

The Oxfam Global Charter for Basic Rights

Every person has a basic right to:

a home

clean water

enough to eat

a safe environment

protection from violence

equality of opportunity

a say in their future

an education

a livelihood

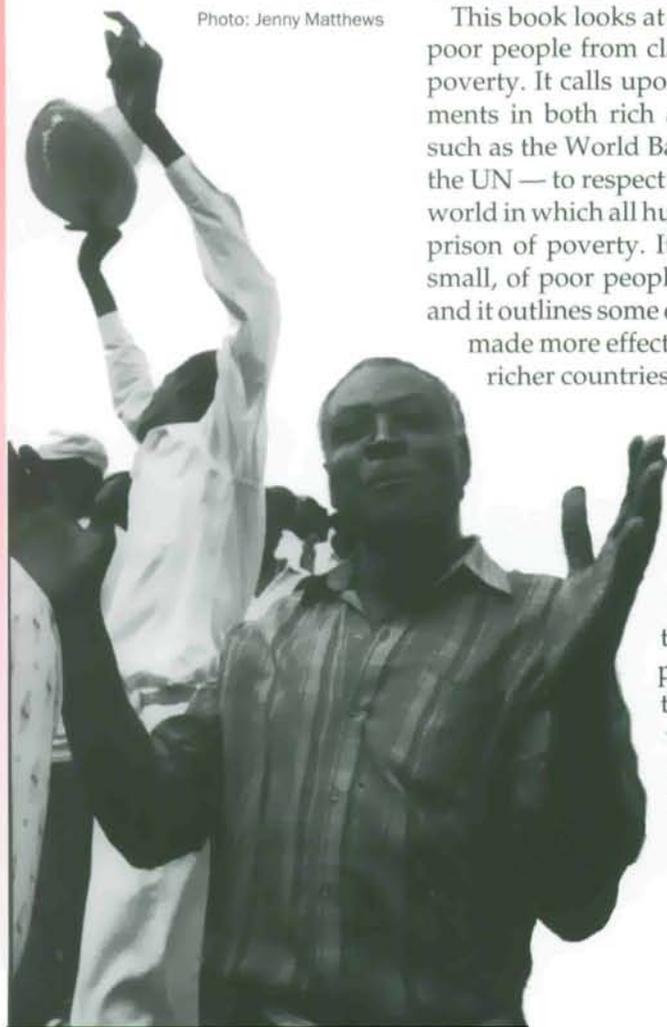
health care



The Oxfam Campaign for basic rights is about turning words, and pious hopes, into action. It calls for a reaffirmation of the basic rights of every human being, because without these rights people will never be able to work themselves out of poverty, and the suffering it brings.

Demonstrating for democracy in Haiti.

Photo: Jenny Matthews



We are all born with these rights. They are recognised in international law, and endorsed by just about every government in existence. The documents which define them, like the UN Declaration of Human Rights or the Geneva Conventions, are the moral touchstones of the twentieth century.

But throughout the world, tens of millions of people continue to live in poverty, unable to claim their most basic rights. Poor people, and poor nations, are trapped in a vicious circle in which they remain poor because they cannot claim their basic rights, and forfeit those rights because they are poor.

The list of rights in Oxfam's Charter is not exhaustive. Most people would agree that there are other important rights: religious freedom, for example, or the right to freedom of speech. The rights highlighted in the Charter, however, represent those which Oxfam believes to be the most basic rights of all – to subsistence and security – without which other rights are unattainable.

Basic rights cannot be looked at in isolation. They are interrelated and interdependent. Where one is violated, others will be; successfully claiming one will make it easier to realise others. And where poor people are denied their rights, sooner or later we all suffer.

This book looks at some of the main obstacles which prevent poor people from claiming their basic rights and overcoming poverty. It calls upon the world's decision-makers — governments in both rich and poor countries, financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the UN — to respect and protect these rights, and to work for a world in which all human beings can enjoy them, freed from the prison of poverty. It shows some of the triumphs, large and small, of poor people who are working to obtain their rights; and it outlines some of the ways in which their efforts have been made more effective by the support of people in the world's richer countries.

Poverty as we see it today in our affluent world is a savage violation of people's most basic rights. We hope that when you have read this book you will decide to take action, by becoming a part of the Oxfam Campaign, Together for Rights, Together against Poverty, to make those rights a reality. In doing so, you will be part of a movement for change which brings together people in poor and rich countries, who are working to bring about change in their own immediate communities, as well as trying to influence national and international policies.

The widening gap

- One in four of the world's people today lives in a state of absolute want:
 - they cannot afford the most basic shelter, or the minimum food requirements for leading an active, productive life.
- 35,000 children die every day because they are poor:
 - they lack the food they need to stay healthy
 - and their parents cannot afford basic health care for them.
- 130 million children do not attend primary school, 70 per cent of them girls:
 - their families are too poor to send them to school
 - and their governments have cut state education services.
- Half a million women die each year because they become pregnant
 - ... and do not receive the health care they need before, during or after childbirth.
- 1.3 billion people have no safe water or sanitation
 - ... and 80 per cent of all illness in the world is caught from drinking dirty water.

It's all too easy to see statistics like these, and the human suffering they hint at, as part of the natural order of human affairs — just “the way things are”. Life has always been like this, after all; presumably it always will be. Perhaps the only sensible reaction is to be grateful we drew one of life's longer straws.

But there's nothing inevitable about this denial to millions of human beings of their most basic rights: the rights to food, clean water, health care, education, a livelihood.

- The world's governments jib at the \$5 billion a year it would cost to provide basic education for all children. Yet they spend at least \$800 billion a year on armaments.
- For just 16 per cent of what they currently spend on weapons, the world's poorest countries could meet the health and

education targets agreed at the 1990 World Summit for Children: these would include giving all children a basic education, reducing child deaths by a third, and providing clean water supplies for everyone.

- African governments currently spend more on repaying their debts to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other, richer, governments, than they do on the health and education of their citizens.
- In Latin America it would take only the equivalent of a 2 per cent income-tax increase on the wealthiest fifth of the population to raise the continent's poorest people above the poverty line.

The world can afford to wipe out poverty: we are choosing not to.

Instead, the gap between haves and have-nots — between the richest and poorest countries, the richest and poorest people within countries, between men and women within households — is stretching ever wider. And, in an increasingly prosperous world, millions of people are growing poorer.



Port-au-Prince, Haiti: the gap between rich and poor is increasing in most countries.

Photo: Jenny Matthews

Racing to fall behind

The gap between rich and poor countries is not just huge — it is also virtually bound to grow. Looking at the GNPs of two countries, one fairly affluent, the other fairly poor, reveals just how impossibly difficult it would be for a poor country to cross that gap.

Peru has a GNP per capita of \$1,160; Norway's is \$23,120. The gap between these two economies is so large that, if Peru's

growth rate were identical to Norway's current 2.3 per cent and remained steady, it would take 95 years for it to reach Norway's present level. Meanwhile, of course, Norway would be likely to have become considerably richer. Even if the economy of Peru were to grow twice as fast as Norway's, its real income would still be falling steadily behind.

In fact, Peru's overall growth rate for 1965-90 was negative, at -0.2 per cent.

- In 1960 average incomes among the richest fifth of the world's population were 30 times greater than those of the poorest fifth. By 1990 the rich were receiving 60 times more.
- The combined wealth in 1994 of Mexico's 13 billionaires was more than double that of the 17 million poorest Mexicans. The number of billionaires is growing faster there than anywhere else in the world, while the proportion of the national income going to its poorest citizens is shrinking steadily.
- Despite continuing economic growth in the UK, the proportion of the population here with less than half the average income has trebled since 1977; the number of people living below the poverty line has soared from 5 million to nearly 14 million.

Unless we can start narrowing the poverty gap again, millions of people face a bleak future. By the end of this decade, on present trends, the number of Africans living in poverty will have grown by nearly a third, from 218 million to 300 million.

By the year 2025 there could be as many as 1.5 billion people living in severe poverty.

In Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, more than 5,000 children live on the streets. Many of them are country children, driven to the city by desperate poverty.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Caribbean, and in all the Americas. The best land is used for sugar plantations; the rest is divided into small plots. Even on the steepest mountainsides, farmers try to grow maize and vegetables, and graze cattle and goats. The hillsides, once covered with trees, are now bare; rain washes away the soil, leaving only bare rock in some places. Over the years the trees have been cut down to build homes and provide fuel for cooking.

