EASING POST-PANDEMIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC 'WICKED PROBLEMS' THROUGH EXPLORATORY VISITS – TAKING 'GENERATIONAL POVERTY' AS AN EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic of COVID-19 brought with it an increase in 'wicked problem' that would be both difficult to define and more complex to solve. Issues as poverty, youth unemployment, mental health and other similar known socio-economic problem will need a new mindset that sees things from different perspectives and take milestones towards long-term solutions or outcomes.

In this paper, the author reflects a case study from experience that targets to explore and illustrate how the exploratory visits if we orchestrated can lead to overcoming the challenges of a wicked problem, taking 'generational poverty' as a context for this work. The authors review the approaches used for dealing with 'generational poverty', besides the tools that lead to the clarity of the milestones towards the outcome. This paper opens a new line of research for the type, the know-how, the know-what and the know-why of the wicked problems post the pandemic and bring in the efficacy of the exploratory visits as one of its abundant solutions.

Key words: Wicked Problems, Problem Solving, Exploratory Visits, Generational Poverty, COVID-19 Pandemic.

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1.INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the definition of wicked problems is reviewed from the socio-economic perspective in order to help prepare for the post-COVID-19 pandemic spillovers challenges. The characteristics of wicked problems, including their nature, and their effect are investigated. The wicked problems design requirements are explored to see the most effective possible solutions or outcomes. The idea here is to build more accurate foresight for a similar future type of wicked problems. [1]

The review shows the importance of dealing with problems uncertainties, giving an example of the wicked problem of the new type of poverty expected in post-COVID-19.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of A wicked Problem

Wicked problem is usually referred to problems that are complex, multidimensional, multivariate, unclear and changeable. The problems are identified to be wicked because of the probability that many of its proposed solutions can turn out to be worse than the symptoms. Therefore, the idea of dealing with wicked problems is not to solve them, but to try to make them better than they were before, or mitigate their risks.

While every wicked problem is unique, each of these problems refers to a class of social systems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many stakeholders mostly would have conflicting values. [1]

2.2 Characteristics of Wicked Problems

When we are facing inherent complex challenging community problem that is full of uncertainty, it can be called as a wicked problem. Wicked problems usually have a collection of complex interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics. These characteristics make the problem difficult to solve. [2]

Wicked problems have no definitive formulation, and it is highly affected by geography. A poverty problem in developed OECD rich country cannot be compared with the same problem in Africa. The nature of the wicked problem affects the way its solutions opportunities are formulated. In many cases, the wicked solution can have even negative consequences on the community's most vulnerable. [3] , [4].

Wicked problems persistently bring human suffering, which is difficult to solve because of interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics. The complexity of wicked problems stems from their systemic, interconnected, and non-linear nature. These problems would help frequently span national, social, and industry boundaries. [5].

Camillus [6] sees that wicked problems cannot be exploited by modelling. The increasingly complex environment of a wicked problem is difficult to capture, even in a modelled wicked problem. A business problem might be wicked if it is easily influenced by stakeholder disagreements, complex rooted problem, lack of current problem events, and have difficulty in problem-solving, or in identifying the possible solutions. [4].

Measuring the beginning, or the end, of a wicked problem, is considered to be very challenging, because its boundaries are not clear. The other reason for the challenge is that a wicked problem would usually bleed into another one; unlike the traditional problem where the scope is well-defined. [7]

2.3 Nature, Requirement and Effect of Wicked Problems

Most wicked problems come with ambiguity, and they have interrelated challenges. These interrelated challenges look to be difficult to understand. The attempts to overcome the difficulty of understanding the true nature of the wicked problems can trigger new chains of persistent social ills. [2]

Wicked problems bring in new challenges to the human values, these challenge of core values help in the problem formulation, and then help to discover the problem opportunities that lead to its resolution. [1]

The relationships to other problems can help to bring its outcome, or resolution. The complexity, and the uncertainty of a wicked problem can be simplified if it is linked to other problems, or challenges, or foreseen or hidden opportunities. The linking together, between the different problems and opportunities help to over the uncertainty. Therefore, collecting field data through selective observations that absorb the different problems help the mind to associate the opportunities within each problem, including the wicked one, to bring the best resolution. [3] , [7]

Sometimes even we need to uncover the ambiguity around a specific wicked problem through change, or challenging, one factor of the problem that would reduce the possibility of having the negative outcome on the community. This requires visualising the problem resolution and believing in its achievement. Seeing how to ease the impact of a wicked problem from one perspective, say from the social impact, ease the kick off attempts. Again, from the field visit, we can pilot this visualisation of this step one approach to see how to achieve it. [4].

