

Caught in the poverty trap

In their struggle to claim the rights they need, most poor people face the denial, not of one or two rights, but a whole interconnected range of them. The following studies look at the complexity of the problems faced by poor people in three different continents. They show a multiple denial of rights leading to deepening poverty, and then on to the denial of further rights.

Legacies of conflict

Sok Sheun, Suon Sea, and Phan Poeh all lived through one of the most savage episodes in human history, the dictatorship of Pol Pot, backed by his Khmer Rouge forces, in Cambodia. During those years, the most basic of rights were treated with complete contempt, and a million people died as a result.

Today, their rights have, in theory, been restored to Sok, Suon, and Phan: a sort of peace prevails in Cambodia. All three live, however, with the legacy of previous conflict, hampered in their attempts to realise their basic rights by disability and the lasting damage that the Khmer Rouge caused to community structures and social trust. Continuing threats of violence undermine their efforts today to overcome the other problems facing them in an often hostile environment.

Livelihoods under threat

A few fish and frogs are all that Sok Sheun survives on each week. This is all his two hectares of rice-field in Cambodia's Battambang province can provide. Having once promised him a livelihood and a plentiful supply of food, the land now often lies abandoned and under water, ruined by floods.

Sok is an amputee, having lost a leg when he stepped on a mine during the war. On returning to his home village in 1992, after the war, he found that all his family had been killed.



Coping with the trauma of the war and the loss of his family has been hard enough, but Sok also faces the struggle against the social stigma of being an amputee. To earn a living and gain independence, he rented some land in Kandal village, to grow rice. But this has only put him into debt.

“Everything I planted was lost in the floods. I can usually grow 20 bags of rice in one hectare. One bag usually lasts about half a month. For each hectare I also have to give three bags of rice as rent. I planted one or two mango and banana trees, but these also died in the floods.”

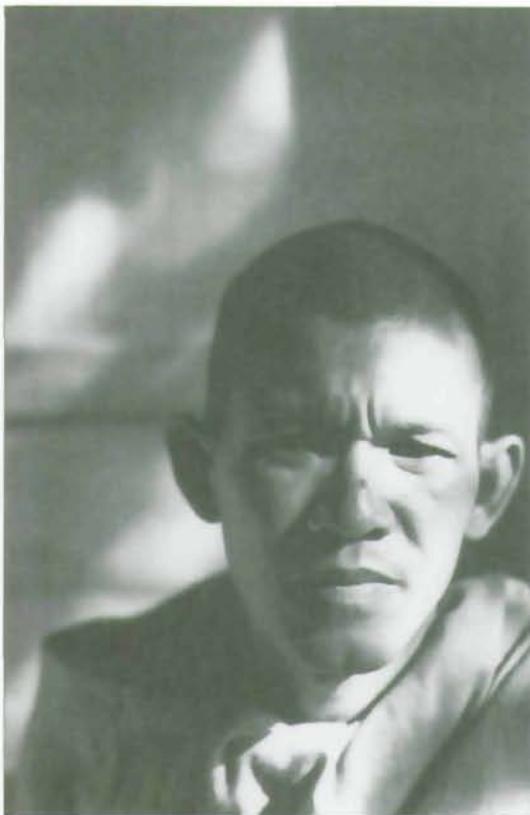
Suon Sea, another mine victim, who lost both legs below the knee, also finds it difficult to gain a livelihood in post-war Cambodia: “In the refugee camp we didn’t worry about food, as the Red Cross provided all that we needed. Here it is very hard to get an income. All our crops — rice, sugar cane, fruit trees — have been destroyed. We owe 20 dollars for rice, and we cannot now pay this back as our crop has failed. The money lender has allowed us to wait until next year to pay, but we are worried about the interest.”

The war the world has forgotten

As far as the world is concerned, the Cambodian war has long since finished, but villagers in Battambang are still waiting for

Sok Sheuon out fishing.

photo: Nic Dunlop



Heng Moni Chenda.

photo: Nic Dunlop

peace. Khmer Rouge guerrillas are a constant threat to villages like Kandal. They carry out frequent raids on the village, stealing the little food and livestock that the villagers possess, or harassing families.

"Security is bad", says Suon Sea, "but the Khmer Rouge usually ignore us and go straight to the village centre. We feel frightened as there is often shooting."

The Khmer Rouge presence serves as a reminder of Pol Pot's genocidal regime. During his rule in the late 1970s, up to one million people were murdered. Pol Pot deliberately targeted trained personnel, destroying the country's services and infrastructure.

Heng Moni Chenda, director of Buddhism for Development, escaped from Cambodia in 1979 to a Thai border camp. "Under Pol Pot," he remembers, "all sense of community was destroyed. We had to live in communes imposed from the outside. People started to steal, to lie, to lose their sense of trust and community. Children denounced their parents. It was difficult just to survive."

Despite the presence of the UN's peace-keeping mission, the Khmer Rouge are still a force to be reckoned with. People who are trying to build a new life for themselves out of the country's ruins have to cope with the constant threat of violence from the guerrillas, and the hazards of land mines.

At least four million anti-personnel mines are scattered throughout the country, preventing many people from farming the land, and deterring displaced people from returning to their homes. Each month between 300 and 700 people need to have limbs amputated as a result of mine injuries.

From one generation to the next

Khmer Rouge terror has shaped the lives of Phan Poeh and his wife for over twenty years. Their very marriage — enforced by the Khmer Rouge back in 1976 — is a constant reminder of the days when Pol Pot was an absolute and bloody ruler of Cambodia.

