THE YOUTH ISSUE

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAKING THEIR MIND

CAPITALISM
CHILD BRIDES
GLOBAL WARMING
SEXUAL TRAFFICKING
WAR
JOBS
CHILD SOLDIERS
HUNGER
POVERTY
HIV/AIDS

A. Markman

UN C THE YOUTH ISSUE
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Perhaps there has never been a generation of youth so acutely aware of the dangers threatening its future. Among an estimated world population of seven billion, youth make up 1.2 billion or 18 per cent. What do young people think about a world whose leadership they are about to inherit? To find out, the UN Chronicle invited them from around the globe to take over its pages for this special Youth Issue.

Joel Cardinal

Lindsay Stevens

Pamela Martínez

Esteban Ramírez González

Ramón

Nicolette Jones
Monique Long

Ricardo Cervantes Gutiérrez
(Santa Rosa del Sauce School)

Rand Jarallah
Sireen Tutunji and Gedalia Gillis

Luka Oreskovic

Qiushi Yue

Achecar

Quiñones Cintrón

Abhishek Raman Parajuli

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(International School of Lusaka)

Dennis Kayebeta, Iwell Banda
(Ibex Hill School)

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The boundaries and delineations used on this map do not imply
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ESSAYS BY OUR FACEBOOK FANS
ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

"The direction capitalist society is headed is unsustainable. My insights, based on my Cree background, are that genuine respect for the land is not only important but is required for the continuity of human existence.

OUR BODY, OUR EARTH

CREE PEOPLE'S CONNECTION WITH MOTHER EARTH

By JOEL CARDINAL

i remember walking through the fields of the Canadian Plains on many occasions with my father. On one occasion, we were going to pick sweet grass blades that had pink roots and a distinctively sweet smell. I observed that, prior to my father picking the first blade of sweet grass, he reached into his tobacco pouch and grabbed a pinch, laid it on the ground beside the sweet grass he was about to pick, and closed his eyes as he made his offering to Mother Earth. The sincerity of the process was completely natural in that moment.

We live in a time where the dominant interaction between the Earth and people is one-sided, with no reciprocity. Throughout the centuries, the notion of Manifest Destiny was used as justification for this one-sided use of the land and its resources; political and religious leaders were able to claim their exploitative practices as their divine right. Growing up in my Cree community where traditional interaction with the Earth is based on respect is in stark contrast to these dominant world views.

Traditional Cree values are difficult to articulate because the ideals are easily associated with contemporary socialist and environmentalist perspectives, and people are inclined to frame Cree values based on these perspectives. While there are similarities, the distinction is that pro-environmentalist perspectives are ideals that people strive to incorporate into their lifestyles, whereas for Cree people, it is part of our traditional lifestyle, with no distinction between the way we live and our ideals.

Reminiscing about the times my father took my brother and me hunting provides me with another example of giving back to the land. Every time we made a kill, our father gave us a part of the animal to give back to the land as an offering for having taken from it. It was interesting

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for me to realize later in life that providing an offering while hunting is not typical mainstream behaviour. Only through analyzing the experience do I now understand how my father's action was based on our innate connection to the land.

This connection is illustrated not only through our practice of reciprocity but also through our spiritual interaction with the land. In the sweat lodge, a spiritual ceremony where Cree people cleanse their minds, bodies, and spirits, we are taught to put our hands on the Earth if it gets too hot for us. This shows an intrinsic connection to the land and its inherent support of us. We are one with the land, as it is an essential part of who we are. This is why we give back to the land—to ignore this responsibility would be comparable to abusing one's own body or one's very sustenance.

How can some people believe they can unilaterally take from the land without consequence? This is a question that dominates the Cree people's view of the world's continually exploitative practices. A few hours north of my community is Fort McMurray, which is gaining international attention for how its booming oil industry created an environmental disaster. Our First Nations brothers and sisters in the region are facing its adverse impacts on their land, which are directly affecting their health. In that area, we can see the direct consequences of the mentality of Manifest Destiny.

If we continue to abuse the land by taking without giving back, the situation will become chronic and irreversible. The consequences associated with this neglect and disrespect of the land has culminated in climate change. What Cree people have to offer to the world is shared with many other indigenous people—that interaction with the land must occur with deep respect and with recognition that what is taken, must be given back.