2.4 Dealing with (Nonlinear) Wicked Problems

(Nonlinear) wicked problems are a type of problems that could not be eliminated by normal mitigation strategies. These types of problems need to change and tested only in the field. The cause and effect of the non-linear problems usually fuzzy, and full of uncertainty. [8]

Taking the case of ‘generational poverty’, as a wicked non-linear problem; we would discover that this problem could not be eliminated by education, or job creation only. It is a problem that needs to be explored in the field and diversified testing to uncover the most influencing thread that leads to the sustenance of poverty. Sources as the type of community environment, resources, assets, gender, race, etc. would be directly selectively tested to realise the most influential one that could be eliminated or mitigated or improved which would then lead to ‘generational poverty’ alleviation. [9] , [10] , [11]

2.5 Designing Solutions for Wicked Problems

When a wicked problem characteristic is absorbed, the resolution, or the solution for such a problem can be visualised and consequently designed. Attempting to address a wicked problem from a *social* perspective, including problems as famine, disease, inequality can lead to socio-input that help to define specific opportunities for the outcome visualised. This would help to design a set for the central leads that would mitigate the negative consequences of the wicked problem under focus, and thus the position-specific trajectory of actions that lead to the desired directions. [8].

The design for the solution should be built with an intention for the mitigation of risks and the focus on speed and agility towards creating an impact. The design should help in optimising the different perspectives that come from interdisciplinary integration that use the knowledge both retrieved from the field and accumulated knowledge from the multidiscipline concepts as science, psychology, sociology, economics, engineering, technology, and medicine to create the effective change. [12]

2.6 Examples of Socio-economic Wicked Problems

Socio-economic wicked problems are persistent issues that can cause great instability, or human suffering, or endanger life or livelihood, and degrade the quality of life. Even an environmental problem, can be a wicked socio-economic problem. The goal here is to alleviate the suffering and damage caused by wicked social and environmental problems when no viable opportunity does clearly exist. [4] , [13]

Knowing there are no true or false solutions to wicked problems, but rather effective or non-effective solutions, the visualisation for an outcome here does not target an end, but rather part of a clear milestone of a long sustainable journey. However, each of these milestones' solutions should bring a measured *improvement*, and each problem may be described differently, depending on the type of the stakeholder's perspective.

2.7 Problem Uncertainty

Wicked problems would be full of problem uncertainty. i.e. Defining and identifying the 'what' of the problem is considered to a big starting point. Actually, once this problem uncertainty is explored, we would see lots of 'entrepreneurial opportunities', or 'sources for inspiration', or 'insights for new outcome resolutions', [14]. There is always more than one explanation for what triggers a wicked problem, but usually, you could see that there is only one source of the causality of the problem; depending on the problem story and how it is seen from a certain perspective. For example, the problem of chronic 'generational poverty' can be explained from a top-down perspective, or from a bottom-up perspective. The explanation of the problem, or its description, as per Buheji and Ahmed [9] can be seen clearly from the field.

There is no template to follow when tackling a wicked problem, although the uncertainty could be reduced by the accumulated learning that comes from the exploration of the field. Teams that approach wicked problems must literally, solve or overcome challenges, as they go along. [2]

Interestingly, identifying a long-standing, widespread problem as 'generational poverty' is easy if we list all its publicised negative effects. However, we need to effectively realise the suitable 'generational poverty' definition, i.e. whether it is more according to: the geographical area, or the particular poverty condition needs, or the capacity of resources, or the capacity to exploit the opportunities, etc. This again requires a feeling of the living conditions which can be only through exploratory visits, [10], [12]

2.8 The Wicked Problem of 'Generational Poverty'

For many decades the world and specifically after the second world war and the early 1950's has been working to alleviate the problem of poverty regionally and globally. These efforts intensified with the UN MDG's and SDG's which stand for Development Goals that were put in the early of the 21st century and later in 2015 which targeted sustainable collective efforts led by the United Nations.