But Phan Poeh's wife has been good to him: unlike the spouses of many amputees, she stayed with him after a landmine blew off his hand in 1983. "I was hunting for small animals to eat, when I saw it," he remembers. "I knew that it was dangerous, so I tried to remove it to protect others. It blew up in my hand."

Fifteen years after the defeat of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge still dominate Phan's life. His land has not been flooded like Suon Sea's, but he is unable to use the rice fields outside his village because the closeness of Khmer Rouge troops makes it too dangerous. His family has to depend on a few crops just round their house, and the chickens he is being helped to rear by a Cambodian organisation working with amputees in his village. He is unable to sleep at night because the Khmer Rouge come into the village as far as his house.

Phan's children do not go to school: they are hungry, and can't concentrate. Anyway, there is no money to pay for their schooling. "If I had my hand, I would be able to farm more easily, and then my children would have enough to eat, and we would be able to send them to school. Losing a hand is worse than losing a leg. At least if you lose a leg you can get a false one, which can make life slightly easier. Without a hand I cannot do many things."

What sort of future do Phan and his family face? "We do not want to move away from the Khmer Rouge," he says. "This is my home, I have always lived here. Anyway I do not know where is any free land elsewhere."

Struggling to recover

The legacy of violence is incalculable for people like Sok, Suon, and Phan. It has left them with few resources, material or emotional, to cope with the ordinary business of survival and rebuilding, let alone a disaster like a flood.

"Integration has been difficult," says a Buddhist monk. "Most people still have no land, and those that do tend to live in heavily mined areas. Many still have no means of earning a living."

Free trade: whose freedom?

Alma Molina knows all about free trade. She lives and works in Mexico's free-trade border zone — described by one commentator as "a facsimile of hell on earth". Free trade for the 2,000 plus manufacturing plants there means the chance to maximise profits by pushing wages down to rock-bottom levels, and disregarding the environmental consequences of their operations.



Training for local people in mine clearance, Battambang province, Cambodia.

photo: Nic Dunlop

For Alma free trade means a wage of \$4.50 for a nine-hour day. It means working with dangerous chemicals without protective clothing. It means skin which is constantly stinging. And it means the sack for workers who try to organise to negotiate better conditions.

Through Alma's eyes

"I live in Juarez... In June 1992 I went to work for a US company with a plant in Juarez. I was among some 300 workers who make electrical switches and sensors. I earned the Mexican minimum wage of \$4.50 for a nine-hour day.

"A group of us wanted to improve our working conditions, safety and wages at this company (Clarostat). We worked with dangerous chemicals, including phenol and epoxy resin, but no masks were provided. The chemicals irritated our skin.

"Six of us began to organise a union. We had meetings every two weeks. After a few months I was fired because I was trying to organise a union...

"Shortly after being fired, I was hired by Electrocomponentes, which is a General Electric Company. The GE logo is on the factory. At that plant, 1800 workers make wiring for refrigerators sold in the US... I had been at GE for only seven days when I was called to the personnel office and shown a list with my name on it... The personnel man said that he did not know why my name was on the list, but that he would have to fire me anyway."

A cowed workforce

Wages in places like Juarez are less than a tenth of those paid in the US, and all the indications are that they will stay that way. The Mexican government, eager to attract new industry to Mexico, does its best to suppress the country's independent trade-union movement. Workers have few genuine safeguards against the abuses of employers.

For the largely female workforce in the free-trade zone, there is a stark choice: desperate poverty out in the countryside, a bitter struggle to survive unemployment in the shanty towns, or working for starvation wages in a General Motors or Du Pont manufacturing plant.

Ultimately, the transnational corporations hold the whip hand. They have already dealt a massive blow to many US workers by moving their manufacturing plants to Mexico. If Alma and her colleagues do achieve any success in their struggle for a fairer wage and safer working conditions, their victory could be a hollow one.

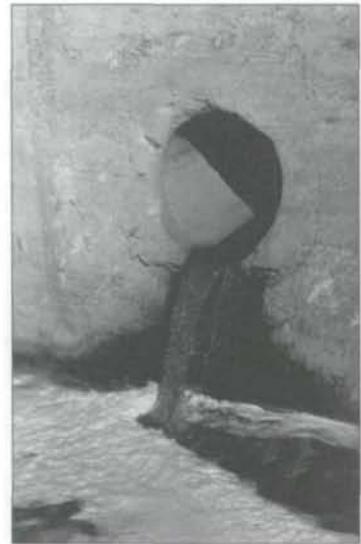
There are plenty more, even poorer, countries eager to woo the transnationals away from Mexico with yet greater tax and import concessions, and still harsher legislation to curb trade union activity.

In search of someone else's back yard

In the late 1980s California introduced more stringent state air-pollution controls. The result was almost immediate: a large-scale exodus of furniture manufacturers to Mexico's border zone. In one border town over a quarter of US firms with plants there said they had been attracted by the relative lack of environmental restrictions.

More than half the border zone plants produce hazardous waste: only a third comply with Mexico's toxic waste laws. Hundreds simply discharge heavy metals and other poisonous substances into open ditches. Much of that discharge is known to be associated with birth defects and brain damage: in towns in this area the incidence of anencephalic births (babies born without brains) is 30 times the Mexican average.

The American Medical Association has branded the whole region "a virtual cesspool and breeding ground for infectious diseases". Like the transnationals, such diseases do not let national boundaries get in their way: hepatitis and tuberculosis are now rife on both sides of the border.



