
Overcoming Poverty through Global Government

The mother of revolution and crime is poverty.

—Aristotle

One of the key functions of government is to take care of people who cannot take care of themselves, especially when nongovernmental solutions are simply not available. Where people find themselves in dire need—whether from a disaster such as an earthquake or flood, or due to poverty, famine, or disease—it falls to government to coordinate the redistribution of resources to alleviate the suffering. Such humanitarian missions are ideally handled in cooperation with charities and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) that focus on such needs. But in those all-too-common situations where such public interest institutions are absent, or when their capabilities for service are overwhelmed, it is government that must step in as the provider of last resort. Sometimes, as in the South Asian tsunami calamity of December 2004, only the resources of the largest governments are in a position to manage the enormity of the disaster.

In less dire situations, local, state, and national governments routinely provide disaster relief and all manner of support services to the poor and disabled in the developed

world. But in the developing world, because so many national governments are inadequate or corrupt, the fundamental governmental task of taking care of those who cannot take care of themselves often goes unfulfilled, with tragic consequences.

On every continent, national governments are forced by the global war system to spend inordinate amounts of money on their armed forces, draining their treasuries of precious funds needed for basic services. Corruption, inefficiency, and lack of infrastructure further impede these societies. What can be done in such countries to alleviate the poverty, disease, or famine that is occurring right now?

Under the current global system, the only resources available to ease the massive amount of suffering and poverty in the developing world come from small amounts of international charity or foreign aid, under-funded UN programs, or inadequate assistance donated by the international community when crises arise that are dire enough to attract world media attention.

The result is a world in which many basic human needs, such as water, food, shelter, and medical treatment, go unmet—a morally repugnant spectrum of widespread and routine violations of fundamental human rights.

The world must address the preventable problems of the poor

In a most profound way, this planet is divided into the haves and the have-nots. Most citizens of so-called developed countries have little knowledge of how the rest of the world lives. Currently, over a billion people survive on less than a dollar a day and almost three billion on less than two dollars. Two-thirds of the poor are women and children. Every year, 10 million people die from poverty-related causes.

When looking at the statistics for preventable problems in the developing countries, one finds numbers that are staggering. Millions of people die simply as a result of contaminated water; all sorts of preventable and curable diseases kill millions each year. This information barely makes headlines. We see a plane crash and say that it is a tragedy, which it is. A much larger tragedy is going on every day, all over the world. Yet we ignore easily correctable problems such as clean water and disease prevention that kill millions.

Modern famines have occurred in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh, just to name a few. These tragedies are usually caused by a variety of factors that include war, anarchy, drought, flood, overpopulation, deforestation, and political corruption. Poor countries have little reserves of food and money and are easily pushed over the edge by war, disease, or drought. The developed world has sometimes responded in such emergencies, but it has usually been too little, too late.

The UN has been instrumental in rebuilding nations after wars and disasters. It created a new government and developed infrastructure in Bosnia, after its war, as well as in East Timor. It has played a critical role in the development of Afghanistan after the US overthrew the Taliban. But lack of funds severely limits what the UN can do.

The task is immense. Dealing with preventable problems of the world's poor countries requires far more resources than are currently available to the UN. True prevention requires "teaching a man how to fish." Developing health and prosperity in deprived areas of the world requires educating people, providing the capital and tools they need to build society, and empowering them to act in new ways through democratic institutions. Donated money is helpful, but so much more is needed. If needy people merely receive money without

learning how to create their own wealth, the money will quickly disappear. (This is why 80 percent of lottery winners are broke in three years.) People can raise themselves out of poverty if they are given hope, education, and opportunity.

The Peace Corps is probably the best model of how outsiders from the West can help people to help themselves. It provides education and resources to developing nations so communities can improve their agricultural production, health care, and infrastructure. It is much more effective to use the Peace Corps to prevent famines than to send in humanitarian assistance after the fact. But institutions like the Peace Corps are also limited by a lack of money and resources.