High taxes and land rents, poor crop yields, and low prices, make it almost impossible to earn a living and bring up a family. Families buckle under the impossible tensions, and many of the casualties finish up on the streets of Port-au-Prince and other cities. Some of Haiti's street children are only five years old. Though many maintain links of a sort with their families, they must scratch a living for themselves in the city as best they can. With no clean water to drink or wash in, very little food, and no health care when they fall ill, they are constantly harassed by the police and army, who see them as young criminals. Deprived of education or training, marginalised, and excluded from any positive role in society, they are unlikely to be able, in their turn, to provide physical or emotional security for their own children.



This street child receives help from a local community organisation.

Photo: Jenny Matthews

Violent clashes over land in Kenya have resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. Since 1991 up to 300,000 smallholder farmers have had to desert their homes and land, for the temporary security of missions, churches, and school houses.

Anthony and Gaudensia Obon'go are the innocent victims of political power struggles that exploit ethnic differences, and set people against each other.

"I live at the edge of the village. I heard the dogs barking at one o'clock in the morning, and went outside," says Anthony. "There were men armed with spears and arrows. As I ran to my neighbour, I was hit. I fought off my attackers but then collapsed."

Anthony was in hospital in Kisumu for nine days. When he and Gaudensia returned home, the place was deserted. "My house and sheds had been destroyed. All were burned,

along with the sugar cane, and the heat from the fire had scorched the orange trees. And the school was burnt down. It was just like the bush."

Unable to salvage any belongings, Anthony and Gaudensia followed other villagers to Muhoroni, a few kilometres away. They took refuge in a mission, and were given food, blankets, and plastic sheeting.

After six months they returned home. Before the attack on their village, they had been successful farmers. Now, their resources all gone, they had to work hard to rebuild their ruined house and replant the crops and trees which had been destroyed.

Anthony and Gaudensia have a home once more, but thousands of Kenyans are still displaced.



Anthony and Gaudensia cultivating their land.

Photo: Geoff Sayer

The vision that faded

“Never again.” Two simple words, expressing the longing of an entire generation: a generation which had witnessed not just the darkness of the Second World War, but the preceding decades of economic depression and blighted human lives.

Half a century or so ago, the United Nations and institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund came into being as an expression of that longing. Never again must violence and conflict be allowed to destroy the lives of the world’s people. Never again were poverty and mass unemployment to be tolerated.

The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provided the moral framework for a new system of rights and obligations upon which this new order was to be built. These visionary documents recognised that human beings have a range of basic rights. They outlined the realisation of those rights as the way to combat poverty and reduce conflict. And they placed responsibility for protecting them upon the world’s governments.

According to President Roosevelt, this was “no vision of a distant millennium,” but “a definite basis for a world attainable in our own time and generation”. The world as we approach the end of the millennium looks rather different. Increasingly, the power of transnational corporations (TNCs) rivals that of nation states. Most economic reforms of the past couple of decades have concentrated almost solely on deregulating markets to the benefit of the TNCs; they have ignored the need to ensure that as many people as possible are able to benefit from the wealth created by deregulation.

Even as governments have abandoned much wasteful and unnecessary intervention, they have also begun to shirk their duty to regulate their economies in the interests of poor people, and to invest sufficiently in health and education services. They have reneged on their commitment to deliver the rights they have already signed up to.

Since 1948 the rights articulated in the Universal Declaration have been consolidated in other international legal instruments and declarations, which all reaffirm on paper the rights of

* see page 107

individual human beings to a livelihood, health care, and enough to eat; more and more, at both global and national levels, these rights are being ignored and undermined.

Poverty, and the denial of rights associated with it, is morally wrong. It is a human creation, and, given the political will, it can be tackled and done away with. It is also economically inefficient, and damaging in the end to everyone, rich as well as poor.

All too often, rising poverty gives rise to violent conflict, refugee crises, increased crime, and trade in narcotic drugs: all problems that do not respect borders and from which the better off cannot insulate themselves. "Security for the few," in the words of Nelson Mandela, "is insecurity for all."



Fifty years ago, Oxfam came into being in response to the plight of civilians like this little girl, facing hardship and starvation in Nazi-occupied Greece.

Photo: Oxfam

Stacking the odds against the poor

Brave new world

The five decades which have elapsed since the UN was founded have seen some remarkable changes. Global economic wealth has increased sevenfold, and average incomes have tripled. Overall, people are living longer, fewer children are dying, more children are attending school.

The partnership between modern technology and global markets has been a powerful and successful one, which has given millions of people increased prosperity and security. It really begins to seem perfectly feasible for every individual to claim the rights that he or she was born to, and to live a full life, free from poverty.

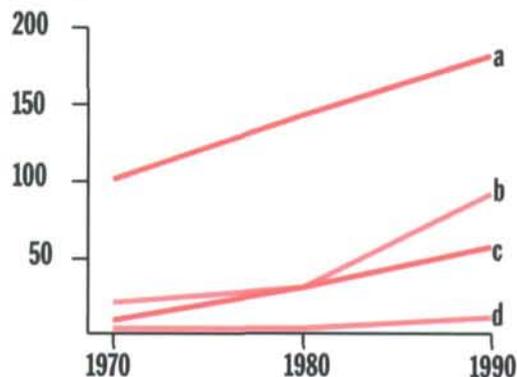
Material prosperity is increasing even in many very poor countries.

Source: *World Development Report 1994*

a Bolivia b Honduras c Nepal d Rwanda

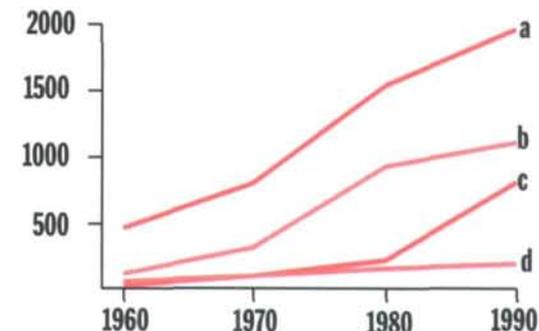
Telephone connections

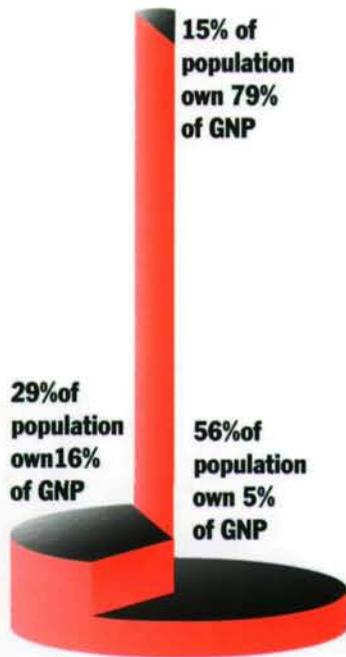
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Electricity production

Millions of kilowatts/hours





Source: World Bank *Social Indicators of Development 1993*

State investment has helped to fund Singapore's economic "miracle".

Photo: Jeremy Hartley



But what do we see instead if we look at the world around us? Armed conflict wrecking the lives of millions of men, women, and children. And — as often as not entwined in a lethal partnership with such conflict — the "silent holocaust" of poverty. Imagine every UK child under 16 suddenly dropping dead — each year an equivalent number of children in poor countries die as a direct result of poverty. Each one of these deaths is preventable.

In a world which has put men on the moon, and can shift money in seconds from London to Tokyo to New York, children still die from drinking dirty water, and one person in four cannot meet their most elementary needs. Millions more people live on the edge of an abyss, uncertain where tomorrow's food will come from — or whether it will come at all. Unable to save, or break out of the poverty in which they are trapped, they are acutely vulnerable to drought, conflict or the introduction of user charges for basic health and education services.

Economics for people

The financial institutions and systems set up after the Second World War (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) were intended to provide a foundation for shared prosperity. A free flow of goods and money would be central to creating and spreading wealth. On the other hand, there would be measures in place to keep this flow under control. In the past, uncontrolled markets had been associated with poverty, inequality, and instability: these evils were to be avoided in the post-war world by making markets work, at national and global level, for the benefit of as many people as possible.

Today, however, most governments and financial institutions have moved firmly over to a belief in non-interventionist economic policies. Countries such as Korea and Singapore (two of the South-East Asian "tigers") have built their miracle economies with the help of high levels of state intervention, major redistributions of assets, and heavy investment in basic health and education services. Nevertheless, the formula now is for deregulated markets, dismantled trade barriers, and reduced state subsidies and investment. Such a formula, it is intended, will create wealth for the relatively few, which will then trickle gradually down to the many, enabling some of the benefits of growth to reach the lowest strata of every society.

