

The Roderick A. Macdonald Contest
Lets End Poverty

Name: Bairavy Mahadevan
Grade: 12

Canadians as Citizens of the World
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Whether it is environmental problems, human rights issue or even international crime, the world has been plagued with many dilemmas but none greater than that of poverty. Poverty is a complex problem that can be compared to an infectious disease that spreads rapidly without any sign of slowing down. Though the cure seems so obvious, it is rather complicated when it comes to actual implementation. Poverty is an issue that has a snowball effect. Once the snowball starts rolling down the mountain it just gets bigger and bigger. In the case of poverty, it starts of as one small issue and then becomes linked to more challenges causing major adversity for human kind. Only when poverty becomes extinct will all the other problems that are associated with it will come to an end. Unfortunately, poverty is not something that can be contained within borders but rather a far-reaching trepidation for the world to consider.

Poverty affects a great number of people in the different region of the world, the hardest hit being innocent children. According to the global issues website, "1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world). 640 million live without adequate shelter, 400 million haven no access to safe water, 270 million have no access to health service. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reach the age of 5."¹ With statistics like these, it is impossible for children to thrive economically and socially let alone grasp the basic aspect of life. Countries that are poor cannot provide the basic needs, such as clean drinking water, proper health care or an education system for its citizen; this could result in more extreme problems. For example, without a proper health care system the spread of easily preventable and treatable diseases can threaten lives and result in great epidemics. Without a significant education system, people are unable to learn and expand their knowledge, thus no advancements what so ever can occur within the country. The major problem to poverty is that it is the core factor to so many other problems.

One major factor that contributes to poverty is the work being done by transnational corporations. The TNCs benefit on the behalf of the poor. The revenues and sales created by TNCs directly go to the wealthy Western nations.² Globalization does not always have advantageous affects for everyone involved. For example, poor countries can be severely exploited and taken advantage of; therefore their economy may not prosper and the people will continue to live in poverty. Take the example of what Shell Oil Corporation did to the Ogoni people of Niger. In order to build oil wells and pipelines, Shell destroyed the farmlands and homes of these people. Shell went on to pollute the land of the Ogoni people through oil spillage and gas flaring. On top of pollution, Shell used violence against these people and abused their human rights all in the name of profit.³ This is how poverty can be instituted in a country; transnational corporations enter countries, exploit the people of that country for their resources then leave. The people who have been exploited are then unable to do anything about the situation. "Similar scenarios have since been played out between TNCs and indigenous people all across the continents of Africa, Asia, South America and North America."⁴ There needs to be end to such atrocious activities by TNCs. Through globalization we are all interconnected; what may occur in another country may directly impact us. For example, if you buy gas for your car from Shell Oil Corporation, then you are using stolen resources from Niger. While you drive off with a full tank of gas in your car, the Ogoni people of Niger are dying of poverty. The sad thing about all of this is how the people of wealthier nations have no idea as to how their actions may severely hurt the people of poorer countries.

Oxfam defines global citizen as being an individual who is aware of the wider world and he or she knows his or her role within the world. A global citizen can also be considered as person who will not tolerate social injustice and who will be a factor in participating at the local or global stage. In order for Canadians to set the bar as to what it means to be a global citizen we need to first open our eyes to the world around us. We need to come to the realization that not everyone on this planet has the same luxuries that we as Canadians do. We are lucky to live in a wealthy nation and to show our gratitude we need to help the less fortunate. It is typical for people to think that just because the problem seems half a world away it is difficult or even impossible to assist in the resolution process.

Poverty is a violation against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which happens to be a significant document that is recognized by numerous countries around the world. The context within the manuscript clearly outlines that there is determination amongst member countries to promote social progress and better standards of life.⁵ With the increase in poverty level around the world it has become apparent that the declaration has not lived up to be what is expected from it. Affiliate countries also have not held their end of the promise. In addition to that, the UDHR states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. If people live in poverty, they are unable to have the right to life because they cannot maintain a lifestyle where their needs are met. What is actually occurring in the world is truly a contradiction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25 (i) of the UN declaration evidently declares, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security."⁶ Article 25 (ii) says that all children are considered equal and shall receive equal social protection.⁷ These rights are impossible to achieve and uphold for adults and children living in poverty. It is impractical for a person living under such horrendous circumstances to receive adequate health care, social services and other basics needs such as food and water to get through the day. These rights can only be applied equally to everyone everywhere in an ideal world. We need to wipe out poverty in order to attain this perfect world where the context of the UDHR applies to every human being that walks the face of the earth.

