life-chances of the world's poorest people. Karnani has made a major contribution to our understanding of both the sources of

global poverty and the roles that business, government, and civil society realistically can play in ameliorating it." - David Vogel, Haas School of Business, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley>

ANEEL KARNANI Associate Professor of Strategy with the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, USA.

This book is mostly a collection of previously published articles edited for the book. The structure of each chapter is a review of information, good practices and, sometimes, theories, followed by discussion of cases. In a sense this seems very practical and makes the book very readable. Nevertheless, sometimes one has the feeling that the cases have been chosen to prove what one wants to prove. Post hoc ergo propter hoc The thrust of the book is to present a potential solution to the problem of poverty: empowerment, through meaningful employment. In the process the author is very keen to debunk, or sometimes attack widely held beliefs, particularly the idea that microfinance can help reduce poverty (no, it does not) or that doing business at the base of pyramid will help the poor get out of that base (it may, but not in the traditional presentation of the pioneer of the idea C.K.Prahalad). The discussion in the book is very well structured and the points are convincingly made. But.....The author seems to have an obsession in criticizing Prahalad's idea of the fortune at the bottom of the pyramid and the microfinance model, pioneered by Yunus. After several decades working on development, I wholly concur with his criticism that the poor have to be seen as a resource to be integrated in the 'circle of exchange' (as Pope John Paul II advocated in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, 13 years before Prahalad's book) and not something to be exploited. Also, that microfinance does not an entrepreneur make. But he takes them to a level of an obsession. Could it be because Prahalad (India) and Yunus (Bangladesh) are from his neighborhood (India)? He seems to be against a lot of ideas. He also wrote the controversial article "The case against Corporate Social Responsibility" in the *Wall Street Journal*, out of a misunderstanding of what CSR is. Fortunately, this article contributed to the promotion of CSR, as it elicited a tremendous amount of discussion and support for CSR. The vast majority of the examples in the book are from India which limits the effectiveness of the ideas. While India is a vast country, with a significant number of experiences in addressing its extensive poverty, it cannot be an example for the entire world. Its economic, social, cultural and political system is unique. By concentrating so much on a single country limits the effectiveness and power of the ideas presented. There are a couple of cases from Latin America and a few from Africa and other Asian

countries, but they do not balance the book. On the role of governments, he takes a very simplistic and narrow view, for instance proposing some rather bland and naïve ideas like increase public sector salaries, and introduce pay for performance. Nothing wrong with that, but they are probably very hard to implement. If not, why haven't they been implemented already? The development community has tried time and again to reform the public sector along these lines but with limited success. This does not mean that we have to give up, but it means that it does require a more thorough analysis than the simplistic one presented in the book. For instance, there is not one word in the book about the power of public sector unions. They cannot be ignored. Consistent with his article on CSR, he thoroughly underestimates the power of the private sector actions, including the power of well-structured philanthropy to support improved public sector governance and civil society development. We need to overcome government and market failure, and this cannot be done without the participation of a responsible private sector. But his emphasis on employment is absolutely spot on. But it is the private sector, operating in a conducive business climate that will create employment. He does present the issue of business climate, but does not discuss how to improve it, in order to combat poverty. His view of civil society is also rather narrow. He sees civil society mostly as a provider of resources, which tend to be its bigger problem. He does not see civil society in the broader context of partner of the private and public sector in the solution of poverty problems, by taking advantage of its honest broker role, its grassroots knowledge and its passion to contribute to development. A good example of this misinterpretation is that the issue of social entrepreneurship is discussed in this chapter. Social entrepreneurs are not part of civil society; they are part of a responsible private sector, entrepreneurs that are born responsible and want to contribute to solve society's problems through the market. The chapters on Governments and Civil Society are not as well developed as the preceding ones. The irony of it all is that the solution is in the title of the book: Fighting Poverty Together. But the author does not exploit the synergies and complementarities of government, private sector and civil society working TOGETHER. His obsession against microfinance, business at the bottom of the pyramid and CSR does not allow the author to present a balanced view. Although the main thrust of the book is correct: empowerment and opportunities for gainful employment. Overall, a very good book that could have been even better had it considered more cases from other countries and taken a less dogmatic and broader view.

Aneel Karnani is not a household name in aid-policy circles, but he should be. His book, "Fighting Poverty Together: Rethinking Strategies for Business, Governments, and Civil Society to Reduce

Poverty," is a fascinating upending of conventional wisdom that critiques government policies without a Dambisa Moyo-like condemnation of good intentions. In his book, Karnani, a University of Michigan professor, takes the reader through trendy concepts in aid and development circles like "tip of the spear" and shows how they are embraced by corporate and government interests for the well-being of themselves, not those they wish to help. But he doesn't impugn their motives. He understands this is natural human perception, and simply points out his flaws and suggests better ways. He shows that foreign aid and business investment have their place, but neither is a panacea. Finally, the book is hopeful but also realistic. Poverty won't be solved in a day, but efforts to solve poverty are worthwhile, and real progress in reasonable time is achievable. I highly recommend this well-written book, which is both insightful for the aid professional and readable for people simply interested in the topic.

This book provides an honest and practical approach for alleviating poverty. There is no exaggeration in Karnani's writing. A must read for the BOP practitioners and researchers.

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