In reality, the rich are becoming richer, while huge numbers of the poor become poorer. One-fifth of the world's people, living in the poorest fifty countries, now receive between them less than 2 per cent of global income.

World trade

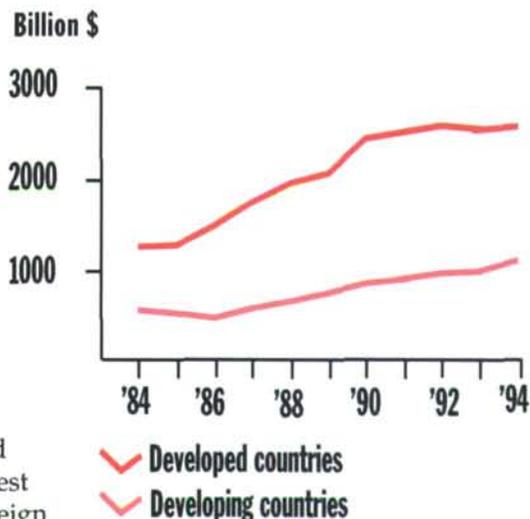
Since the war, international trade flows have increased by a factor of 12, to over \$4 trillion. Many countries depend heavily on these flows: on average, middle-income countries now obtain a third of their national incomes from such trade, and even the poorest countries depend on it for a quarter of their income.

But increasingly, the rules of the international trade game favour the world's rich countries over its poor ones. And in the past couple of decades a new breed of winner has emerged: the powerful transnational corporation.

The "free market" today is largely dominated by a handful of private companies. The 100 largest TNCs control over one-third of all foreign investment, and 40 per cent of world trade now takes place within TNCs. General Electric, General Motors, and Ford between them control assets worth roughly double Mexico's entire gross domestic product.

As more and more countries are pressurised into abandoning restrictions on movements of capital, and as modern technology makes it possible to move money rapidly in and out of countries, the TNCs are becoming ever more mobile and so more powerful. National boundaries and economic policies are becoming almost irrelevant to them.

In fact, measures aimed at protecting the livelihoods, health, and future of poor people — laws on minimum wages, workers' rights, and working conditions, anti-pollution measures, environmental protection — are under attack, as TNCs move production and jobs from one country to another in a restless search for minimum restraint and maximum profitability. The resulting pressure for an ever-lower common denominator affects rich and poor countries alike, as job opportunities are shifted from rich countries to poorer countries, and then, as workers in those countries start to demand slightly higher wages, to still poorer ones. In some cases, the TNCs themselves offer better wages and conditions than local employers, but push down the rates they pay local suppliers, who, in their turn, push down the wages they pay their own work-forces.

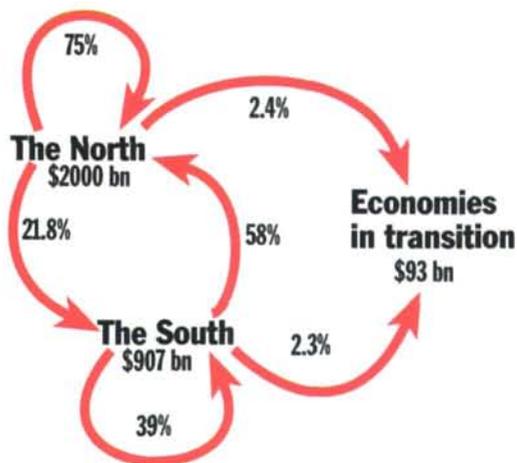


Value of exports

Source: GATT, *International Trade*, 1993: Statistics

The world's trade flows

Source: UNCTAD



Rule 3

Overproduce and undercut

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidises production by European farmers and, when that production leads to surpluses, subsidises exports. The recently concluded Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) did little to change this

Rule 4

Stitch up the South

The Multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) protects Northern textile industries from cheaper Third World imports. Under the MFA Northern countries impose quotas on Third World textile producers, but not on other Northern producers. The MFA is temporary — in operation since 1974, it will be phased out by 2005!

11 Rich industrialised countries impose escalating tariffs, charging more on your processed goods than on the raw materials
Go back two squares

World Bank experts advise you to clear forested hillsides: sell the timber, and plant cash crops.
12 *Go forward one square*

13 Heavy rain washes soil from the hill-sides and causes floods.
Go back two squares

Get a new foreign expert to advise you.
Go forward one square

14

Try to add value to your commodities by doing some of the processing yourself.
Go forward one square.

10

The Trade

A Game every developing country must play

Farmers, ruined by the low grain prices, abandon their farms and migrate to the cities looking for work.
See Rule 3
9 *Go back two squares*

8 Cheap grain from the EU floods your markets. Urban food buyers are happy.
Go forward one square

As a former European colony you may be eligible to join Lomé.
See Rule 2 *Go forward two squares*

7

6 Flooding destroys rival producers' crops. Prices go up.
Go forward two squares

Rule 2

Lucky for some

The Lomé Convention regulates trade between the European Union (EU) and the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries. It gives ACP countries preferential access to the EU market, and protection against falling commodity prices.

Rule 5**Make more rules**

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established in 1995 as a successor to GATT. Its scope and powers are wider than GATT's, but it comes no closer to addressing many of the long-standing problems faced by most poor countries in the world trading system. Discriminatory trade policies, subsidised agricultural exports, and low prices for the commodities they produce will continue to undermine the livelihoods of most people in poor countries

19 WTO is dominated by rich industrialised countries.
Go back to Square One

Whatever you do, the rules seem to be stacked against you. Join WTO to try to change the rules.
See Rule 5 **18**

15 Go into textile manufacturing, taking a lead from Taiwan and Korea.
Go forward one square

Rich industrialised countries impose textile quotas under the MFA.
See Rule 4
Go back one square **16**

17 Beet sugar exports from the EU, subsidised by the CAP, undermine your sugar cane exports, leading to low prices.
Go back one square

The Trade Game**Rule Book**

The rules will change constantly during play

Game

Maybe there's strength in numbers — join UNCTAD
See Rule 1

5

4 Diversify into other commodities to spread the risk
Go forward one square

Other countries do the same and the price collapses.

3 Go back to Square One

2 Experts from rich industrialised countries advise you to increase exports of your main commodity to bring in more money

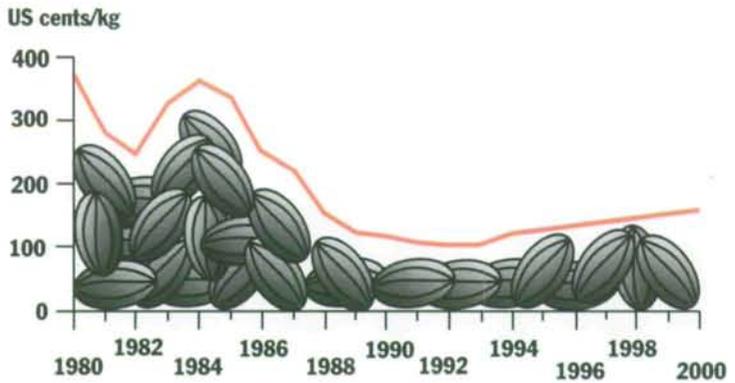
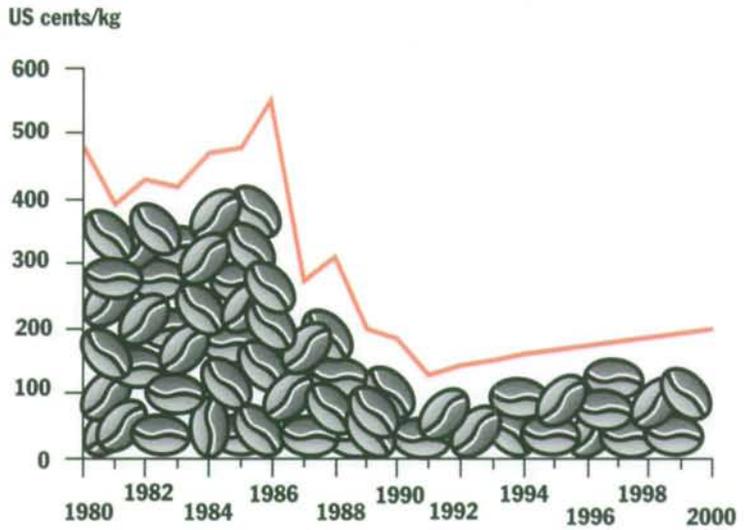
Rule 1**Stall 'em**

UNCTAD — United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — was established in 1962 to promote international trade and commerce with a principal focus on the problems of developing nations. Its influence is limited to a research and advisory role.