Poverty is a complex problem; however, 'generational poverty' is a wicked problem. Both can be prevented by realising the generative mechanisms that create them. 'Generational poverty' can be linked with other problems as access to continuous education, economy, society, and so on. These problems are typically seen too cumbersome to handle, yet these problems can be seen feasible if we link them with sustainability, or equality, or health and wellness programs. These programs can be included in the process of design, which is an intellectual approach that emphasises empathy, abductive reasoning, and rapid prototyping. [5], [10], [11]

2.9 Managing Wicked Problems with Exploratory Learning

Managing wicked problems as 'generational poverty' may manifest many conditions such as cultural, or social challenges, besides the known economic challenges. When attempting to manage wicked problems, we need to understand that they are themselves made up of multiple, interconnected smaller problems, [5]. Every wicked problem is a symptom of

another problem. The interconnected socio-economic problem of ‘generational poverty’ illustrates how, for example, we need to establish necessity entrepreneurship program in education that change the behaviour of the community in dealing with challenges. [9], [13]

Rittel and Webber [15] see that most of the wicked problems are invented by humans by their activities. Thus, we might investigate this thread during the exploratory visit too. Hence, scientific approaches that are designed to solve natural problems are found to be ineffective at analysing and solving such problems. In order to manage a wicked problem, we need to realise that they have data or information that are very difficult to measure. This creates a more difficult challenge in defining a solution with a clear outcome framework. Usually, even after taking an attempt following an exploration, no one knows whether this course of action would lead to the best-sustained outcome. Therefore, we need to manage the wicked problems with a set of explorations that are of unknown consequences. [12]

A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that can be solved only with complete knowledge, or non-contradictory data, and this can be achieved through mainly through exploring the field of the problem and where applicable getting the beneficiaries or stakeholders involved. The more problem carries large impact on the community, or it is a multidisciplinary, or interconnected with other problems, the more exploratory learning and field exploratory visit is on demand. [4], [11].

2.10 Increase of Wicked Problems in Post-COVID-19 New Normal

As we enter an era post, the disruption of a devastating pandemic as COVID-19, wicked problems appear to be increasing rapidly. The pandemic brought with its wicked socio-economic problems that influenced both our life and livelihood. ‘Generational poverty’ became more complex, with an unknown potential solution.

Because ‘generational poverty’ has no clear-cut, or known fixes, proposing solutions for such a problem became more uncertain as the association of this problem with other global issues need to be analysed post the pandemic. For example, the lockdown brought an overwhelming problem to all the social class where even middle and lower class are now on the verge of being categorised as being poor.

2.11 Generational Poverty

Generational poverty represents one type of persistent and multi-dimensional poverty that usually stayed with one family for at least two generations. Those living generational poverty usually suffer educational poverty, parental poverty, and spiritual poverty, besides financial poverty. These cumulative forms of poverty sometimes create the most damaging outcome to a person’s or a family’s capability to exit the vicious poverty cycle. The cumulative form makes people hopeless and this feeling creating a series of depressing cycles that transfers from one generation to the next. [16], [10]

In communities and family’s where generational poverty is persistent, the belief that life can be better is rarely experienced. Thus, motivation and energy needed to break the vicious cycle of poverty are very low. The focus of these type of the poor is on surviving day by day, like looking for money to put food in the table, or finding a place to shelter for the night or the week. Such type of poor would have instability in their family, and challenging health issues.

One of the main challenges for ‘generational poverty’ family’s is their low capacity for control of their life since their values are centred more on survival and short-term outcomes. This makes them more prone to counterproductive actions with low interest in continuing education. [16]

3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the literature review on the wicked problems. An application case study is set to define the proposed requirements for exploratory visits that suites a wicked problem, along with the visit purposes and tools. To apply the proposed exploratory visits requirements a list of ‘generational poverty’ elimination or alleviation papers published by the author are used to test the link between the proposed resolution framework and the type of exploratory visits data collected. The data collected is as per the type of the condition of the problem. i.e. the type of community, the level of education, the socio-economic status, the resources available, etc. Then, the importance of the field exploratory visits to the wicked problems solving is synthesised and discussed in detail.

4. APPLICATION CASE STUDY

4.1 Importance of Field Explorations for Effective Wicked Problems Solutions

Fields exploration helps in build effective diagnosis path that leads to absorption and then the realisation of the wicked problem keys. Alleviating a problem needs first an understanding of its nature which can be only fully exploited through exploratory learning and repeated observations from the field visits. Depending on the factors collected from the field, the problem opportunities would start to be creating ease in both the association and synthesis of the problem solution.

If a wicked problem is targeted then the way it is occurring and what it is affecting the need to be exploited first. For example, solving a ‘generational poverty’ problem and the way it is occurring in an emerging economy country like Bangladesh is different than solving the same problem in under-developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. To measure the outcome possible for such wicked problem, depending on the area visited, we need to explore what is the problem influence from multi-context perspectives to define its different stakeholders.