Polluted water from factories being discharged into a river.

photo: Julio Etchart/Reportage

Toxic and industrial waste dumped by factories in the border zone.

photo: Julio Etchart/Reportage



Evading control

Mexico is part of the North America Free Trade Agreement, and there has been great concern over the social and environmental consequences of setting up the Agreement. As a result two subsidiary agreements have been negotiated, designed to curb abuses. Neither has been very successful:

- The labour agreement recognises the right to form and join trade unions, and to collective bargaining on wages and working conditions *but* any violations of these rights are to be “punished”, not by trade sanctions, but by fact-finding exercises and consultations.
- The environment agreement has provided the resources to improve standards in Mexico, and recognises the need to establish acceptable minimum standards *but* the Commission set up to oversee the agreement has no powers of investigation and has to rely on evidence supplied by governments of offending countries. The responsibility for enforcing the agreement is also placed squarely on governments: the Mexican government does not even enforce its existing environmental laws.

An adequate livelihood and a safe environment are still remote prospects for Alma, her fellow-workers, and the children they may bear in years to come.

Struggling for a livelihood: Dorothy Chiredze’s story

Historic inequality

In 1980 the newly independent Zimbabwe faced a legacy of deep inequality left by the previous white minority government. The white population made up about 5 per cent of the total population, but owned most of the country’s wealth: its good agricultural land, its many rich mines, and its manufacturing industry.

The Land Act of 1930 had allocated over half the country’s land to white settlers. They got the High Veldt, with its fertile soil and large river system. The remainder was left for the black population. Today, the situation has changed little: a mere 4,500 commercial farms, most of them still owned by white farmers, spread over the High Veldt. Meanwhile, four million black farmers are still crammed into the “Communal Areas” — the poorest quality land, fragile, heavily eroded, and in areas of low rainfall.



A fragile environment

Masvingo province in semi-arid southern Zimbabwe is a hostile environment. Rainfall is low and erratic, and drought a regular occurrence. Tree cover is almost non-existent. The scrubland is largely bare, except for occasional colonies of mopane trees, known locally as “the camels” because of their ability to survive with little water.

During the long dry season the fragile top soil, unprotected from the sun, bakes into a solid concrete-like crust. When the rains come, that crust disintegrates and is transported through the deep gullies which scar the land, into fast-flowing river tributaries. These in turn feed into once-mighty rivers, like the Tokwe and Runde, which carried Victorian explorers into the interior. Now little more than streams for most of the year, they are briefly transformed, during the rainy season, into torrents which carry the soil from Masvingo down to the Indian Ocean.

A threatened lifestyle

Dorothy Chiredze lives in the village of Katule, which is typical of many in Masvingo. She farms just over one hectare of land, ploughing the soil with a hoe. In April, just before harvest, her widely spaced, thin stalks of maize wilt in the sun. They are

Farming in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas.

photo: Chris Johnson

nourished by water carried before dawn from a spring two hours' walk away.

If it is a good harvest, Dorothy will grow three sacks of maize. After she has sold one to pay for school fees, seeds for next year's harvest, oil, and other basic items, she will have enough left for herself, her two daughters, and one son, to last until January. Then she will have to work clearing land for wealthier neighbours, or on some larger commercial farms about ten kilometres away. Dorothy also grows small amounts of millet, which she brews into beer for cash, and some green vegetables.

The poorest families in Katule, most of them headed by women like Dorothy Chiredze, typically have less than two hectares of land, and no irrigation. What sets them apart from the wealthier people in the village, most of them say, is that they do not have cattle for ploughing. This restricts the area of land they are able to cultivate, and the amount of crops they can produce. Most cannot afford fertiliser, which explains why their maize stalks are smaller and paler than those of richer farmers. Few have savings or other assets, except a few goats, which they can sell to get through times of stress.

When disaster strikes

In a good year, the poorest families will grow enough maize to feed their families for three or four months. But many years are not good. The climate in Masvingo is changing, so farmers are less and less able to assess accurately when they need to plant. And the land is being hit by drought more frequently and more severely.

In 1992 Masvingo experienced the worst drought of the century. Almost the entire maize crop was destroyed, and most of the oxen died. Previous years of low rainfall and mediocre crops had already left people vulnerable: many had exhausted their savings or sold off assets like goats and chickens; some were already in debt.

In Dorothy's words

"It was the worst [drought] we had ever seen. Our maize was destroyed. We were left only with a little millet. Even those with much land lost their crops, so there was no work for us. There was emergency food, but it came so late ... There was much hunger in our villages, some children died from dysentery.

"My husband used to send money from Harare. He worked in a factory. But he came home because there was no more work.

"Our children ate only one meal each day. For many weeks we just had *sadza* (boiled maize meal) with no meat or vegetables. Our daughter became sick. The children were too weak to walk to school. Even if they were strong we did not



have enough money to send them because the school was charging higher fees. The school said they had no choice because the government was giving them less ...”

School students in Zimbabwe.
photo: Chris Johnson

Spiralling downwards

It takes only one, very small step to move from subsistence to hunger and starvation. Dorothy and her family have worked out a way of life that is perfectly viable, in a reasonable year. With their own small farm, their access to work on neighbouring larger farms, and the remittances from her husband in Harare, they have a whole strategy for survival carefully formulated. It is a strategy which works — just, and until things go wrong.

All too often, many things go wrong, at the same time. Then, vulnerable families like Dorothy’s are trapped. When the rains failed, Dorothy and most of her neighbours had already lost the savings that might have tided them over. In an area where even the biggest farms for once had also lost their harvest, there was no labouring work to be had. Because Zimbabwe is heavily dependent on agriculture, the drought affected the whole economy, including its manufacturing industries. Economic recession led to massive factory lay-offs — and Dorothy found herself with an income less and an extra mouth to feed at home.