Square One

You are a poor country and you want to develop.

Price fluctuations for coffee (top) and cocoa (below) projected to the year 2000
 Source: World Bank



UK newspapers in early 1995 reported the complete transfer of a large UK plastic-bag factory to China. Machinery and equipment were simply packed up and flown out. The UK factory workers were kept on for a while to train the Chinese workers who were to take their jobs; then they were laid off.

In South-East Asia, Japanese investment has moved in the last few years to Malaysia and Thailand, where wages are one-tenth those that Japanese firms had been paying in South Korea and Taiwan. Now enter Vietnam, where, since the economy was opened to foreign investors in the mid-1980s, people have been eager to work for still less than their Malaysian and Thai counterparts. However Japanese investors may decide to respond to the arrival of this new, and highly educated, workforce, one fact is clear: workers in poor countries lose out, from low wages and poor working conditions because of the erosion of workers' rights, while the rich in both poor and rich countries benefit.

Free trade contains perils enough for poor countries, but, in fact, trade is far from “free” for them: the rules of the game have been drawn up by the winners. The need for “a level playing field” is often stressed by policy-makers from the rich industrialised countries, stressing the virtues of the free market. In fact, the benefits of international trade are currently strongly skewed towards the countries of the rich, industrialised world. They insist on open markets for their products, while at the same time maintaining trade barriers to protect their own industries from competition. In agricultural production, for example, the level playing field runs all the way downhill from the heavily subsidised farms of Europe and North America, to the staple-food systems of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

At present, about one-fifth of all exports from poorer countries face an array of protectionist barriers which discriminate specifically against them. The Multi-Fibre Arrangement, for example, scheduled to remain in place for another ten years, sets limits on exports of textiles and clothing from developing countries.

It costs those countries about \$50 billion a year in lost export earnings, roughly equivalent to the total flow of development aid to all poor countries from the richer countries who are making it impossible for them to export their goods.

Even without these arbitrary controls, rich countries hold the whip hand. Local crop prices in many poor countries are being depressed, and people’s livelihoods undermined, by the “dumping” of heavily subsidised food exports from rich countries. In 1991 alone, for example, the European Union shipped 54,000 tons of beef to West Africa. Subsidised by European tax-payers, the meat sold at 50 per cent below the price of locally reared beef. The results for a country like Mali, where trade in animals accounts for 30 per cent of all exports, have been disastrous. “The European Union is giving us money to help us develop,” commented a government trade officer, “but at the same time they are preventing us from trading with our neighbours.”

Livestock market, Mali.

Photo: Jeremy Hartley



In 1994 over four-fifths of Uganda's export earnings — \$162 million — went on debt and interest payments. By comparison, it was able to spend a total of only \$120m on health and education services.

The debt trap and its consequences

For some 15 years, many of the world's poorest countries have been trapped in debts which they are unlikely ever to be able to repay. Interest rates have increased, world prices have fallen for the commodities they depend on to pay those debts, and they are, to all intents and purposes, virtually bankrupt.

Most have had to turn to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for help, for new loans to meet the interest payments on their existing loans. As a result, the two institutions now wield considerable power in many poor countries, and have been able to demand major adjustments to the economic policies of their governments.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that governments have had to adopt, to qualify for an IMF rescue-package, have emphasised reducing public expenditure, and market deregulation, at the expense of measures to enhance the rights of poor women and men. According to both institutions, SAPs have provided frameworks for sustainable economic recovery, if at some short-term cost to some individuals.

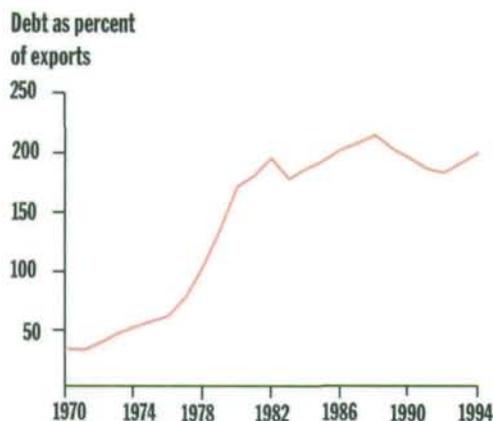
Certainly, there was a need for economic reforms, but these should have been designed to address the needs of poor people. Poor men and women, however, were never consulted about what the changes might mean for their lives. In their eyes, higher interest rates have meant that small producers cannot obtain the credit they need, that wages have fallen dramatically, and employment become highly insecure. Women are carrying a particularly heavy burden, as they struggle to make ends meet, and compensate for reductions in state services.

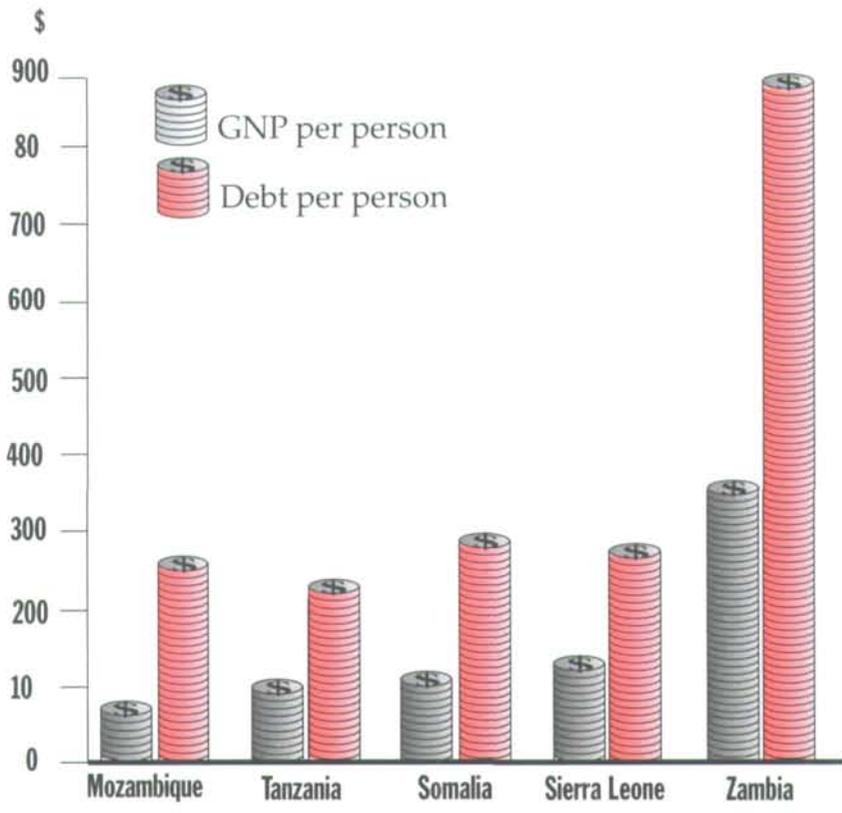
The World Bank itself has become concerned about the impact on poor people of cuts in state spending. It now aims, so far without much obvious success, to ensure that essential state services are protected in new adjustment programmes. But there is a huge gap between rhetoric and good intentions on the one hand, and what is actually happening out in the villages and squatter settlements on the other. The last five years have seen, for example, Zimbabwe reducing its spending on primary health care and basic education services by a third, the Zambian education budget pushed down to its lowest-ever level, and Pakistan's health budget declining from 1 per cent to 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product.

