



## WHO IS “THE VILLAIN” TO BLAME FOR SMALLHOLDERS’ POVERTY?

*“Good intentions are necessary but insufficient to bring prosperity to smallholders”.*

I will succeed if, by the time you finish reading this column, you will no longer blame leaders, decision-makers, or anyone else in smallholders’ poverty.

I will succeed if you understand that, like us, leaders act based on the best available knowledge and theories, and when those are misleading, they make wrong decisions.

Hence, when I put myself in those people's shoes, I feel compassion, for they are asked to solve a global challenge without provided the toolbox of knowledge and theories to enable it.

**This column is dedicated to those in the frontline involved in the agro sector in developing economies who are frustrated by the little advance achieved and the families of smallholders who suffer persistent poverty.**

# THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN

Every classical Hollywood / Bollywood movie has its hero and a villain.

The heroes are easy to spot, for they are the ones who cope with unbeatable challenges and consequently suffer. Conversely, the villains represent the source and cause of the difficulties and suffering.

The underlying message is, *“If you want to know why you suffer, look for the villains and blame them for your suffering”*.

If life were a Hollywood movie, the global heroes would surely be the 550 million impoverished smallholders.

If the smallholders are the “heroes”, who are the “villains”?

## COMMON DENOMINATOR FOR FARMERS' POVERTY

In the previous column, I mentioned and emphasized that smallholders are **not** responsible for being poor, **nor** are their governments.

Now, I take the above statement and risk generalizing it; **no one is responsible or guilty in the poverty of 550 million small-hold farmers.**

Don't be shocked; I will soon explain, but first, let me emphasize that the above statement does not ignore the historical and contemporary injustice done to farmers and others, nor do we forget the corruption and other evils.

Unfortunately, the world was and will be imperfect, for it reflects us.

Nevertheless, as we will see, those hurdles **contribute** but are not the cause of poverty among smallholders.

While we are busy “witch hunting” the villains so we can blame them for our suffering, remember that –

- Five hundred fifty million smallholders live in dozens of developing countries on all continents and suffer similar symptoms.
- In developing countries, sectors other than agriculture may prosper, e.g., finance, computing, industry, mining, high-tech, education, culture, science, logistics, etc.

**It indicates that smallholders' problems have a global common denominator UNRELATED to a particular person, organization, country, or historical event.**

TO BE BLUNT, THERE ARE NO VILLAINS AND NO ONE TO BLAME IN THIS ANCIENT PROBLEM.

You may say, *“Hold your horses; smallholders are poor because of colonialism and current poor leadership”*.

Indeed, many blame colonialism for every sickness on Earth, including smallholders' poverty. The problem is that too many exceptions don't support this, including Israel, where I live, which was under changing colonial regimes for millennia. Yet, its agro sector is an example.

Leadership – Take, for example, Rwanda and India. Those two countries, one gigantic and the other small have honest, dedicated leaders (PM Narendra Modi and President Paul Kagame) with a declared goal to increase smallholders' income and shift them toward prosperity.

Both leaders have been in power for a long time and have invested, and still do, a lot of resources to improve the dire situation of smallholders.

Is it a coincidence that both leaders failed to improve the agro sector, while at the same time, other sectors developed fast and well, e.g., the high-tech/IT sector!?

## **LANDING ON THE MOON**

Once again, how is it possible that no one is responsible for 550 million smallholders living in poverty?

Furthermore, how is it possible that after decades of endless, separated efforts to defeat smallholders' poverty, we got nowhere and with no practical solution in sight?

From the dawn of humanity, humankind dreamed of “Reaching the Moon”, while from an individual perspective, we dreamed of “Reaching economic freedom/prosperity”.

In human history, we labeled both as Grand Challenges.

However, "Reaching the Moon" was more of a romantic fantasy that no one ever expected to achieve. Yet, in 1969, the US achieved it, and the impossible dream came true as a man set foot on the Moon.

Meanwhile, the Earthly challenge of reaching prosperity for all humankind remained as far as it always was.

How could this happen!?

Questions are a powerful tool, so before we provide the automatic answers (corruption, tech, money, leadership, etc.), let's ask some questions. In the following paragraphs, I use questions to make us reconsider the regular answers.

The “Reaching the Moon” project is almost too good to be true.

What was it that enabled the US to reach the Moon only seven years after J.F. Kennedy declared it a national goal, while decades and \$ trillion later, smallholders still live in poverty?

If only we had the answer to that...

Since poverty, hunger, and smallholder issues are highly emotional topics, it is more convenient to examine the successful “Reaching to the Moon” challenge and see what we can learn from it on solving Grand Challenges, including that of smallholders’ poverty.