Not all the threats to the security of Dorothy's family came from the weather, or even from within Zimbabwe. The country's economic recession has been caused partly by its structural adjustment programme, as have the increased school fees Dorothy was unable to pay during the drought.

Once a family like Dorothy's start to slip downwards, it is difficult for it to start struggling upwards again. Dorothy's lack of savings or assets meant that her children became malnourished and ill; their ill health led to the disruption of their education. Poverty makes people less healthy, and so less productive, and then in turn still poorer and less healthy: it's a simple but utterly vicious circle.

An uncertain future

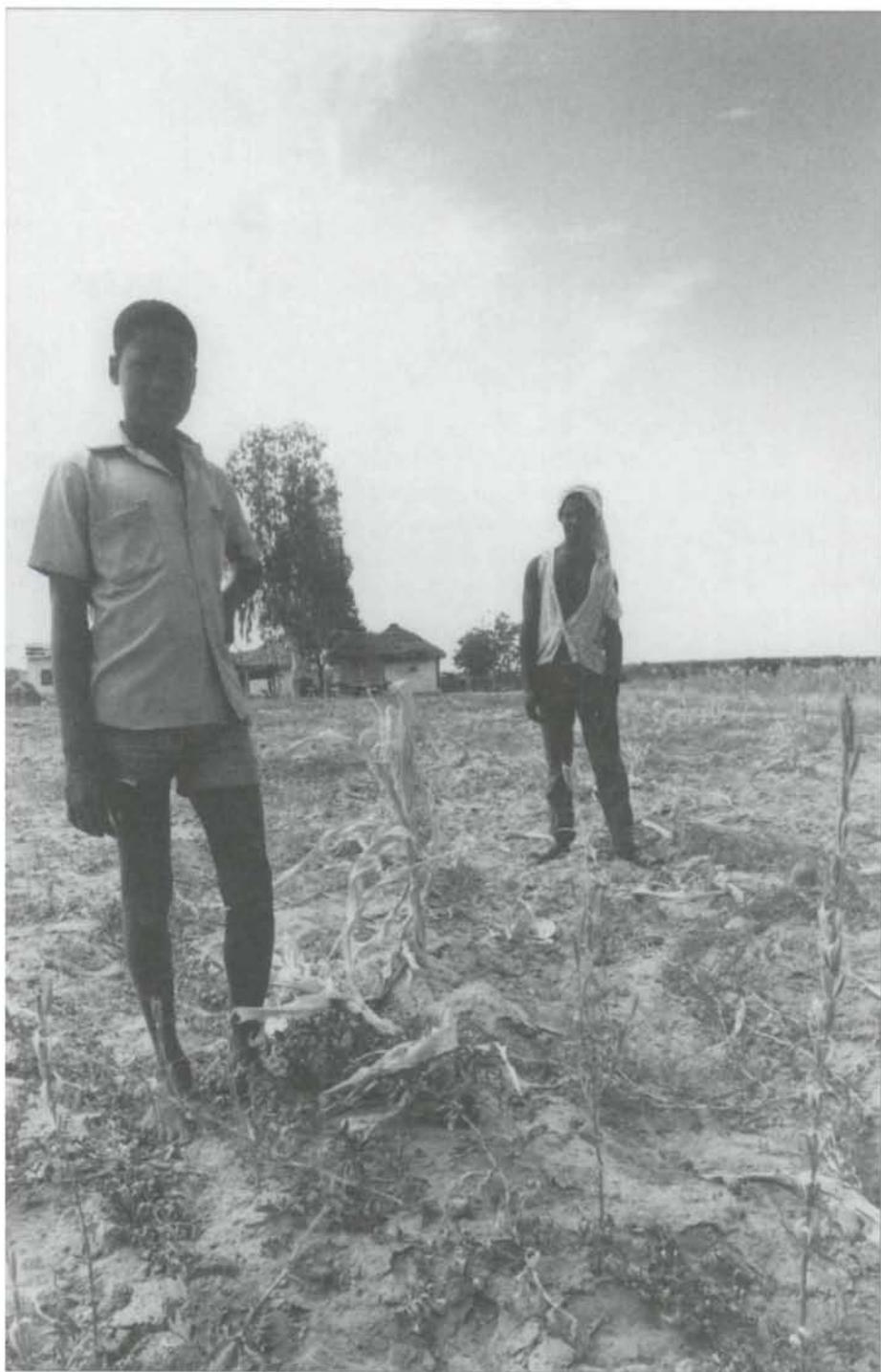
"This year we will have a small harvest. We could not buy seed or fertiliser, and we have planted less. There was no money to hire an ox, so I ploughed the land by hand. If the rains are good, maybe we will grow two bags of maize; in a good year we used to grow three. I will have to work on the farms of others for food maybe as early as December.

"If the rains are bad again, I don't know if we will survive. We pray for rain ... but life is hard. We struggle to stay alive, but life is so hard."

The drought of 1992 did more than leave Dorothy's family hungry that year. It undermined their whole future. Because it left them poorer, they were unable to make the best use of their land when the rains returned, so their harvest will be smaller than it might otherwise have been. And that will have repercussions on the next year's crop, because Dorothy will have to spend more time working on the farms of her wealthier neighbours and less on her own farm.

Meanwhile the future looks unpromising for Dorothy's children. They have already had a year's schooling disrupted. With school fees increasing, and their family's income decreasing, there will probably be more disruptions in the future. Besides, with Dorothy off working for someone else, their labour will be needed more on their own land.