Where state services survive, they now often have to be paid for, either up-front or through charges for a whole range of essential "extras", such as pencils, contributions to school repair funds, or medicines. So fewer children learn to read and write, and fewer

External debt: developing countries 1970-94

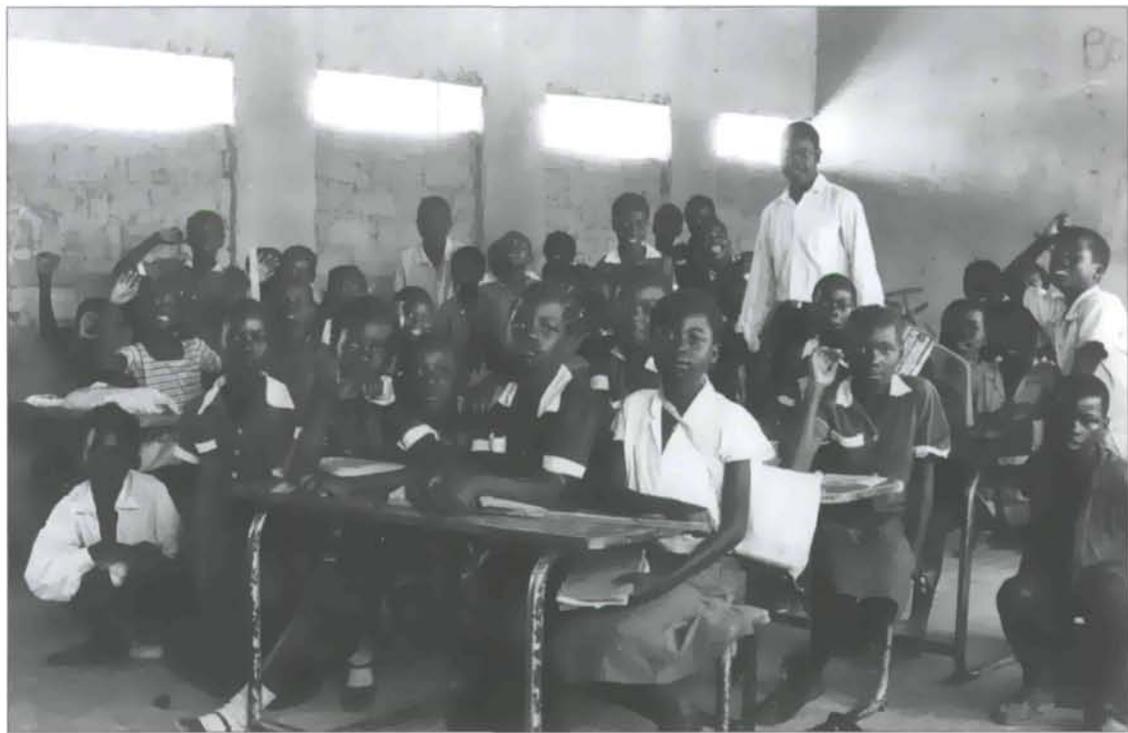
Source: *Vital Signs 1995*





Left: Debt and GNP per person in selected countries
Source: World Guide 1995

Below: Classroom in Zambia, 1990. Even before recent cuts in education spending, Zambian schools were overcrowded and under-resourced.
Photo: Chris Johnson

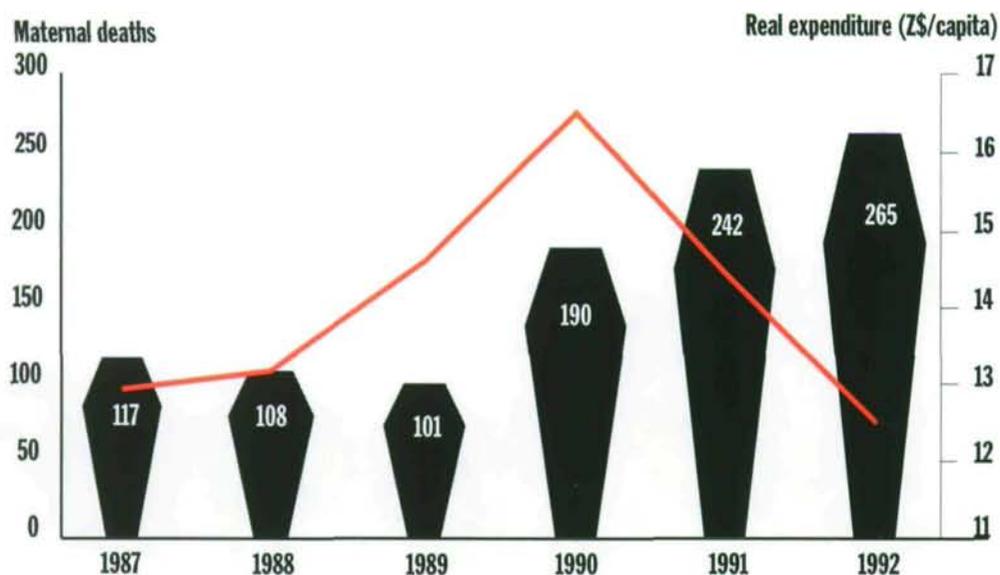


women get the antenatal care they need: in Zimbabwe in 1994 the number of babies born to women who had had no antenatal treatment rose from 1.6 per cent to nearly 9 per cent; and those women were five times more likely to die during or just after childbirth. Fortunately, the Zimbabwean government has come to recognise the harm being caused by the new policies, and has withdrawn fees for rural health services.

Essential though many of the enforced reforms were, there has been far too little attempt to help poor people share in any resulting increase in prosperity. Unless they are enabled to participate in the new markets opening up, for example by being given access to land and affordable loans, they are likely to suffer rather than benefit as a result of market deregulation. Their poverty is likely to be significantly reduced only if they have a say in critical decisions which will have far-reaching effects on their lives: their experience and perceptions must be taken into account in the design of national economic policies.

Maternal deaths in Zimbabwe compared with Ministry of Health recurrent expenditure per person, 1987-92

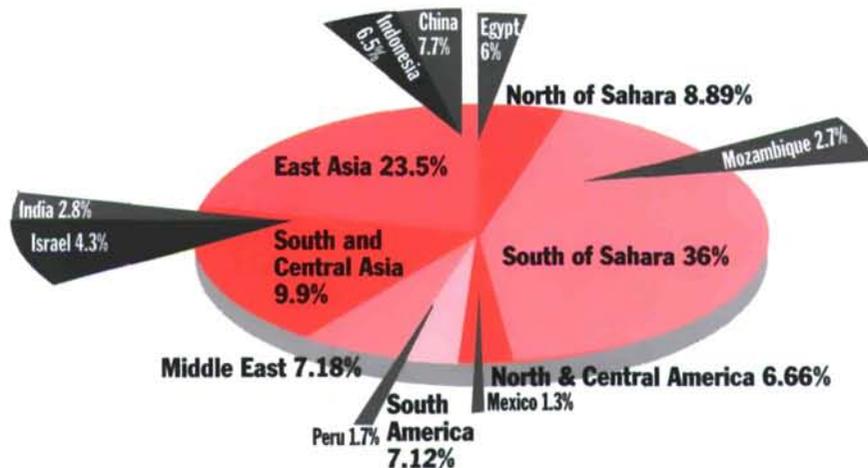
Source: UNICEF



Aid

Of all the aspects of the relationship between high- and low-income countries, aid is probably the one with the most myths around it. In the UK, public perception tends to be that we are sending huge sums of money — money that we can ill afford — to help poor people in poor countries. At least until the Pergau Dam affair hit the media, aid was often seen as a gift from “us” to “them”, the product of generosity and compassion. If the generosity had strings attached, that was, and still to some extent is, seen as only reasonable.

In many ways, the myths exaggerate the importance of aid. In



Distribution of net development aid from major donor countries 1989-93
Source: OECD

fact, the governments of rich countries would do far more for human welfare than they achieve through their aid budget, if they simply wrote off some of the debts owed to them, or ceased to operate double standards in demanding access to poor country markets, while putting up trade barriers to their own.