Billionaire Bill Gates donated one billion dollars to the World Health Organization, gave \$100 million to develop an AIDS vaccine, and has pledged to give a total of \$3.2 billion to improve health care in developing countries. Gates has said, "All you have to do is take a modest amount of the rich world's resources to have a huge impact on the poor world."¹ He looked at the statistics, saw for himself the suffering around the world, and recognized that improving people's health was the place to start. Gates has also stated that the capitalist system has failed to bring medicine to the developing world, and that in fact drug companies do not develop treatments or vaccines for the diseases of the developing world because there is no profit in it.² His donation shows us a way to begin: We need to help people in developing countries get healthy enough to have the energy to solve their other problems. Poverty and many diseases can be eliminated worldwide. The people of the world have the means—we just need the political will to do it.

Fighting global poverty is in everyone's interest

Helping the suffering peoples of the world is not just an altruistic act. It is in everyone's self-interest in an interconnected and interdependent world.

Despite the reality that the world is really one global civilization, we live in a world that lacks the binding force of global law. In this condition of relative anarchy, political instability and economic inequality are inevitable; these will in turn drive immigration as well as terrorism. History shows that failed or weak states easily become breeding grounds for unrest that can spill over borders. One clear example is the case of Afghanistan: The US abandoned any interest in the country after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in the early 1980s. The hapless Afghans then went through years of anarchy and civil war only to come under the domination of the Taliban. These new rulers were indebted to Osama bin Laden, offering him and al Qaeda a safe haven. Not long after, the people of US unfortunately learned on September 11, 2001, that our neglect of the poorest countries in the developing world has consequences.³

It is difficult to maintain a peaceful world if billions of people are hungry and deprived. Furthermore, when people live in poverty, they tend to destroy the environment for short-term gains, specifically personal survival. For example, the gathering of firewood by millions of people who need it to heat their homes and cook their food has led to deforestation throughout the developing world, and deforestation is believed to be one of the causes of global warming. This is yet another reason why it is in the developed world's own self-interest to eradicate poverty in the developing world.

Improved health in the developing world would lower infant mortality rates, which, in turn, would lower birth rates. When people know their children are likely to survive, they choose to have fewer. This phenomenon can be seen around the world: In the developed world, where health care is available, the birth rate has come down to replacement levels. If we can do the same in the developing world, much of the pressure comes off the related problems of poverty and instability that directly affect all of us.

Global government is the only effective solution to global poverty

When one lives under a stable system of law, the burden of taking care of people unable to take care of themselves is shared equally by the functioning members of society operating through democratic government. Realistically speaking, the UN, the Peace Corps, and Bill Gates—as helpful as they have been—are capable of making only a dent in the enormous tragedy of billions of people living in poverty. Solving the problem in an organized and consistent manner can come only through the response of government, particularly global government.

A democratic world federal government would make poverty the concern of all countries. It would use its income from taxes to fight worldwide poverty and would not have to beg for the payment of “dues” as the UN does now. Once people understand that weapons can’t create peace—and that only enforceable global law can prevent war and preparations for war—then the world will shift its spending priorities to programs that address the dire conditions of the world’s neediest. The elimination of national military budgets would free up vast financial resources to address poverty and hunger.

The economic imbalances of the world must be addressed for the sake of creating a peaceful and environmentally stable world. We cannot consider ourselves civilized and yet allow the widespread misery of hunger and treatable diseases to flourish on our planet. A global government is by far the best vehicle for dealing with failed states, and for settling the conflicts and civil wars that rage around the world and cause some of the most acute humanitarian crises. A democratic government of humankind is our best hope for creating effective programs for the elimination of poverty and reducing needless suffering on our planet.

It is a tragic mix-up when the United States spends \$500,000 for every enemy soldier killed, and only \$53 annually on the victims of poverty.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.