

Notes of U8 meeting – 28th November 2007

What is the most significant cause of poverty?

1. Geography/natural resources or control of resources

Reasons for:

- Africa etc. was colonised so colonial powers got the benefit of those resources
- Richer nations on a horizontal landscape which provides similar climate and opportunities to inter-relate and trade whereas Africa is horizontal and a very hot climate meaning much of it is desert and uninhabited – this has led to a lack of sharing of information and knowledge between neighbours in Africa compared to the West
- UK has resources such as coal and an optimum climate for growing crops etc.
- Oil has only become relevant recently so places such as Iraq etc. did not get the benefits of this natural resource historically

Reasons against:

- Africa/Iraq etc. have good natural resources, e.g. agriculture/oil yet are still poor
- Agriculture began in what was known as the ‘fertile crescent’ – an area including Iraq, Israel etc. but was so exploited that the region became desert

2. Role in political economy i.e. resources less relevant than described above

3. (Small and large-scale) Corruption in Third World governments

Reasons for:

- Leaders such as Robert Mugabe and Idi Amin clearly were corrupt and had significant impact on thwarting their country’s development
- The difference in success can be seen when good leadership is present, e.g. in Ghana

Reasons against:

- Used by the West to alleviate guilt and responsibility for the situation in the Third World – more myth than reality

4. Historical accident leading to Damaging Ideology

Reasons for:

- Capitalist, Western thinking teaches immoral behaviour is necessary to satisfy our egoism, or our success must necessarily be at the expense of other’s failures
- Individualistic ideology causes inequality
- There is not enough global acceptance of the equality of status of all

- Seeking material profit above all is arguably quite alien to some cultures but is being unsuccessfully imposed upon poorer nations

Reasons against:

- Communism in practice did not work
- Human nature is self-seeking and responds to material incentives

5. Hierarchical social structures e.g. caste/Confucianism

Reasons for:

- Social hierarchies leads to stagnation in progression as many sectors of society, e.g. dalits (untouchables) in India, have no 'hope' of changing their social station and therefore are unproductive
- The USA considers itself the 'land of opportunity' where no status is fixed and the possibility/opportunity for great wealth is theoretically available to all – and they are the richest nation

6. Gender inequality

Reasons for:

- Gender equality is necessary for development
- Countries that are the most rich generally have the greatest gender equality whereas countries like Iraq are poorer due to the fact they repress women's education and therefore wipe out half the population as potential workforce

7. Colonial legacy

Reasons for:

- The Western world only got rich due to slavery and exploiting the resources of the Third World
- Settlements – e.g. Australia/USA, as opposed to colonies, have become massively more wealthier than the colonies which were suppressed in their own development
- Colonialism compounded and manipulated pre-existing geographical inequalities

Reasons against:

- Ethiopia was never colonised yet is still very poor
- Colonialism has some good effects for some countries, e.g. some Indians were educated

8. Persistent warfare/conflict

Reasons for:

- Huge drain on resources and money
- Partly explains why Ethiopia – despite not being a colony – has remained so impoverished as resources went into fighting the Italians
- Becoming a soldier becomes the most accessible form of employment, e.g. in the DRC the single biggest employer is guerrilla soldiers

Reasons against:

- Rich nations such as the UK have often been at war and yet not been poor

9. Ignorance/lack of education

Reasons for:

- The lack of educated, literate people in the Third World makes them very unemployable
- Political elites in the Third World are somewhat uneducated and inexperienced at how to successfully govern a nation (partly due to the fact colonialism stopped them learning)
- In the First World, people mistakenly assume their own wealth is dependent on the poverty of others
- Lack of education about disease, e.g. AIDS/HIV in Third World
- Lack of education about family planning in Third World

10. Population growth

Reasons for:

- There aren't enough resources in the world to feed a rapidly growing population

11. Disease e.g. HIV/AIDS, malaria etc.

Reasons for:

- Cures are costly
- Disease makes people unemployable and in need rather than contributing to the economy
- Cures are being patented by First World companies which mean Third World scientists cannot develop the same cures and can only buy what is available at relatively extortionate prices (and arguably the First World companies have no choice but to patent and charge a lot or the developing of a drug would be non-profitable as investing in drug research is very expensive)

Conclusions: The ultimate cause of poverty?

“Exploitation in all its forms”

“Ignorance in all its forms”

“All the above problems put together”