Poverty is transmitted down through the generations, just as wealth is; unless action is taken rapidly to enable Dorothy and her family to secure the rights to which they are entitled, her children seem to have little chance of escaping the poverty which has trapped their parents.



Drought in Zimbabwe, 1992
photo: Greg Williams

On 26 January 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man [sic] one vote, and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall ... continue to deny the principle of one man one value ... How long should we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? ... we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril.

from Dr Ambedkar's speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly, November 1949

An agenda for change

If present trends are allowed to continue unchallenged, the future is a frightening prospect. It will be a world of deep divisions, of societies segregated between the "haves" and the "have-nots": between those with skills and opportunities, jobs and wealth, and those with none; between those who "count" in economic, social, and political terms, and those who do not.

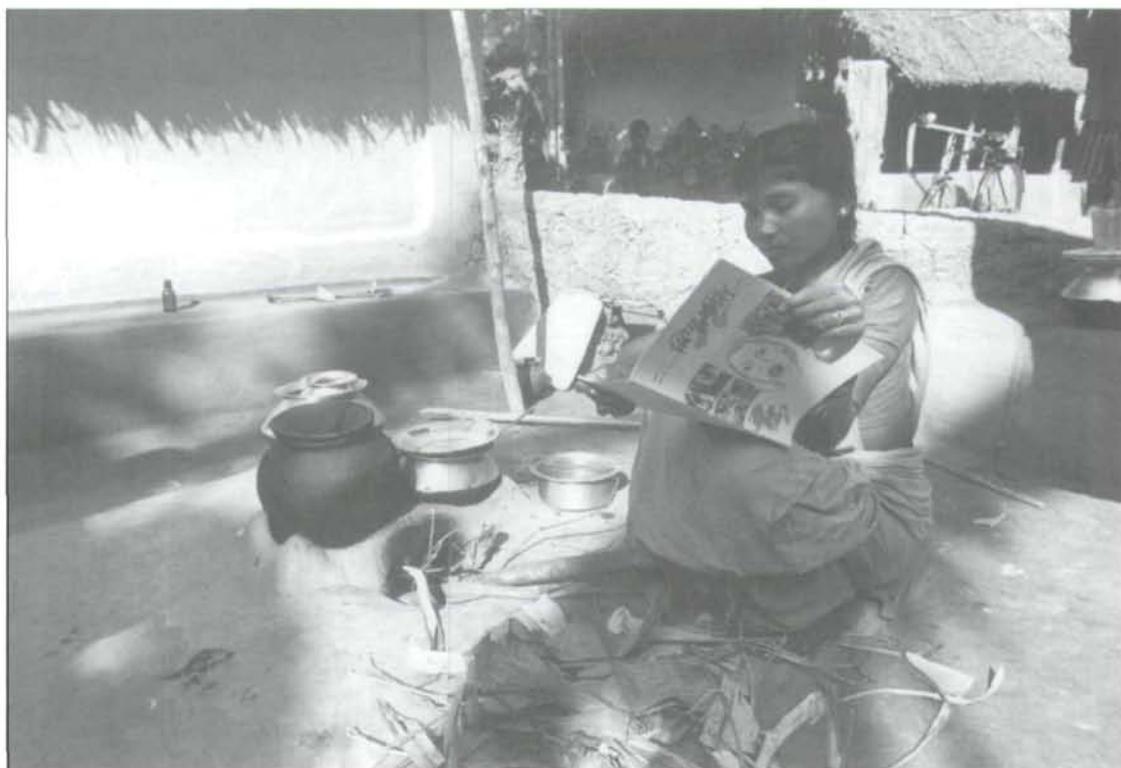
This is a prescription for increasing misery and deepening instability. The only way out is to tackle poverty and injustice, so that all people have a stake in society. We all have a responsibility to engage in that struggle, to turn the words of innumerable international covenants, agreements, and declarations — all venerated, often ignored — into action.

Because rights are so interlinked and interdependent, it is only part of the solution to consider them separately, and look at ways of safeguarding each one individually. Instead, we have to plan for a world where the *whole body* of basic rights is recognised and put into place. Let us look at the sort of world environment where those rights could become reality, and consider what needs to be done to create such an environment.

Opportunity

Poor men and women are ready to seize the opportunities which come their way. But they can only make the best use of these opportunities if they are able to meet their most basic needs: they must have enough to eat, clean water to drink and wash in, health care, education, a home, political freedom, and freedom from violence.

A healthy, well-fed, educated population is likely to be an economically effective one, so money invested by governments in the health and education of their people is money well spent. Yet in country after country governments are cutting back on state spending, and demanding that people start paying for services which have been free in the past.



All too often, the result is children having to be withdrawn from school, and people going without the medical treatment they need. Women are particularly hard hit by these developments: they face more health risks themselves, and they are now being expected to provide free care for sick members of their families. Girls are usually the first to be withdrawn from school when times are hard.

All governments must take responsibility for providing essential services, such as health care and education. In particular, they should:

- allocate at least 20 per cent of all government spending to providing the services which poor people need most, including primary health care, primary education, clean water and sanitation;
- provide primary health care and basic education free of charge.