One revelation that came from writing this article was that, as a Cree youth, I knew a lot more than I expected. Coming from a culture where the teachings were passed down experientially and orally, I felt hesitant in articulating Cree culture because I was unsure of how consistent my experiences were with other Cree people. As I looked into my own life and shared stories with friends, I quickly realized these important aspects of my life were unique because of my Cree background. This insight made me realize two things: the fact that Cree traditions and culture are passed down orally means that there is no right or wrong way to be Cree. I am Cree because of my life experiences in my community and there is no doctrine that I must follow in order to be Cree—it is simply who I am. The other insight I had was one of opportunity. The Cree language, like most indigenous languages, is at risk of becoming extinct because younger generations are not likely to use it. Attached to language is the culture itself. Understanding that I already notice a lack of knowledge of my culture and do not speak the Cree language, what is the future for Cree youth? What can be done to make the most out of the knowledge that youth have about their culture for far-reaching benefits? The Cree language and the wisdom it contains is part of what Cree people have to offer, and it is an opportunity for this generation to keep that aspect of our tradition alive.

Growing up in my community, my experiences have provided me with an opportunity to understand the connection that Cree people have with the land. Also, growing up in a broader society that is dominated by capitalism, I've been able to see the drastic disconnection between humans and the land. The direction capitalist society is headed is unsustainable. These insights, based on my Cree background, bring me to the knowledge that genuine respect for the land is not only important, it is required for the continuity of human existence. unc

> ❝**What Cree people have to offer to the world is shared with many other indigenous people—that interaction with the land must occur with deep respect and with recognition that what is taken, must be given back.**

JOEL CARDINAL ◆ OUR BODY, OUR EARTH

Commit to Love and Respect our Planet

By RICARDO CERVANTES GUTIÉRREZ

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nearly every day on television or in the newspapers we see reports of natural disasters in different parts of the world, causing concern and alarm. Our planet is going through a most difficult time because mankind, in its eagerness to improve upon personal economic and living conditions, has forgotten that its actions cause pollution and uncontrollable climate change. According to the United Nations Framework Convention

> **Developed countries are accountable for reducing increased carbon levels for which they have been largely responsible. Likewise, developing countries need support and financing to implement clean technologies.**

on Climate Change, this term is used to refer to global climatic change that is directly and indirectly attributable to human activities that change the atmosphere's composition.

As the planet warms, drastic changes occur. In some places heavy rainfalls cause uncontrollable floods, while in some other places the effect manifests itself in droughts and increased forest fires.

As the global temperature rises and melts the polar caps, millions of people who live in coastal areas could lose their homes because of elevating sea levels. The poor populations of Africa, Asia, and other regions face a loss of crops caused by a decreasing agricultural productivity, as well as increasing hunger, malnutrition, and the proliferation of different diseases.

Climate change is one of the most complex challenges of the twenty-first century. As no country is safe from this serious problem, it is necessary for all countries to be united in making decisions to protect our planet. In view of this critical situation, developed countries are investing in researching clean technologies and are looking to expand natural drainage systems that allow for the absorption of gases and the protection of the environment. Developed countries are accountable for reducing increased carbon levels in the atmosphere, for which they have been largely responsible.

Likewise, developing countries need support and financing to implement clean technologies in a way that avoids risking their development prospects. They also need guidance to cope with what has become unavoidable climate change. Future climatic needs will force developing countries to not only build infrastructures that can withstand the new conditions, but also to sustain a growing population

with the limited use of land and water resources, from which enough food and bio-mass must be extracted. Different strategies must be applied to preserve ecosystems and redesign global energy systems.

The World Bank, for instance, is funding research on carbon sequestration by giving incentives to different industries to reduce the emission of poisonous gases into the atmosphere.

If climate change is not controlled, the prospect for the future of the planet over the next one hundred years is an overall temperature increase of 5°C (41°F). Never in history has such an increase in global warmth been registered, and it could mean the end of us.

In view of these circumstances, students cannot remain indifferent and must take such urgent and necessary measures in their own localities as:

- Spreading and applying the culture of the 3 Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle

- Organizing campaigns, such as planting and adopting trees because they purify the air

- Switching off electrical appliances such as light bulbs, computers, dryers, etc.