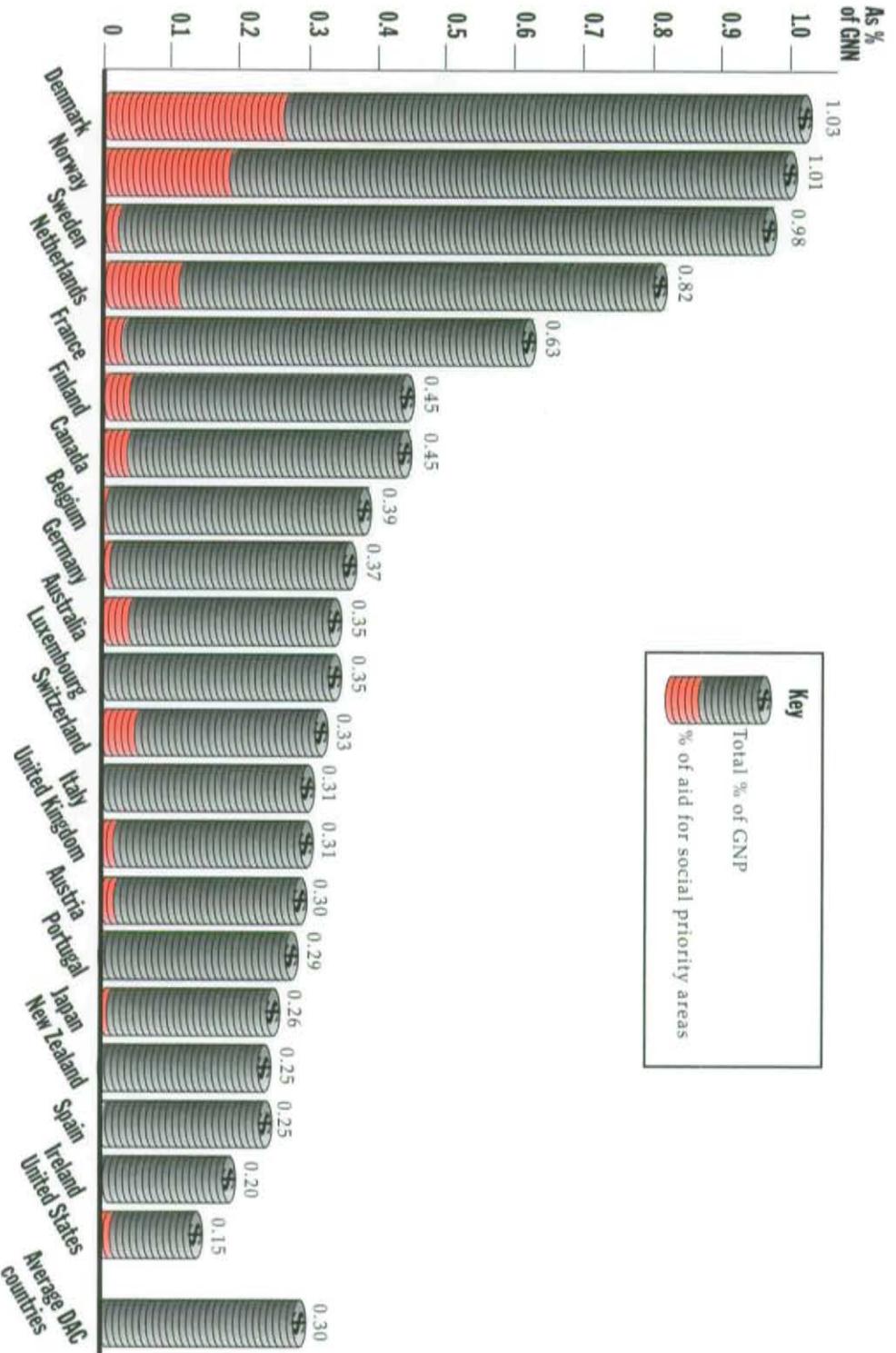
Nor are the sums of money involved particularly massive. The target set by the UN for aid budgets is 0.7 per cent of GNP. A modest enough target, but one that has so far been met by only four countries. Indeed, most countries are now moving further away from it. 1993-94 saw deep cuts in bilateral (government-to-government) transfers of aid. The 21 OECD countries reduced their aid budgets by over 6 per cent in real terms, with aid grants to non-African countries falling by 25 per cent. The US, already one of the countries furthest from meeting the UN target, reduced its aid expenditure by 19 per cent. Canada's overseas aid is expected to fall to 0.3 per cent of GNP by 1997-98; over a period which has seen its defence budget cut by 4.9 per cent, its aid budget has fallen by 15 per cent.

Overall, in 1993-94, the rich industrialised countries spent just 0.3 per cent of their GNP in aid, the lowest level recorded for two decades.

If the popular myths are mistaken about the size of the rich world's aid budgets, there is still more misunderstanding about the impact they are designed to make in reducing poverty.

For a start, resources are not concentrated in the countries where they are most needed. According to the UNDP, the poorest 40 per cent of the population of the developing world receives less than half the aid that goes to the richest 40 per cent.

Aid tends to be targeted at the countries of most strategic importance. Between them, for example, Israel and Egypt absorb over half the US aid budget, receiving over \$5bn annually: three



Official aid from donor countries, 1993, showing percentage for social priority areas

Source: World Bank

times the US aid budget for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. Israel receives \$626 per person: Peru, where average incomes are one-twelfth of those in Israel, only \$30 per person.

Even where aid is spent in poor countries, it does not always benefit the poorest people. Between them, bilateral donors spend only 7 per cent of their budgets on areas such as primary health care, basic education, water and sanitation provision, and nutrition programmes.

Even the money which does go on health and education services tends to benefit the better off: about a third of British aid is spent on priority areas like health and education, but four-fifths of its 1992 aid budget for education went on universities, technology centres, and secondary education, rather than on primary education. Four times as much aid worldwide goes on water supplies and sanitation for urban areas as for rural areas, much of it being used to provide relatively high-cost tap water to private homes. The primary health care facilities which could prevent or treat 80 per cent of the diseases afflicting poor people, receive only 1 per cent of international aid spending. Most donors continue to fund teaching hospitals, which provide high-cost services to urban populations.

The pursuit of commercial self-interest also reduces the effectiveness of aid programmes in combating poverty. Most aid donors use part of their aid budgets to promote exports by their own industries: around 75 per cent of British aid is tied to the purchase of British goods and technical assistance. In fact, in some cases, the aid budget is used to subsidise the British commercial sector by helping firms with the costs of tendering for projects.

Because the tying of aid insulates donors from competitive pressures, developing countries end up paying above the market rate for goods and services. One recent estimate suggests that these extra costs to aid recipients represent more than 15 per cent of the aid provided. According to the World Bank, untying all aid donations would be worth as much as \$4bn a year to developing countries: more than the entire UK aid budget.

It could also result in more appropriate solutions to people's problems, because developing countries would be able to acquire what they need, rather than what donor countries have available to sell them. It might enable people to develop their own skills,



rather than having foreign “experts” foisted on them: of the \$12bn or so of development aid spent annually on training, project design, and consultancy, over 90 per cent goes on such experts. This is not just a waste of the potential of people in poor countries; it is also only too likely to lead to bad advice being given by people with insufficient understanding of local situations.

The Pergau Dam scandal illustrated everything that is wrong with tied aid. The largest programme ever financed under the Aid Trade Provision of the UK aid programme, it cost some £234m. An ODA report concluded that it was an expensive and inefficient source of power, and “a very bad buy” for both Malaysian consumers and British tax-payers. But the deal had been pushed through because it was linked to billions of pounds of British exports to Malaysia, including over \$1bn of arms exports.

Ecological footprints

Land is constantly washed away from Hatiya Island, Bangladesh, particularly during storms in the Bay of Bengal.

Photo: Shahidul Alam

The damage being done to our environment affects us all, and is likely to impoverish all our lives if it continues unchecked. But global environmental problems, such as the warming effect of “greenhouse” gases, pose particular problems for poor people.

For example, impoverished Bangladeshi families, left destitute by the 1991 Bay of Bengal cyclone, have won the right



to cultivate small pieces of land on Hatiya Island. In reality the island is little more than a low-lying sandbar created by siltation — only people with no other options would even consider trying to live there. Nevertheless, the island's new community is struggling to protect its new home, by building embankments and planting trees. They are developing all manner of ways of making a livelihood from their perilous environment. All their initiatives will count for little, however, if global warming causes a rise in sea-level, and increases the frequency and intensity of flooding.

Throughout the world, poor people are the most immediately threatened by global environmental degradation, since so many of them live in fragile ecological areas and lack the resources to protect themselves. Yet it is the rich — nearly all of us in the developed world, and the elites of poorer countries — who are responsible for most of it. The industrialised world has largely caused the build-up of carbon emissions which threatens to lead to global warming, but it is poor people, like those on Hatiya Island, who will suffer.

The poor are often blamed for the threat to the global environment because, it is said, they have "too many" children, and therefore put damaging pressure on land and resources. This accusation overlooks the fact that poverty usually cuts people off from the very family-planning services the rich world blames them for not using. Or that, with no social security or pensions, and with so many children dying young, it can be a rational choice for poor people to have large families as security for their old age.



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In any case, it is poverty, rather than “over” fertility, which most frequently forces men and women to degrade their local environment: squeezed out on to poor, unproductive land, many families have to sacrifice tomorrow’s environment for today’s meal or this year’s harvest. Many of them have no realistic choice but to over-cultivate their land, over-graze their pastures or cut down their forests for firewood.

Whatever damage they may do, however, is minute compared with the havoc wrought by the rich. The average American, for example, has an environmental impact on the planet about 140 times greater than the average Bangladeshi, and 250 times greater than the average African. With only 16 per cent of the world’s population, the industrialised countries generate nearly 70 per cent of its industrial waste and over 30 per cent of the gases responsible for global warming.

