

The late Nelson Mandela eloquently describes, what in my opinion, should be the number one issues on the global agenda—poverty; Mandela states:

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural, it is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes, it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that generation. Let your greatness blossom” (Poverty Quotes n.d.)¹.

Unfortunately, pervasive inequity of wealth and wealth distribution has led to situations that cause many nations to exist in perpetual states of extreme poverty—with no relief in sight. Statistical data on the global impact of poverty is both revealing and troubling; according to Globalissues.org, “Almost half of the world—over three billion people—live on less than \$2.50 a day...According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty” (Shah 2013)². Let us reflect upon these numbers for a moment; 22,000 children per day, that is equivalent to 8,030,000 children per year—dying due to poverty. However, this is not surprising when we look at the spending priorities of Westernized, Industrialized nations. The Earth Institute at Columbia University highlights the imbalance of financial resources dedicated to poverty relief efforts “The U.S. currently spends \$450 billion on its military, but only about \$16 billion in official development assistance...\$25 billion a year would be enough to deliver life-saving health services to low-income countries. The U.S. has recently given \$200 billion per year in tax cuts”

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Poverty Quotes. n.d. www.borgenproject.org/poverty-quotes/ (accessed February 12, 2014).

² Shah, Anup. *Poverty Facts and Stats*. January 07, 2013. <http://www.globalissues.org> (accessed February 12, 2014).

(University n.d.)³. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), such as the United Nations (U.N.) have taken a leading role in working to eliminate conditions that contribute to the existence of extreme poverty. The Millennium Development Goals or (MDG), consist of eight targeted areas the U.N. is working to address; these include: Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; Universal Primary Education; Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women; Reduction of child mortality; Improving maternal health; Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; Environmental Sustainability; and Global Partnership Development (Nations n.d.)⁴. Through the MDG's, the U.N. aims to reduce these eight target areas by 50% by the year 2015 (Nations n.d.).

In addition to the altruistic benefit of working to eradicate global poverty and all of its contributing factors; there are also economic benefits to be reaped from a world without poverty. In July 2002, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote an article stating "Sustainable development is a security imperative. Poverty, destruction of the environment and despair are destroyers of people, of societies, of nations, a cause of instability as an unholy trinity that can destabilize countries and destabilize entire regions" (Ferraro, et al. 2003)⁵. Within the same report, a reference is made to the Global Poverty Report, issued at the G8 Okinawa Summit in July 2000 "Eliminating global poverty, is both a moral imperative and a necessity for a stable world...thousands of private organizations work tirelessly and with great effect to reduce global poverty. But these private efforts cannot, by themselves overcome the problem" (Ferraro, et al. 2003). Obviously, a cooperative effort will be required by all world citizens, if we hope to

³ University, The Earth Institute Columbia. *Extreme Poverty: A Global Emergency*. n.d. <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/1780> (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁴ Nations, United. *We Can End Poverty Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015*. n.d. www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁵ Ferraro, Vincent, Carol Lancaster, Per Pinstrip-Andersen, and Jeffrey D. Sachs & John Sewell. *Environmental Change and Security Program Commentary: Should Global Poverty be a U.S. National Security Issue? part 1*. 2003. www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/commentary-should-global-poverty-be-us-national-security-issue-part-1 (accessed February 12, 2014).

one day achieve the goal of a world without poverty—which in my opinion, is indeed possible. Globalization has created an interconnected world where the instability of poorer countries, if left unattended, could infiltrate the entire international system; “Poor states are threatening to rich states because the weaknesses of poor states could be globalized, thereby destabilizing the entire international system. What is new and different about this threat...it is not an intentional strategy” (Ferraro, et al. 2003).

Next, we will explore the local impact of poverty on communities; specifically within the author’s state of residence, New Mexico. A Huffington Post article highlights “At 22.2 percent, New Mexico has the highest share of poor people of any state” (Post 2012)⁶. The 2013 New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book, ranked New Mexico 50th in the nation for child well-being; “The annual report tracks child well-being by providing data on important indicators such as child poverty, child maltreatment rates, math and reading proficiency and teen birth rates by race/ethnicity” (Children 2014)⁷.

Professionally, as a Contract Workforce Development Trainer with the New Mexico Department of Human Services (HSD); I have witnessed the lengthy lines and crowded waiting area at the state assistance offices. I have worked with many individuals who come from backgrounds of generational poverty and lack even the most basic education; some not completing beyond 7th or 8th grade. Until recently, when visiting the State of New Mexico’s Human Services Department website (www.hsd.state.nm.us) the homepage banner stated “HSD Serving 1 in 3 New Mexican;” however, the banner was removed as a result of the revamping of the HSD website. Still, it is significant to note that approximately 33 percent of the state’s population is receiving some form of low-income public

⁶ Post, Huffington. September 13, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/13/new-mexico-poverty-rates_n_1881321.html (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁷ Children, New Mexico Voices for. *Annual NM KIDS COUNT Data Book Released Amid Calls for Action on Children's Issues*. January 21, 2014. <http://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NM-Kids-Count-Press-Release.pdf> (accessed February 12, 2014).

assistance. On a personal level, I was recently terminated from my position as Workforce Development Trainer and now find myself relying on the same public assistance programs that I once helped others access. I am grateful that these safety net programs exist; recognizing that in poorer countries, my situation might result in absolute destitution. Many people in the United States have a false sense of security, believing their occupations are recession-proof, or that they are too invaluable to be terminated. However, what I have learn from living on both sides of the metaphorical coin is that poverty and inequity impacts all of us; whether directly or indirectly.

Global poverty is an epidemic; we must work together if we hope to initiate any type of tangible change. NGO's such as the United Nation and UNICEF have made progress; however, it will require global consciousness and a united effort to eliminate poverty from our communities. As global citizens, we have to view the poverty in developing countries as our problem and be willing to act. Change will be slow and gradual due to the systemic and pervasive nature of global poverty; however, if we resolve to care about the well-being of people; instead of perpetuating a culture of greed, excessive consumption and material accumulation, we move a step closer to becoming a more equitable and compassionate global society. In his famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. articulately expresses a similar concept, recognizing the interconnectivity of the struggles for civil rights in the United States, to the problems of broader society:

“I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (King 1963)⁸.

We must rise up and heed Dr. King's call to action; no longer can we afford to sit idly while 8,030,000 children die each year from poverty; no longer can we pretend that the suffering caused by wealth inequity does not affect those of us living in wealthy, industrialized nations. Globalization, in the words

⁸ King, Dr. Martin Luther. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." *University of Denver University College*. April 16, 1963. <http://ucolonline.com/> (accessed February 3, 2014).

of Thomas Friedman, has made it possible to “reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before” (Friedman 2000, 9)⁹. Instead of viewing globalization in purely in economic terms; we should view it as a tool for raising awareness; coordinating resources; creating opportunities for economic and educational investment; improving health outcomes; combating food insecurity; and promoting environmental sustainability. If we hope to survive this “new system” as Friedman describes globalization; we must recognize, accept and embrace our interconnectivity. Poverty creates the illusion of separateness; for example, we perceive the plight of the man, woman or child in Kenya or Burma as unfortunate, but far removed from us. The fact that “80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day; or 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation” (Shah 2013), are problems that impact all of us, and therefore require collective action. Without shared concern and action, poverty will continue to proliferate; destroying the communities and lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

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⁹ Friedman, Thomas. *The Lexus and The Olive Tree*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

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