

Children & Global Poverty

INTRODUCTION

This lesson plan looks at global poverty. The information has been summarised from the new interactive education resource book *Action on Global Poverty: A guide to making a difference* published by international children's development agency Plan in partnership with The Age newspaper.

WHAT IS POVERTY?

Myth

Poverty only means not having enough money.

Reality

Lack of money is often a significant aspect of poverty. However, poverty is much more complex than this. For many people in the world poverty means they have been exploited, are powerless and do not have a voice in matters that directly affect their lives and wellbeing.

Definitions of poverty often centre on what are called 'basic needs' for a human being to survive. These basic needs include food, water, clothes and shelter. Others would say that for a person to have the opportunity for a full and meaningful life rather than just surviving, basic needs also include freedom, healthcare, education and positive community life.

Generally speaking, there are two broadly accepted types of poverty that involve difficulties with basic human needs - 'relative' poverty, and 'absolute' poverty.

What is relative poverty?

Poverty is not confined to people in countries overseas – there are many people in Australia who also experience poverty.

For the most part, however, people in Australia experience *relative* poverty. This means that a family or person is considered to have *less* money and possessions than most other people but is still able, with different levels of difficulty, to meet *some* of their everyday needs.

An example of relative poverty would be a family that has somewhere to live, but finds it very difficult to pay all their bills, rent, food, travel expenses and more. You might know someone who experiences relative poverty.

The Australian Government provides support to meet some of the basic needs of people who find themselves in difficult situations. There are also many organisations working to help when Government support is not quite enough.

Although it is called 'relative' poverty, it is often very difficult and unpleasant for those people who experience it.

What is absolute poverty?

The World Bank, an international financial organisation focused on reducing poverty, considers a person to be in absolute poverty if they are unable to meet the basic needs of human life.

Robert McNamara, the former President of the World Bank, described absolute or extreme poverty as "... a condition so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency."

That's a pretty technical way to describe absolute poverty. The following description from the World Bank website helps to explain what Mr McNamara meant.

"Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

"Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways.

"Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape."

[SOURCE: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>]

It doesn't sound like a meaningful way to live – and it isn't.



Curriculum Domain

Civics & Citizenship
Humanities
Communication
Thinking processes

Learning Outcomes

Define poverty and degrees of poverty
Understand links between poverty, money and happiness

POVERTY, MONEY & HAPPINESS

While many of the measures of poverty are based on money and resources, it's important to remember that increased wealth doesn't guarantee happiness.

Money is important for helping to provide many of the things that people need to survive and have quality of life, but it is not the only thing that contributes to a good life.

Some cultures do not have a concept of poverty, but all cultures have a sense of what makes a 'good life'.

Plan asked some children in India to identify what makes a better life, and what things make life worse. Some are related to poverty, and some are not. See what you think.

Things that make life better for children

- ◆ The rights of children, particularly the right to life (referring to female infanticide). These include, in order of importance: right to food; right to education; right to equality particularly between boys and girls; right to play; right to be protected from violence; right to be safe from an abusive environment and right to participation.
- ◆ Love and support and encouragement from parents.
- ◆ Good support from peers and good friendships.
- ◆ Being part of a children's group that provides an opportunity for children to discuss the issues that they are not able to discuss at home.

Things that make life worse for children

- ◆ Denial of love and affection by parents.
- ◆ Discrimination against girl children. Girls are unable to assert themselves when they are the subject of violence.
- ◆ Use of abusive language and behavior, especially to girls, which leads to some dropping out of school.
- ◆ During exam time school children require a good environment. But lots of people play loud music and have events, which makes this time difficult.
- ◆ Parents who prioritise things other than education.
- ◆ Substance abuse by children who then exert pressure on others to do the same.
- ◆ Picking up bad habits from parents.
- ◆ Parents who impose what they want will damage relationships at home.
- ◆ Bad or violent television.
- ◆ Violence against children makes them more violent.
- ◆ Lack of support by adults – parents need their own support group and when that is formed it will help.
- ◆ The impact that children can make is limited and adults can destroy even that.

Who is Plan?

Plan is one of the world's largest community development organisations that has worked for over 65 years to help end child poverty. Plan works in over 45 developing countries and all Plan's work is based on a child centred community development approach.

What is Child Centred Community Development?

Child centred community development is a rights-based approach in which children are active and leading participants in the community development process.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Talk it up

Draw up two columns. Label one 'wants/desires' and the other 'needs/rights'. Think about the things in your home and life. Which column do they belong in?

How do the lists compare?

Who tells us what we need?

Who tells us what we want?

Do we get the two confused?

Happiness Index

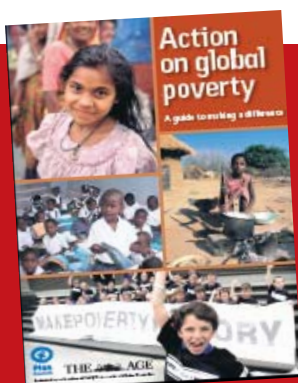
There is an assumption that poverty and happiness are linked yet, as this chapter also points out, there is much more to happiness than money and much more to poverty than happiness.

Ask students to rank from 1 to last the items that contribute to their happiness (this can be done as individuals, groups or as a whole class). These could include family love, feeling special, friends, money, leisure activities, pets, success in school, participation in sport or other activities, time to relax, faith, good health and so on. The list can be as long as they like. When their lists are complete, ask the students which of these are rights? How do these relate back to the discussion points from the children in India?

Surfs Up

Go to www.globalrichlist.com and find out how rich or poor you are compared to the rest of the world.

Go to www.plan.org.au and find out how children around the world are involved in helping to end poverty in their or other communities.



Action on Global Poverty – A guide to making a difference has been designed as an accessible, interesting action guide for students and interested community members and groups. For students in schools, the resource provides a range of valuable activities for Levels 4 – 6 of the VELS and is an excellent source of information and discussion for VCE Geography and International Politics. Teachers notes also available.

Order online at www.plan.org.au, or call 13 PLAN (13 7526).