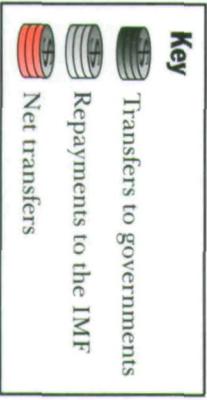
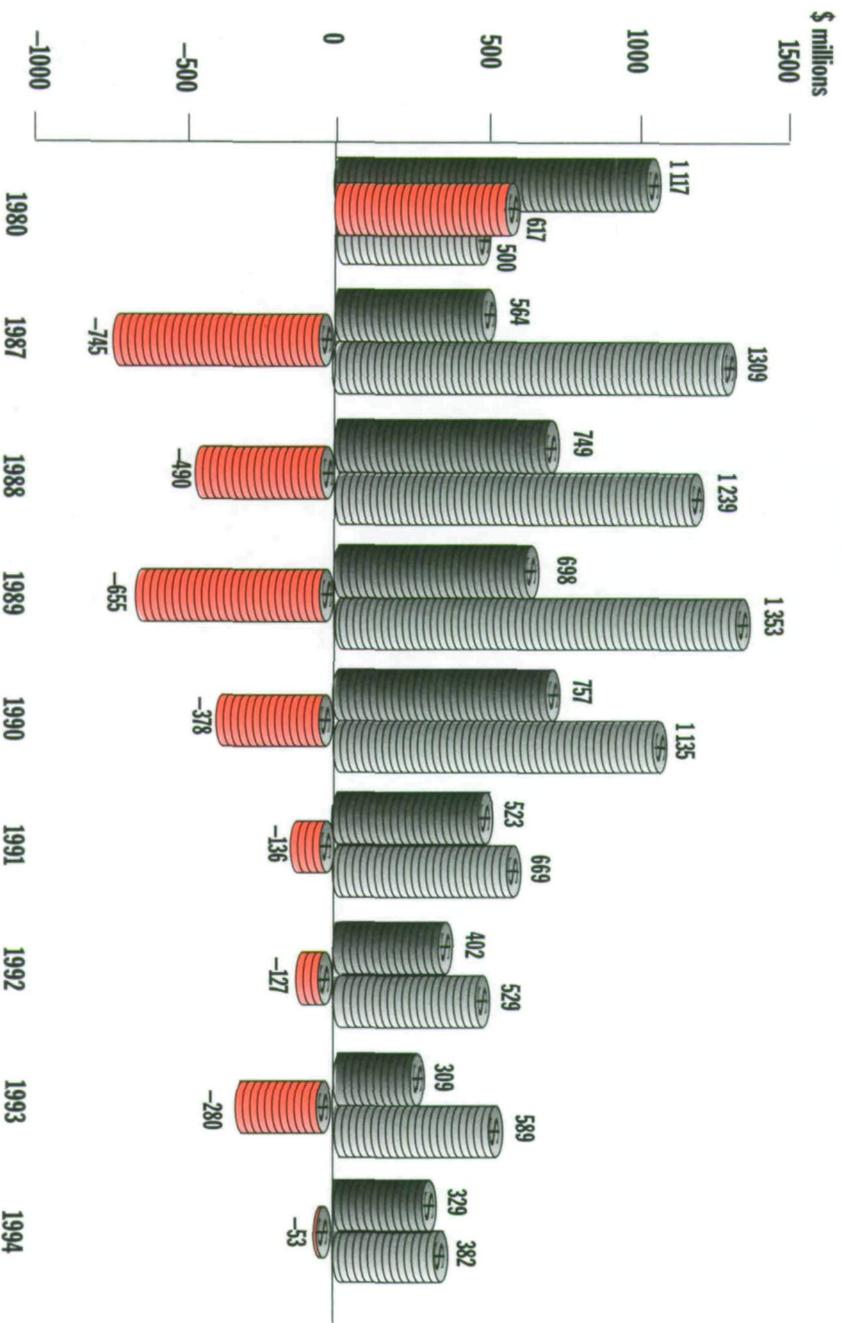
All governments must greatly reduce military spending, investing in people rather than death and destruction.

Aid donors must increase the percentage of their country's wealth going on aid to poor countries.

The UN target is 0.7 per cent. Donor governments must agree timetables for reaching that target.

Lakhi, of Birganj, Bangladesh, reads the article she has written for her community association magazine. "I have written about how we women have worked hard to create a better social and economic life for ourselves."

photo: Shafiqul Alam



Transfers between IMF and severely indebted countries
 Source: World bank, World Debt Tables

Creditor governments and international financial institutions must act to reduce the debts of the most severely indebted low-income countries.

A co-ordinated debt-relief strategy, setting out improved terms, should be drawn up. This would include writing off 80-100 per cent of debts owed to Paris Club countries. Agreement is needed on new measures, to tackle the growing crisis of debts owed to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF; these measures would need to be financed from within those institutions.

Participation

Democracy can take many different forms, but if it is to flourish in a healthy society, people must have a say, within their own household, as well as locally, nationally, and internationally, in the issues and policies which affect their lives. Governments must be open in their dealings and accountable to the people they govern. There must be respect at all levels for the rule of law, and for the civil and political rights of all individuals.

Some governments treat democratic rights as luxuries that their country can indulge in at some, usually ill-defined, time in the future, when economic growth is safely under way. But repression and economic growth do not necessarily go hand-in-hand; economic growth without a respect for people's democratic rights is unlikely to be sustainable.



Demonstrating for democracy, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

photo: Jenny Matthews

Average for selected developed countries
215 papers

How electorates keep themselves informed: daily newspapers per 500 inhabitants in rich and poor countries

Source: UNESCO

Average for selected developing countries
0.4 papers



All governments must take measures to strengthen their countries' democratic institutions, from village associations to an independent judiciary.