In September 1962, J.F. Kennedy gave one of the most famous speeches of our time, known as “*We Choose to Go to the Moon*”.

Kennedy was a visionary and practical leader who used the Moon Project to turn the US into a global science leader, unite the nation, and create economic prosperity (over time, the US earned more from the project and its ripple effect than it invested).

### Questions about the Going to the Moon challenge:

- For thousands of years, people wanted to fly and reach the Moon. If so, why only on December 17, 1903, did the first person (the Wright brothers) have the first powered flight? Why was it only on April 12, 1961, that the first man (Yuri Gagarin) reached space? Why did the first man (Neil Armstrong) reach the Moon only on July 20, 1969?
- Didn't people previously want to fly, go to space, and reach the Moon?
- Did these historical events not occur earlier due to lack of motivation, corruption, evil, and lack of raw materials or workforce?
- Did anyone ever say, “*I blame my leader, our decision-makers, and experts for not reaching the moon ages ago*”?
- Do you think human history was a failure before 1969 because we failed to reach the Moon till then?
- Do we blame anyone for **not** reaching the Moon before 1969?

And one more question: Could we land on the Moon without the following insights that lay the foundation for our understanding of how systems (e.g., physical, chemical, astronomical, etc.) work?

- Newton's Laws
- Bernoulli's principle
- Kepler's Laws
- Einstein's Theory of General Relativity
- Celestial Mechanics
- Radio Astronomy
- Materials Science
- Computer Science
- Astrogeology
- Space physiology
- etc.

[Now reread the above text, but this time replaces the "reaching the moon" with "reaching smallholders' prosperity".]

Why did we fail to reach the Moon before July 1969?

What was it that was missing?

The answer is simple – **KNOWLEDGE**.

For thousands of years, people correlated the ability to fly with birds, feathers, and wings and then tried to fly by jumping from high places while flapping their feather-made wings.

It ended painfully when they reached the hard ground faster than expected.

People reached the sky, space, and the Moon once there was enough knowledge for the foundations of new **theories**, such as the "Bernoulli principle", developed on liquid flow.

Theories, not correlations, enable us to "predict" the future with high accuracy.

We use theories to change our assumptions and, based on this, design new technologies that create a better reality.

A good theory helps us improve our reality.

Theories help humanity understand how systems work and quickly close gaps between our present state and our future desired state, as with the "Reaching the Moon" project.

## THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

Imagine going back to 326 BC, sitting next to Alexander the Great the day after he arrived in India and became the king of one of the greatest empires ever.

While celebrating his victory, an adviser turns to him and says, "*Great King, congratulations on reaching India. How about reaching the Moon as your next destination?*"

As a time traveler, you would be smiling, knowing that despite Alexander's fortune, power, motivation, and wisdom, he lacks the tools, i.e., knowledge, theories, technologies, expertise, team, etc., to complete such a task.

You would also know that no one in the next 2000 years could complete such a task, including if J.F. Kennedy had been born a hundred years earlier.

As we easily recognize a person with a broken leg and understand he can't run, we are trained to notice **technological gaps** (resulting from knowledge gaps) and quickly understand the implied limitation.

In contrast, we struggle to recognize a person suffering from disabilities we can't see, such as emotional ones, e.g., PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

People with PTSD suffer more than those with visible disabilities, for we believe what we see and are skeptical about "unseen issues".

We, therefore, often categorize those with emotional disabilities as "problematic", "lazy", and that sort.

Similarly, we go to a factory or a village and immediately notice the technological problems and gaps but will struggle to observe the issues arising from what our eyes can't see: organizational level, ecosystems, and business models. Hence, we understand the implied limitations of what we see but not what we don't see.

As a result, we interpret **ALL** problems as "technological limitations", including those caused by "unseen issues", causing us to treat all problems with technological tools.

We are blind to our knowledge gaps regarding problems dealing with "unseen issues" such as Organizations, Ecosystems, and Business Models.

We relate to all problems as if they were the same, including problems arising from "unseen issues", trying to solve those with the only tool we are trained to use – technology.

Relating to smallholders, we correlate technologies that help professional-industrial farmers and business success, hence providing smallholders technologies or funds for technologies.

The approach correlating technologies with business success repeatedly and globally failed, yet we repeat using this approach.

This is the equivalent of helping smallholders to fly using feathered wings, and when they fail to fly (i.e., always), to "fix" the problem by enlarging the wings or suggesting more sophisticated feathers.



Jacob Peter Gowy's The Fall of Icarus (1635–1637)

## BLIND TO UNSEEN GAPS

President J.F. Kennedy understood the national business implications and advantages of reaching the Moon.

He also understood that the knowledge gap, i.e., expressed as technological gaps, must be bridged before reaching the Moon.