One of the reasons why rights cannot be applied equally to all people is because of the large margin that exists between the rich and the poor; this margin has consequently become a contributing factor to poverty. "A few hundred millionaires now own as much wealth as the world's poorest 2.5 billion people."⁸ In today's society, it seems that a person is either rich or poor; there is just no room in between. "The richest 5 million people in Europe and North America have the same income as 2.7 billion people."⁹ These statistics clearly show a big gap among the rich and the poor. The same notion of disparities that is applied to rich and poor people also pertains to countries around the world. The nations of the north are extremely wealthy where as a significant number of nations in the South are extremely poor. Certain countries hold considerable power and wealth while others stand in their shadows, literally left to dust. This disparity in wealth can be traced back to the colonial period when countries were under colonial rule, were striped of their resources and left to suffer the consequences.

The continent of Africa is a prime example of an area that was depleted for its resources under colonial rule. Hard hit by poverty and unable to prosper, Africa is ruined economically because of its exploitation by wealthier nations. Images of frail and weak African children who cling on to life by a thin thread or images of overpopulated villages containing children with bloated stomachs dying of starvation continue to bombard Canadian television screen. Canadians sit at home comfortably watching these images on television without any effort to contribute, quickly changing the change in neglect. It is not something people of wealthier countries such as Canada are used to seeing. However, the reality is that these sad sights exist around the world;

people face these problems in poor countries constantly. Moreover, if we Canadians turn away from helping such helpless citizens of Africa, we can be categorized in the same group as those who were responsible for the start of poverty in Africa.

People wonder what they can possibly do to resolve this problem, if anything at all. In general, it appears unfeasible to attack a problem of such magnitude as poverty, but when broken down to its essential ingredients it can be easier to resolve. Education is the key to all of the world's problems, specifically when it comes to poverty. Canadians and citizens of other nations around the world need to be educated first; people need to realize what the issue is before they take action. Only when you know the facts behind a situation, can you implement a proper resolution. An example, a way to help resolve poverty is for people to pressure their government into erasing any foreign debt that is left outstanding by third world countries. When the tsunami occurred late last year, there was a petition circulating around to the public as a means of pressure into erasing the debt owed to Canada by the tsunami affected countries. If the debt were erased it would ease the pressure on a poverty stricken countries. "Millions of children die each year as a result of the debt crisis. [More than eight hundred thousand] children have died since the start of the year 2000 [as of March 24]." ¹⁰ Generously removing any debts owed to Canada would enable poverty-incapacitated countries to refocus on the betterment of their economy and getting the country back on world's economic stage. This could possible be the stepping-stone towards a prosperous country. In addition to the elimination of debt, the Canadian government can donate money, aid, and resources to help rebuild countries with citizens who are fighting for survival. This could in exchange benefit the Canadian economy if the aid being provided is a form of tied aid. If the assistance giving to another country were used to buy goods and services from Canada, then it would be beneficial for our economy. If our economy prospers then we can continue to donate assistance and the cycle would continue. Governmental involvement is not the only option in the resolution plan. Individuals can take it upon themselves to travel to these countries ravished by poverty to help build hospitals, schools, and farms. Human resources can be of great value in the rebuilding process for these countries. This could be a fresh start for people struggling to live life. Of course these are not the only choices when it comes to resolving the issue. People can contribute in any little way they possible can because the modest of contributions can result in greater change. It is vital to keep in mind that "effective poverty reduction solutions must involve the real experience, energy, priorities, and recommendations of poor people themselves." ¹¹

The important thing to remember about this problem is that people do not choose to be poor. People do not choose to live in poverty and suffer needles pain. People do not choose to be born either rich or poor; it just happens and it is no one's fault. It should be of human nature to help one another and poverty is a prime example where such actions can transpire. The only good thing that can arrive from poverty is the unionization of people coming together to help make the world a better place for humans to live in. Whether a person is wealthy or not should not matter because they are people too, are they not?

Endnotes

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