4.2 Defining Purpose and the Tools of the Exploratory Visit

In this case, we shall attempt to define the most suitable tools for wicked problem exploratory visit. To help verify the socio-economic outcome or resolution targeted, we need to define first the purpose of this visit beforehand and the tools that are going to be used during the observations and the data collection.

The field visit tools can be in the form of both structured or unstructured: observations, interviews, questionnaires, indicators or measures surveys, historical or literature reviews, systemic reviews, longitudinal studies, hit rates measurements, etc. Once these tools are defined, as per the purpose and the milestone of the wicked problem targeted solution, the outcome is going to be extracted in a table that links this outcome to specific economic and societal effects.

Hence, the purpose of the exploratory visits would be refined or calibrated more in the field, based on the typical questions raised, the reflections on the observations collected, and how the analysed knowledge could be used further for the next milestone of alleviating the wicked problem.

Assessing the exploratory visit impact can be seen from the functional reference schemes and initiatives that would be set towards capturing and linking the relevant aspects of the wicked problem. The field visits go through a sequence of steps that might include: observing, exploring, learning and reflecting, as per Figure (1). These steps are coupled to the development stages towards the targeted outcome visualised for the wicked problem investigated, which is in this case, is the ‘generational poverty’ issue. These development

stages are called: codification, classification and stratification, as illustrated again in Figure (1).

Figure (1) Sequence of Exploratory Visit Steps and the Development Stages during Wicked Problem Handling

4.3 Generational Poverty as a Wicked Socio-Economic Problem.

Dealing with generational poverty as ‘a wicked problem’ is one of the significant approaches towards more stable socio-economy. Buheji [17], [18] sees poverty in general as a deep and complex socio-economic problem that needs a scenario for tackling a visualised story, as shown in Figure (2). The clarity of the story would be more once we start a collection for the data and explore more opportunities and ideas.

Then, based on the collection of opportunities exploited, in relevance to the generational poverty problem, the proposed solutions would be reflected through problem vectors modelling. The refinement of vectors can be developed based on the conditions of the field visits and in-depth observations. [9]

Table (1) Approaches of Wicked Problem of ‘Generational Poverty’ and Type of Exploratory Visit Defined

Approaches of Wicked Problem of ‘Generational Poverty’	Exploratory Visit & Data Collected
Approach 1- Poverty due to Geography Ref: [19]	Collecting the type of available or reachable, or exploitable community Assets or Resources due to geographical location (including the possibility of unique social assets, besides the physical and natural assets).

<p>2-Elimination of poverty within the community.</p> <p>Ref: [20]</p>	<p>Step 1-The series of field visits used both structured and unstructured interviews, observations of the poor families conditions, measures of the type of families capacity, and level of functionalities of those categorised as poor.</p> <p>Step 2-Using Cross-disciplinary approach to eliminate a milestone in the poverty problem</p>
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**Cross-disciplinary
Socio-Economic Problem**

Figure 2-c Poverty Elimination Opportunities

3- Eliminating Youth Future Type of Poverty

Ref: [21]

Collection of data through questionnaire and interviews to exploit what leads Poor Youth that are Not in Education and Not in Employment (NEET) conditions.

Figure 2-d Future Youth Poverty Elimination in the area of NEET

4-Eliminating Poverty in the Slums and Rural Area through Educational Approaches

Ref: [22]

Field visits for the type of educational programs delivered to the poor, discussion and group focus. Observations of the level of education delivered and type of students

Figure 2-e Poverty Elimination through Education

<p>5-Re-Defining Empathetic Approaches to Poverty</p> <p>Ref: [23]</p>	<p>Collection of the type of assumptions and attitudes that prevent the poor from raising their capacity to capture opportunities.</p>
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Figure 2-f Poverty Elimination through Empathetic Thinking

4.4 Analysis After Exploratory Visit

Based on the reflections on the data collected from the exploratory visit, two main types of observations are collected: "exploratory observations" and "solid observations". After descriptive information had been gathered, the focus would be on the attitudes and mindset to be used in discussing the straight data and then the observations of the field. For example, whether to focus more on the economic rather than social effects or vice versa. Or sometimes

whether to focus on identifying the potential direct solutions, or the opportunities for an effective outcome for the wicked problem.