- Participating in global events, such as The Hour of the Planet, when lights and electrical appliances are switched off for one hour

- Promoting research in clean technology.

It is important and necessary to encourage love and respect for nature. Each country should have a campaign to bring awareness to its people about nature reserves, and create actions for the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. All human beings should commit to loving and respecting our planet. unc

By ASHLEY ONG

Water is a basic necessity of life, and it may seem inconceivable to imagine living without it. But the stark reality is that many people around the world do. The availability of fresh water for drinking and sanitation poses an urgent and challenging problem, particularly in many developing countries.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in March 2010[1] that over 2.6 billion people, or about 39 per cent of the world's population, live without improved sanitation facilities; in other words, without a proper latrine. Furthermore, WHO estimated that about 1.1 billion people across the globe—approximately 17 per cent of the world's population—lacked access to safe and improved sources of drinking water.

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Saving *Water,* Saving *Lives*

UNICEF PHOTO/KATHRYN GRUSOVIN

SRI LANKA: A girl drinks safe water at a tap in the village of Islamabad in Kalmunai District, Ampara Province.

this progress is not uniform across the globe. Our goal for improving sanitation is further from attainment. Compared to the current 61 per cent of the world's population currently living with improved sanitation facilities, our target of 75 per cent would require a momentous effort as 2015 draws near. In addition to introducing and supporting inexpensive systems and technologies that are environmentally friendly, WHO is working towards this goal through the monitoring of global water supplies and sanitation facilities. An innovative example is water disinfection, using ultraviolet radiation from the sun to deactivate diarrhoea-causing organisms in plastic water bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate, commonly known by its acronym PET, which is a cheap and effective solution viable for many developing countries facing a shortage of potable water.[6]

As the world's population increases, the rising demand for food would accompany a corresponding need for fresh water for agricultural purposes. Many equatorial regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa,[7] face an acute water scarcity and extended drought which are known to be exacerbated by climate change and deforestation, thereby adversely reducing short-term crop yield. Even more worrisome, over the long term, droughts transform arable farmland into large barren areas, further squeezing the already limited food supply. This chain of cause and effect illustrates that human activities are environmentally linked and, therefore, environmental conservation is our only hope to lessen the seemingly never-ending cascade of problems.

It is unforgivably grim that something that is sorely needed by so many people in the world is taken for granted by others. Many live under the

The scarcity of potable water sources and the absence of adequate sanitation in many rural areas have led to a host of potentially fatal health problems such as dysentery, cholera, and other diarrhoeal diseases causing an average of 1.6 million deaths per year. Children under the age of five are especially vulnerable and account for about 90 per cent of these deaths.[2] In fact, diarrhoeal diseases kill more children than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.[3] Other problems from unsafe drinking water, such as trachoma-related blindness and

intestinal parasitic worms, are rife in developing countries, totalling several hundred million cases annually.[4]

According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goal 7, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation should be halved by 2015;[5] in numerical terms, 88.5 per cent of the world's population should have accessible drinking water by 2015. It bodes well that we are prepared to achieve this goal with sustained effort, but it must also be acknowledged that

misconception that fresh water is an abundant resource, but the reality is that fresh water is finite and susceptible to depletion. Water scarcity cannot be ignored. What triggers more concern is that our high water consumption, partly due to both the growing world population and ever-increasing consumer needs, necessitates massive energy consumption for water treatment and purification.

Higher water consumption, combined with its wastage, is not the only link between water and other environmental issues. The high-profile case of the BP oil spill crisis in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico once again brought the issue of water pollution back into the limelight. The explosion of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig resulted in widespread and disastrous effects on marine habitats in the Gulf. The vast amount of petroleum that leaked into the sea has directly harmed marine creatures such as fish and seabirds, while the digestion of oil by microbes has contributed to lower oxygen levels in the water. Researchers also discovered the presence of massive oil plumes in the sea that were not visible on the surface. These are only some of the many ecological consequences of the BP spill. Families dependent on the fishing and tourism industries around the Gulf have also felt the economic fallout of this accident.