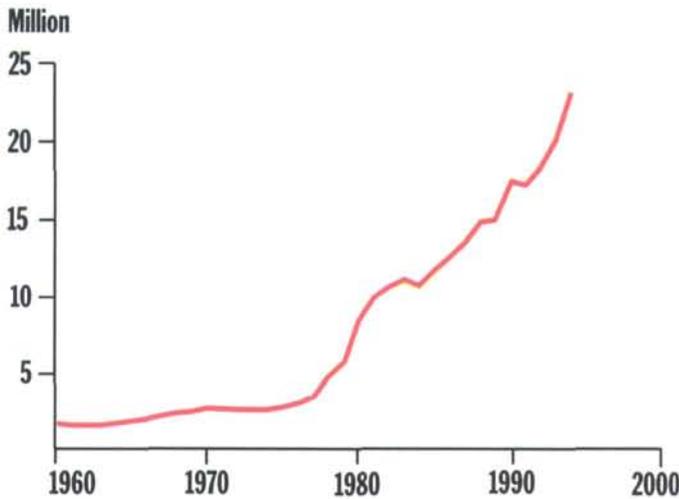
The agenda of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit was defined to a great extent by the interests of the industrialised world, and concentrated most sharply on the actions which poor countries should take. Attempts to make the rich, industrialised world clean up its act, such as the Climate Change Convention, commit governments to little effective action: targets and timetables are left vague. For President George Bush, “the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation”, a view tacitly shared by the governments of most rich, industrialised nations and almost guaranteed to lead to a steadily worsening environmental situation. We are all likely to suffer when that happens, but, almost certainly, it will be poor people who suffer first, and most.

Conflict

Nothing violates people’s rights more massively than war and armed conflict. For the time being, the old model of conflicts between states has largely given way to one of conflicts within states, but the results are similar: 40 million people left as refugees or internally displaced within their own countries; a million people killed in Rwanda in 1994; a quarter of a million killed in Bosnia and 2.5 million driven from their homes.

War today is waged mainly against non-combatants: four out of every five casualties are civilians, most of them women and children. According to UNICEF, 1.5 million children were killed in conflict between 1982 and 1992, and another 4.5 million left disabled. In some conflicts, rape has become a routine way of terrorising and humiliating women, and, often, through them, their entire ethnic group.

Even in times of peace, conflict continues to claim victims. There are up to 110 million anti-personnel mines scattered across the world, mostly lying in the fields and roads of poor



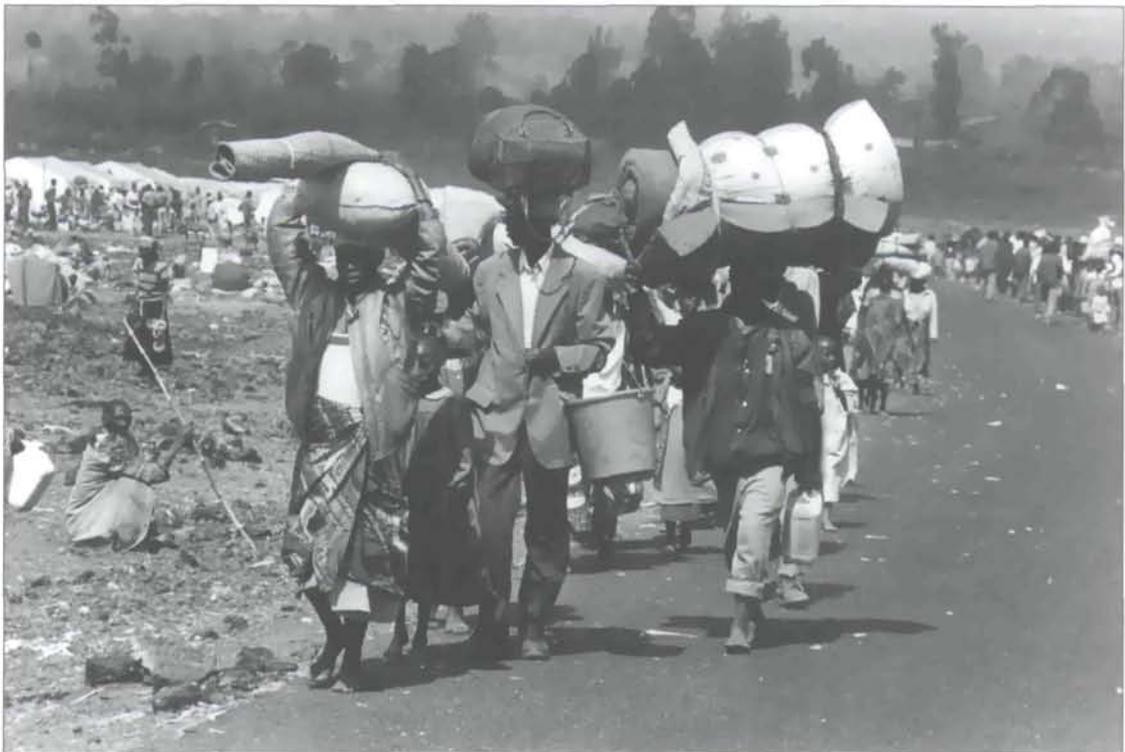
Number of refugees worldwide 1960-94

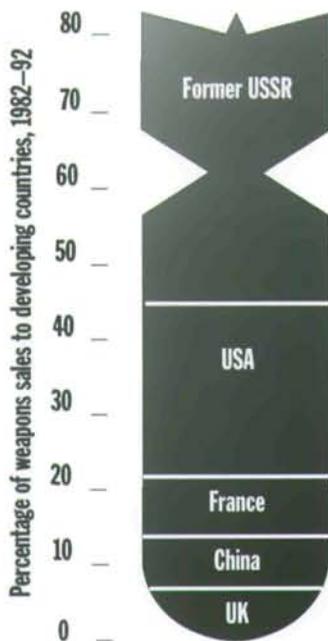
Source: *Vital Signs* 1995

countries. Every day they kill over 20 people, and injure double that number. The indirect damage they cause is long-lasting and almost as harmful. Good land has to be left uncultivated, often in areas where people are going hungry. Travelling or transporting goods along mined roads remains fraught with danger, leaving communities isolated, and jeopardising attempts to rebuild war-wrecked economies.

Rwandan refugees walking towards Katale camp, Zaire.

Photo: Howard Davies





Weapons sales to developing countries by the permanent members of the UN Security Council

Source: UNDP

Poverty is a common element to many conflicts. Another is the part played by governments of the industrialised nations through the international arms trade. In fact, over 80 per cent of that trade is carried out by the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. This trade adds further to the poverty which fuels conflict, by diverting the scarce resources of poor countries away from where they are most needed. Third World elites, who benefit in all sorts of ways from the trade, are only too happy to collude in, or even run, the process. Indeed, they often benefit doubly, since many weapons are purchased to repress civil dissent, and preserve an unjust status quo.



Church in Kibeho, Rwanda, where over 4000 Tutsis were murdered.

Photo: Robert Maletta

Time for a new vision

A shared world

Poverty affects us all, as individuals or nations. Denying huge numbers of people the chance to use their talents and realise their potential is an inefficient, wasteful way of running our world. And in the end we all suffer.

Despair and frustration are leading, at national and global levels, to social instability, violence, environmental damage, and massive increases in organised crime and drugs trafficking. Poor people and nations may bear the brunt, but we live in a shrinking, interdependent world. Affluent communities and nations cannot shelter indefinitely behind security systems and border controls.

Real security can never be built on poverty, even poverty apparently confined to another postcode or a distant continent. There is an urgent need for people in the rich world to join the millions of poor people who are working for a world where every human being enjoys his or her basic rights: there is no realistic alternative.

In fact, the idea of an end to the poverty which currently blights the lives of so many people begins more and more to seem not only realistic and realisable, but also the only hope for world survival.

The world's governments currently spend at least \$800bn a year on their military requirements: reducing their expenditure by a little more than half a per cent would free enough money to finance basic education for all the world's children. Indeed, how can anyone claim that the world is too strapped for cash, when each day \$1 trillion moves through the global financial markets?

Struggling for rights

Many of the world's poorest people have shown a vision lacked by most, if not all, governments. They are not content to be told that their rights are unattainable, that it is unrealistic to want clean water or enough to eat. They are demanding, half a century after the UN outlined its vision, that words be turned into actions. And they are beginning with their own situations, putting time and energy into transforming their own communities.

It's taken Janki Manjhi eight years to obtain proof that he owns the land that he and his family depend on for a living. Back in 1986 he moved on to government-owned land in the Indian state of Bihar. The government had allocated the land for distribution to landless farmers like Janki, but it was being illegally occupied by a landlord from a neighbouring town.

With help from Oxfam-funded Gram Nirman Kendra, the farmers campaigned for the eviction of the landlord and the right to claim the land for themselves. Eight years later — eight years of asking, and waiting, and promises that came to nothing — Janki holds the all-important piece of paper confirming that the land is his.