The field exploring team or experts need to arrive at a point that balance between evaluating the information gathered from the field and how to use some these data immediately for the purpose of exploiting possible milestone for the wicked problem.

In the case of the wicked problem of the ‘generational poverty,’ we might target to use the data, or the information collected for alleviating poverty, or for improving the productivity of the community in the long-run. For example, are we targeting in the outcome solution for ending ‘generational poverty’ a better safe, collaborative community, or working for long-term prosperity that would bring later safety and competitiveness.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Synthesising How Exploratory Visit Mechanism Influence the Wicked Problem Solution

The applied case shows the importance of the exploratory visit in dealing with a wicked problem as ‘generational poverty’. Once the reflected data of the exploratory visit is rigorously analysed and implemented, a better acceptance of ‘humility’ and knowing by exploring can be expected. The deep involvement with the exercise of exploratory visit helps to cast-off old paradigms built about the wicked problem, as shown in Figure (3).

The triangle of analysing while implementing, exploring with acceptance of errors, and the development of a new mindset helps the mind to build the proper association that would help to explore opportunities in ways it has never been explored before. This should help, as shown in Figure (3) to bring fresh new perspectives that can establish an interdisciplinary approach to advancing the socio-economic outcome of a specific project.

Figure (3) Mechanism of Exploratory Visit for Wicked Problem and its Influence on the Solution

This exploration visit mechanism help to build the capacity to deal with physical and mental challenges which can help later to accurately visualise the outcome, and sustain it

through developing the mindset and its way of thinking. The involvement with the field or the stakeholders of the wicked problem build an exploration driven mindset that appreciates the depth of the problem, and help to prioritise the seen and the hidden opportunities.

5.2 Synthesising ‘Generational Poverty’ Approaches

The approaches of the wicked problem of ‘generational poverty’ show that such problems are caused and can be alleviated, or eliminated by focusing the human side of the problem, as poverty can be a product of the culture and the socialisation process. ‘Generational poverty’ need to be examined by the behaviour of the group dynamics, including the communication model and the challenges within the community. Again, the exploratory visit could play to bring the proper insights in this area.

A socio-economic problem as ‘generational poverty’ need a change management program that interfaces between culture and development. Both the literature reviewed and the case applied for shows that the structured and the unstructured approaches of the exploratory visits bring in new perceptions about the wicked problem under study which help to create the right focus on the resources need to exploited or utilised to put a forward milestone towards the final problem outcome.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Implications and Limitations of this Paper

This main paper implication is that it encourages practitioners, experts, researchers and decision-makers to bring untapped solutions to the different wicked problems, similar to the ‘generational poverty’, through first doing exploratory visits.

The field visits and the deep observations, help to exploit opportunities that can enhance the problem outcome. When the field of a wicked problem is visited, the possible milestones for long- and short-term solutions can be explored and determined.

The limitations of this paper are that it not go into the details how the exploratory visit would exploit the wealth within the ‘generational poverty’ community, as the main focus and scope of this work are on the wicked problem. The other limitations the author did not illustrate in detail the role of the community in mobilising the wicked problem outcome milestone, again with the aim not to distract the reader of the main purpose of the paper.

6.2 Importance of Wicked Problem Stakeholders Engagement

One need to re-emphasis the importance of the engagement and the involvement of any wicked problem, regardless of its type, complication and community. In general, the author claim that he did not experience sustenance of any wicked problem solution with the engagement of also the Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Therefore, any expert needs to take into account the way exploratory visit outcomes are going to be communicated and address through networking.

6.3 Dealing with Future Foresight of Socio-Economic Wicked Problems

COVID-19 pandemic and the spillovers of the new normal brought deeper wicked problems that are going to experienced more once the vaccination program settle and the virus is strained. The problems now are deeper as the economic, the social and the health-related issues would have much more unknown set of boundaries, with no clear problems’ definitions, no known formulation and thus cannot be measured for effective solutions. Therefore, the world problem solvers and the decision-makers should expect that more need

for a dynamic mindset that solves one milestone at a time after a series of exploratory visits would be the norm. The worries, however, that need this type of approach needs a mindset that accepts to work for long-term development, rather than short-term growth. For example, to focus more on agricultural projects rather than a measurement of inequality that leads to ‘generational poverty’. The idea here is to overcome the wicked problem various external cycles, by exploiting first the intrinsic opportunities with the problem. The more we start to build this type of mindset, the faster we would overcome the social conflicts and eliminate its rising sources, due to the spillovers of the pandemic.

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