Media-worthy catastrophes like the BP oil spill are not the only causal agents of water pollution. With increasing urbanization and industrialization, water bodies such as the Ganga River in India are being severely polluted. Defiling the river considered holy by millions of Indians, tanneries in Kanpur, for example, channel sewage and toxic chemicals into the Ganga.[8] The water of the Ganga, once a symbol of life, and where many Indians still drink and bathe, has become a turbid and toxic vexation for India.

Yet, countries have responded to address the world's energy and

> "The habits of modern man, including water wastage and pollution, have already led to disastrous consequences for the environment and, in turn, for us. Water is something that we must learn to regard with sanctity.

environmental concerns by using water in more innovative ways. Hydroelectric dams produce electricity through the force of water flow, in most cases involving a turbine and a generator. In China, the construction of the Baihetan and Wudongde dams to accompany the soon-to-be operational Three Gorges Dam represents the country's push towards renewable energy by harnessing the power of water. The dams are slated to be completed by 2015.[9]

As the most widely used form of renewable energy, hydroelectric power just might be the energy wave of the future, provided that governments exercise care with regard to the potential alteration of ecosystems resulting from the creation of artificial reservoirs. The difficult circumstances we face today are inextricably linked to other societal and environmental problems related to resource allocation, energy consumption, and pollution. The lack of access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation that many people experience on a daily basis illustrates the problems with building infrastructure, preventive health care, and proper resource allocation in many parts of the world. And with our world population growing, the negative impact on our environment is similarly amplified. The habits of modern man, including water wastage and pollution, have already led to disastrous consequences for the environment and, in turn, for us. Water is a resource that we must learn to regard with sanctity.

The future, however, is not necessarily bleak. We have responded with solutions to achieve our goals through spreading awareness, humanitarian aid, and the production of clean energy.

Our dependence on water underscores the need for conserving it, not just in terms of reducing wastage, but also in terms of saving our rivers, lakes, and seas from further harm. Throughout history, water scarcity has symbolized the ebb of life for many great civilizations. Water will always be a basic necessity of man, regardless of era and creed, and our collective future depends on its sustainability today. Water, in essence, represents life. By saving water, we save lives. `unc`

Notes

1 WHO, "Health through safe drinking water and basic sanitation." http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/mdg1/en/index.html.

2 Water.org, "Water facts." http://water.org/learn-about-the-water-crisis/facts.

3 WaterAid, "Second biggest killer of under-fives being ignored." http://www.wateraid.org/uk/about_us/newsroom/7655.asp

4 WHO, ibid.

5 UNESCO, "Facts and Figures: The Millennium Development Goals & Water." http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/facts_figures/mdgs.shtml.

6 IDRC, "Water Disinfection Using Solar Radiation." http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26972-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