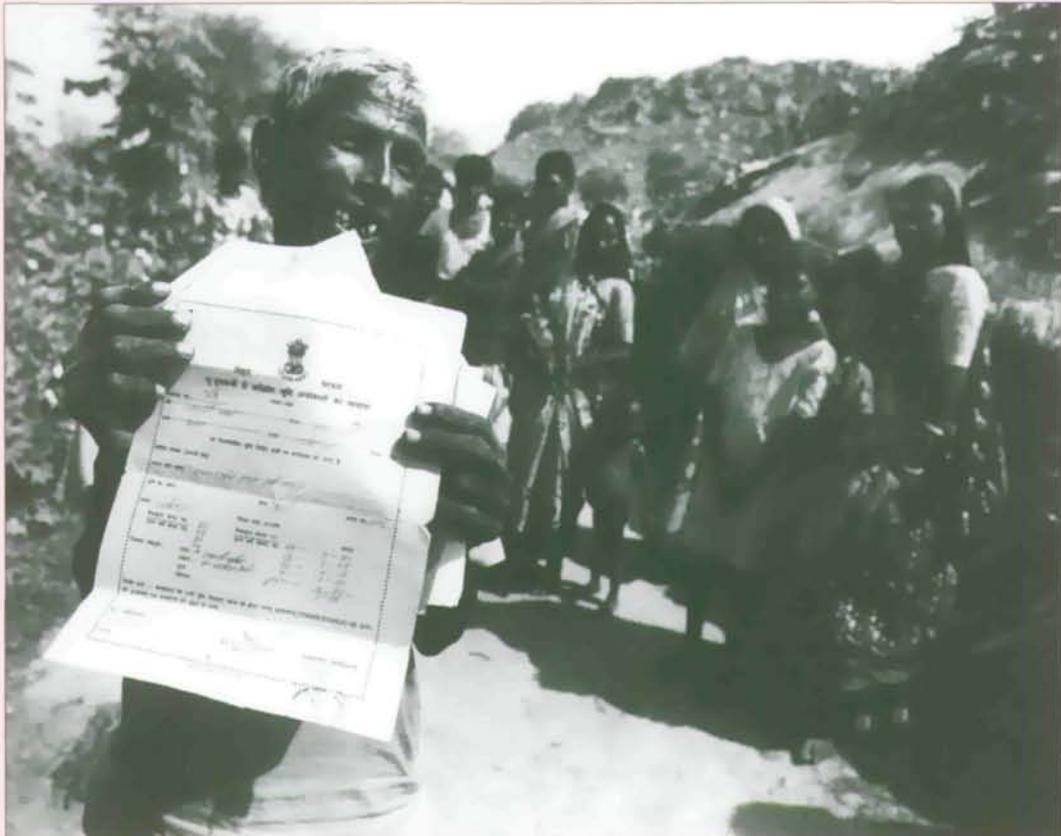


photo: Achinto

"This place was a mud hole when we first arrived," says Maria Silva de Andrade. "We now have a school, a health post, water, and electricity." Maria and her husband live in Belém, at the mouth of the Amazon. Most of the city is below sea-level, and the swampy land where the poorest residents live is regularly flooded. When it rains the river branches rise, and the streets of the poorest shanty towns become ankle-deep in sewage and litter. Disease is a constant threat, and local community groups are doing what they can to improve health care there.

A municipal scheme to improve drainage and sanitation for half a million people will make for a safer environment, but Maria and 2,500 other people face losing their homes as a result. With help from the Oxfam-funded Belém Residents' Association, Maria and the other affected people are campaigning for compensation and better resettlement terms.

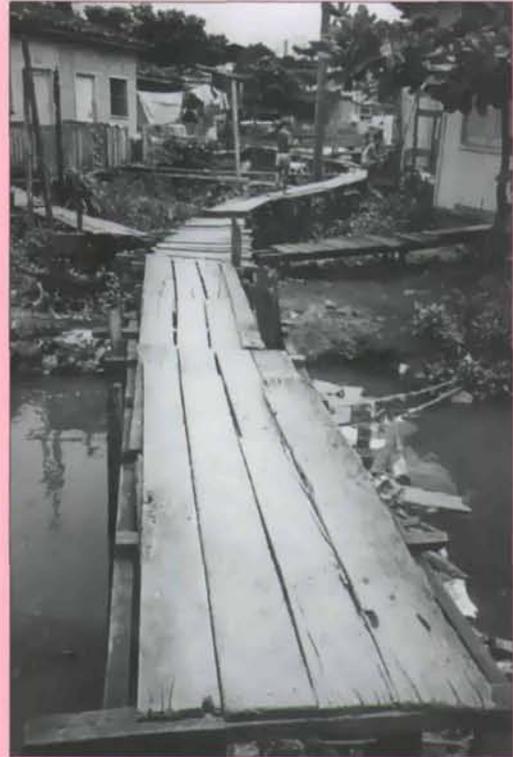


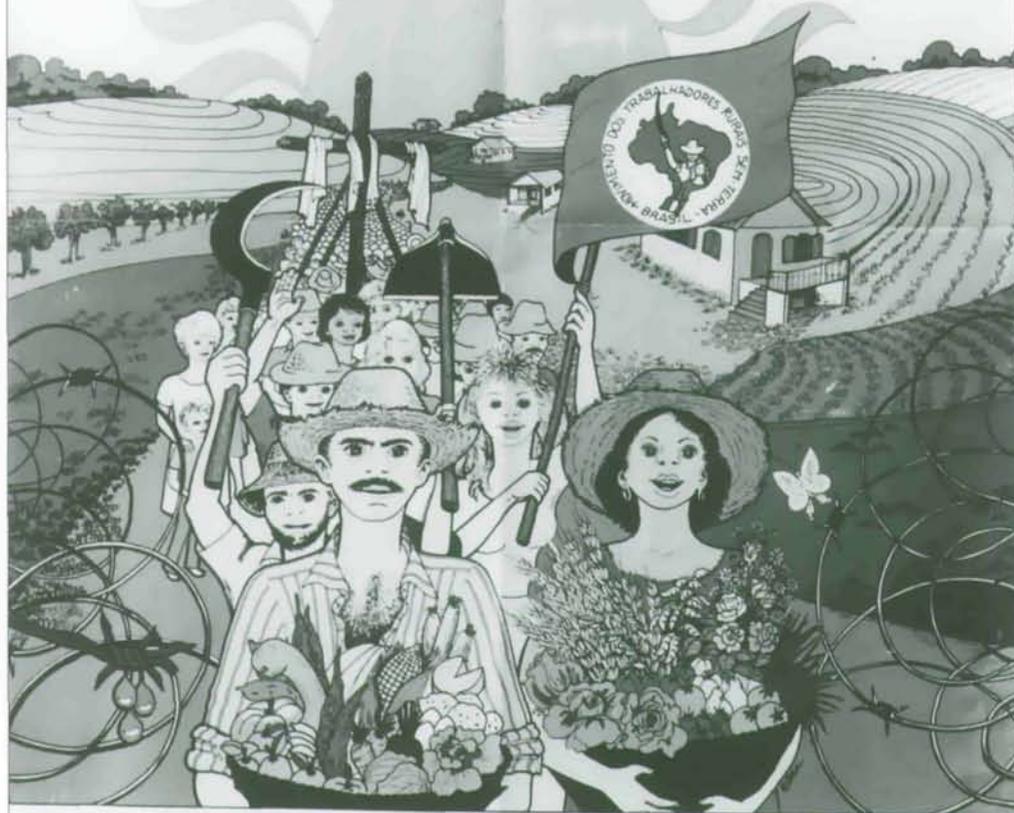
photo: Frances Rubin

Janki and Maria are driven by the urgency of their own needs, and also by a stubborn vision of their own rights as human beings: rights to a livelihood, and a safe, clean home. It is time for governments and international institutions to show as much vision as Janki and Maria, and

- re-affirm the basic rights (social and economic, as well as civil and political), of all human beings
- act to turn those rights into reality.

It is time, too, for ordinary people in the world's richer countries to add our voices to those of Janki and Maria, in demanding that they do so. Real change comes from the grassroots up.

10 anos da retomada da LUTA CONQUISTA e RESISTÊNCIA na terra



DIAS: 7,8,9 de setembro de 1989

LOCAL: Encruzilhada Natalino — RS

APOIO: CPT — FETAG —

Poster for Rural Workers Union, Brazil

photo: Jenny Matthews