Institutions at local, national and international level must be democratic, transparent in their dealings, and accountable to the people they exist to serve.

A fair distribution of wealth and power

A system where large numbers of people are excluded from the benefits of economic growth is not merely unjust: it is inefficient, and the growth is unlikely to last. In particular, no nation can genuinely claim to be "developing" if half its population — its women — are disadvantaged and marginalised, cut off from the advantages of that development.

At an international level, many features of trading patterns — low prices for raw commodities, protectionist trade barriers, the unrestrained powers of transnational corporations, and irresponsible use of natural resources — act against the interests of poorer countries. For these countries, such patterns are leading to economic decline and environmental destruction.

In countries where land ownership is very unequal, and a more equal allocation would make a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty, land must be redistributed in favour of poor men and women.

The interests of poor producers must be protected at local and national levels.

They must be able to obtain loans on favourable terms, advice about marketing their produce, and training.



Harvest-time in northern Vietnam

photo: Keith Bernstein

All forms of discrimination against women must be outlawed.

In particular, they must enjoy the same rights as men to:

- own and inherit land;
- obtain the resources they need to make a living;
- obtain loans;
- join trade unions and other campaigning and development groups.

They must also have the right to equal pay with men and to maternity leave and job protection during and after pregnancy.

The World Bank must do more to eradicate poverty by:

- involving community-based organisations, women's groups, and non-government organisations in the design of economic reforms;
- doing more to protect basic services for poor people, such as health care and education, and insisting that governments stop charging fees to those using them;



- putting less emphasis on deregulated markets, and more on the fair distribution of wealth and power, and on regulating markets in the interests of poor producers and consumers.

World trade systems must be reformed, to generate wealth for the many, not just the few.

- Poor producers must receive fair prices for the commodities they make or cultivate;
- Trade barriers put up against developing countries must be dismantled.
- Rich countries must stop dumping subsidised exports to poor countries.

Consumers must enable small producers to obtain a fair price for their labour.

They should buy Fair Trade goods wherever possible and put pressure on retailers and suppliers to make more Fair Trade goods available.

Peace and security

There is no greater challenge facing the international community than that of creating the conditions for peace and security. There can be no lasting peace without a reduction in poverty. But without peace, efforts to eradicate poverty will fail.

Conflict, violence, and crime are being fuelled by poverty, the widening gap between haves and have-nots, and the suppression of minority social and ethnic groups. Civilians, particularly poor women and children, are bearing the brunt of that violence. Family and community networks are being destroyed, and livelihoods wrecked.

Ultimately, it is individual societies that will have to create the conditions for greater peace and security. Only increased opportunity and participation for all, with a more just distribution of wealth and power, will bring a permanent end to conflict.

The international community is still searching for the appropriate response to conflict. There is a desperate need to identify the most useful role that outside parties can play when violence and armed conflict break out.

Member governments must strengthen the UN's capacity to prevent and resolve armed conflict, quickly and effectively.

They must:

- set up a permanent rapid deployment force, ready to be sent instantly to conflict zones;
- send monitors promptly to investigate large-scale human rights abuses;

- provide the financial support the UN needs to be an effective peace-keeping force.

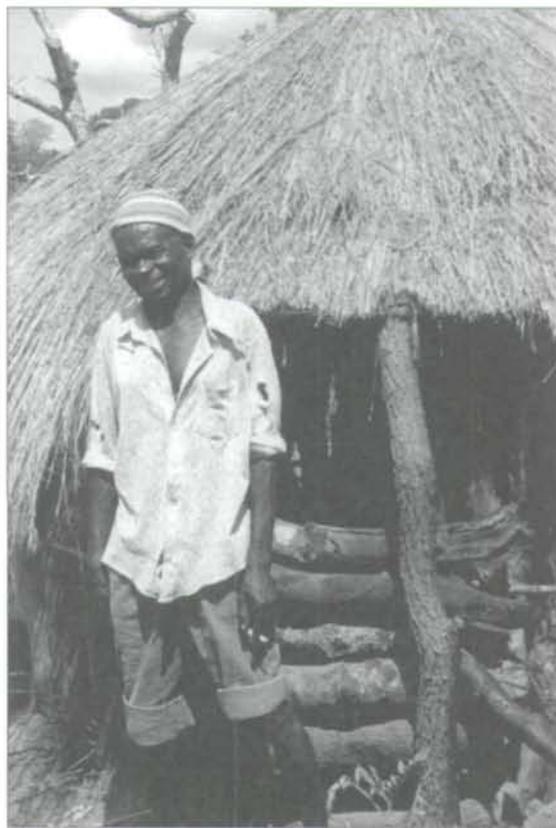
The international community must help countries which are rebuilding after war and conflict.

Reconstruction efforts must:

- address the underlying causes of the conflict;
- create conditions for lasting peace;
- involve existing organisations and structures in the reconstruction process, and enable the people affected to participate fully in its design and implementation.

A high-level expert committee must be created, reporting to the UN Secretary-General, to look at ways of controlling and reducing the international arms trade.

In particular, there must be a comprehensive and worldwide ban on the manufacture, stockpiling, export, and use of anti-personnel landmines.