Most leaders, decision-makers, experts, and others in developing economies understand the national business implications and advantages stemming from smallholders reaching prosperity.

However, trained to interpret **any gap** as a technological gap, I am afraid all they see are “technological gaps”, dismissing other options.

This is why anyone visiting Israel wishes to see “Israeli technologies” while no one asks to understand the Israeli approach/concept, particularly the operational/ecosystems/business models.

As we now understand, and history supports that understanding, ignoring the “unseen gaps” and turning any challenge into a technological challenge didn’t help much to advance 550 million smallholders to escape poverty.

Hence, it is the task of our generation to replace the goal of reaching the Moon or Mars with that of reaching smallholders' economic freedom and prosperity. The expected global business and life impacts will be far more significant.

## AGRO-INDUSTRY-BUSINESS

Shifting small-hold farmers from poverty to prosperity is interlinked with transforming from traditional agriculture to agro-industry-business.

[Note that agro-industry-business can be practiced as Conventional, Organic, Regenerative, etc.]

J.F. Kennedy began the “Reaching the Moon” project by getting the best people to help close the knowledge gaps. They closed the knowledge gaps only seven years later, and humanity reached the Moon.

It is time for a similar effort, the “Reaching Smallholders’ Prosperity” (RSP) project.

The RSP project will take a shorter period and a fraction of the budget, for there is no need for expensive technologies, and pilots take less time than sending a rocket to space.

In this spirit of the above and paraphrasing J.F. Kennedy’s 1962 speech, “*We choose to go to the Moon*”, we should say -

*“We choose to Reach Premium Markets and be the best. We choose to Go Global..*

*We choose to Reach Premium Markets and be the best in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win”.*

\* Note the keywords "Organize and Measure" and the absence of "technology".



## **NO ONE IS GUILTY, BUT MANY ARE VICTIMS**

Consider yourself the president of a developing country or a decision-maker where everyone is telling you, *"Our farmers are poor because they don't have technologies, and when they have, they don't use those properly"*.

If I did not know what I know now, I would do precisely what those Presidents, Ministers, Decision-makers, and experts do, and I would fail as they do.

Smallholders' poverty is the fault of no one, as not reaching the Moon before 1969 is the fault of no one.

Our task is not to eliminate poverty but to create prosperity, which are entirely different goals.

We create prosperity among smallholders by closing the gaps in knowledge, which will result in new theories.

This is within reach in this decade, and like the Moon project, the trophy will be unimaginable business opportunities, but above all, human happiness!

Now that you understand why I am patient, not angry or upset, with those who keep investing in technologies in the hope of eradicating poverty, I hope you are, too.

But I hope that, like me, you are doing your best to share that knowledge and change the situation.



Join the [IBMA 2024 conference](#), where we discuss those issues with global experts.

Want to change the rural community's development trajectory in your country or elsewhere? Are you unsatisfied with a running rural project or want to plan a new one? Message me +972-54-2523425

Whether you agree or not, share your thoughts with me.

## TAKEAWAY MESSAGE

- **FARMERS' POVERTY** is as old as farming itself.
- **FARMERS' PROSPERITY** is an uncommon state in human history.
- **NO ONE IS** to blame for smallholders' poverty.
- **RESULTS** are the measuring tool for the quality of our knowledge and theories.
- **SMALLHOLDERS'** poverty results from a lack of knowledge of its cause and theories for solving it.
- **CLOSING THE GAP** of knowledge and theories is mandatory to enable rapid scale-up of the efforts to create prosperity.

[Follow me on LinkedIn.](#)

If you enjoyed the article, please share it with friends and colleagues.

[SUBSCRIBE TO THE WEEKEND COLUMN.](#)

*\*\*\* Mental and Economic Freedom Are Interconnected \*\*\**

See you soon,

Nimrod



Dr. Nimrod Israely is the CEO and Founder of [Dream Valley](#) and [Biofeed](#) companies and the Chairman and Co-founder of the [IBMA conference](#). +972-54-2523425 (WhatsApp), or [email nisraely@biofeed.co.il](mailto:nisraely@biofeed.co.il)

**P.S.**

If you missed it, here is a link to last week's blog, "[Is There A Room For Optimism For Smallholders' Future](#)".

**P.P.S.**

[Dream Valley](#) is a field-proven disruptive business model based on the successful Israeli model.

To learn more and become a Dream Valley partner, contact me at [nisraely@biofeed.co.il](mailto:nisraely@biofeed.co.il), +972-542523425 (WhatsApp/Text)

If you like it, please **share** it with those who need to see it and [Subscribe](#).

***Change Begins With A Decision  
That The Existing Reality Is A Choice  
and Not A Decree of Fate***