

Book Review

Anderson, S. (2014). *New strategies for social innovation: Market-based approaches for assisting the poor*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Reviewed by Ottis Murray, Ed.D.
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 12, Number 1 (2015)
Copyright 2015, Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)

This text may be freely shared among individuals, but it may not be republished in any medium without express written consent from the authors and advance notification of ASWB.

A continuing question for activists, social scientists, governments, corporations and the general public has been “how do we assist the poor?” This question continues to seek a viable response. Enter Steven Anderson’s new book, *New Strategies for Social Innovation: Market-Based Approaches for Assisting the Poor*. Dr. Anderson, director of the Michigan State University School of Social Work, teaches social program development and welfare policy. He is particularly interested in policies and program strategies to improve access for the poor and positive outcomes for social programs. As Anderson explains, he seeks to “describe and assess an important set of social development approaches that have emerged largely outside the scope of governmental provision in recent years.” As such, this book is an important departure from a more general focused approach on the role and performance of governments in assisting the poor. Acknowledging government action is crucial; however, given its uneven history and performance, the author elects to take us on a journey to review and explore four market-based social change models (i.e., corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, private sustainable development, and fair trade) that may prove to be viable options in assisting the poor.

In the first chapter, the reader is quickly familiarized with market-oriented social development approaches. Following an overview of significant challenges (e.g., relationships between market-oriented approaches and governments, globalization, the spe-

cial role of consumers, welfare retrenchment, and the rise of both the corporate and nonprofit sectors), the reader is encouraged to consider this as a wonderful time for “social innovation,” as society has undergone tremendous advances in new communication technologies, sources of ideas, and resources. Perhaps, this could be summarized as “hope springs eternal.”

In Chapter Two, seeing gaps in theorizing and comparing social change models, the author develops a basic conceptual framework to aid in understanding and analyzing these models. In addition to a discussion of broad issues in constructing and assessing social change approaches, the author provides some basic terminology; more importantly, he outlines a general framework for analyzing these approaches. This framework consists of the following nine attributes: beneficiaries, change agents, intermediaries, benefits, innovation, sustainability, scaling, political interactions, and management.

Over the next four chapters, using the suggested conceptual framework, the author explores social change models in terms of corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, private sustainable development, and fair trade. Each chapter provides the historical development or operational context of each model. It is accompanied by helpful charts/figures, which greatly aid the reader in working through each model’s development process, benefits, and intended outcomes.

The final chapter provides an analysis of the market-based social change models using the previously identified “attributes” of the conceptual framework. In a different context, while one could easily skip to this chapter, I echo the author’s admonition, “not drawing lessons from these approaches is irresponsible, because change agents who are deficient in skills stressed in these models are likely to forego useful knowledge for impacting the groups they wish to serve.”

This book deserves to be read, pondered, widely debated, and can become a useful model upon which to build. Why? According to the Christian writings, “the poor you will always have with you,” but with dedication, focus, knowledge, insight, and determination, we must believe and feel that collectively we can make a difference. Thanks to Anderson’s work, tomorrow may begin a new day in analysis, contemplation, and exploration through discussion, debate, and vision!