Farmer from Nyasa province, Mozambique, standing by the new pig-stye he has just built. People can plan for the future now that peace and stability have returned to the country.

photo: Matthew Chambers

A safe environment

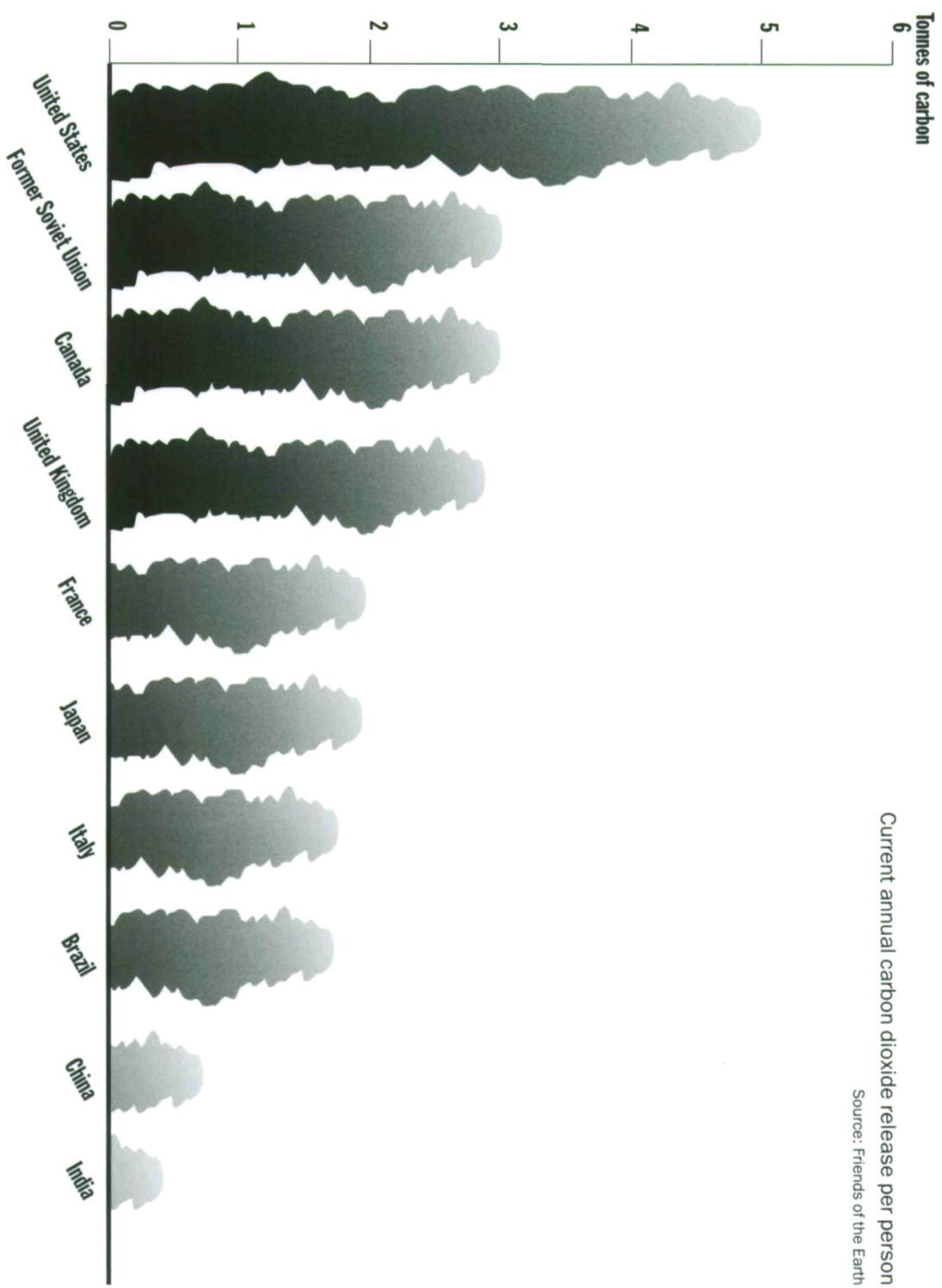
Poverty is a major destroyer of the environment since poor people often have no alternative but to damage and overuse local resources such as forests and farmland. All too often, they have very little realistic choice, even though they may be painfully aware of the extent to which they are prejudicing their own futures.

In the rich industrialised world, considerably more choice is available to most people. And it is here that the bulk of the damage is being done to the global environment. The impact of high levels of energy consumption and wasteful life-styles in rich countries is felt far beyond their national boundaries.

Rich industrialised countries must examine the impact their activities are having on the environment, especially their energy use and agricultural practices.

Rich industrialised countries must demonstrate their commitment to the Rio Earth Summit Agenda 21 recommendations.

They should provide the additional finance needed to implement them, and environment-friendly technological know-how.



Current annual carbon dioxide release per person
Source: Friends of the Earth

Industrialised countries must introduce measures to reduce their own energy use.

These measures should include:

- tougher energy-efficiency standards;
- building-insulation programmes;
- investment in renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind power;
- tax penalties for over-exploitation of natural resources.

Rich industrialised countries must commit themselves to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30 per cent from 1990 levels by 2005.

Individuals and groups in rich industrialised countries must act locally to protect their environment.

In particular they should conserve energy and recycle resources themselves, and campaign for energy to be conserved and resources recycled wherever possible in their locality.



Children at a primary school in Ky Anh district, Vietnam, working in their school's tree nursery.

photo: Sean Sprague

The issues outlined above are the ones that the Oxfam Campaign will be focusing on in the coming months and years. The list may seem an ambitious one but, as we have seen, all these changes are possible, given the political and moral will to achieve them. Many of the changes and reforms outlined will take time to achieve: things cannot change overnight. But the important point is that progress should *begin*, and begin in the right direction.

Note: The full list of Oxfam's recommendations can be found in Chapter 7 of *The Oxfam Poverty Report*.