7 UN, "Water Scarcity." http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.html.

8 J. Thottam, "How India's Success Is Killing Its Holy River," Time, 12 July 2010: 16-21.

9 "Hydropower Stations Dot Yangtze River." http://www.china.org.cn/english/news/190253.htm.
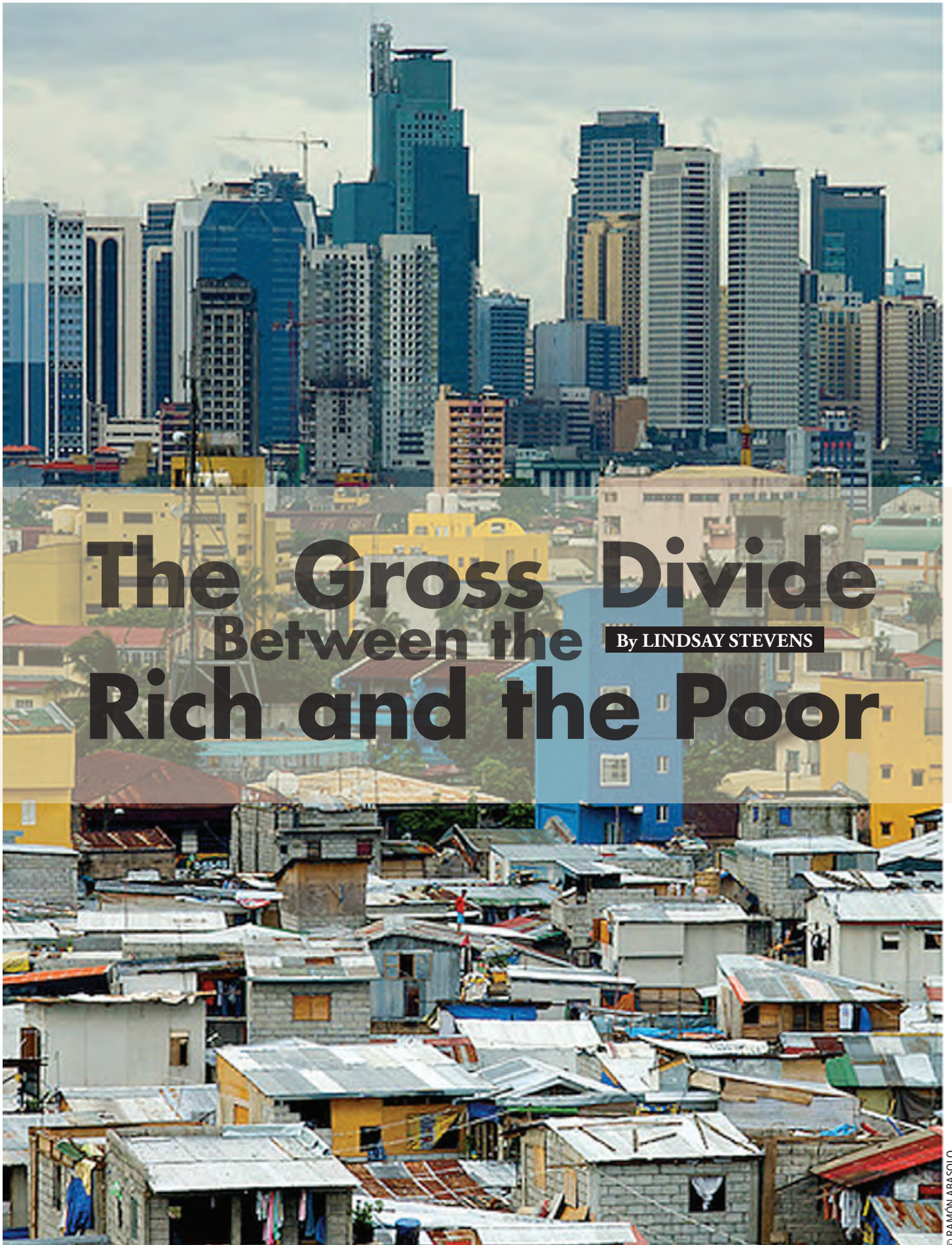
The Gross Divide
Between the
Rich and the Poor

By LINDSAY STEVENS

i could not believe my eyes when I walked through the narrow dirt pathways between the hundreds of rickety tin shacks in the township of Khayalitisha in South Africa. A beautiful African girl, not much younger than me, wearing a pale pink skirt that casually hung below her hips and a white, dirt-stained tank top, led me to Sekwamkele's hut.

Sekwamkele and I met the first day I began volunteering at his preschool. My eyes had been quickly drawn to his sparkling glare and sincere smile. The hut was no bigger than 144 square feet, which is roughly the size of an average public restroom. The family of four shared a queen-sized bed, and the only other pieces of furniture were a bookshelf and a table. It was hard for me to even imagine living like this, as I come from a seaside suburban town in Rhode Island, United States, and go to school at a college-prep boarding school in Massachusetts.

It is horrifying to imagine that almost half of the world (over three billion people) live on less than $2.50 a day, while the richest man in the world can spend a million dollars a day and still live well for the rest of his life. In a world where money translates into power, the majority of people are not fortunate enough to have sufficient funds to stay afloat. The middle class is quickly disappearing and falling through the cracks, leaving an even greater divide between the rich and the poor.

Unfortunately, the cycle of poverty is very hard to break. A major reason for the growing numbers of poor people is the bad quality of teaching that most children receive around the world. Almost a billion people who entered the twenty-first century lack the ability to read a book or write their name.[1] This substandard quality of teaching does not provide students with the basic information needed for maintaining a job in the real world. Especially right now, with the economic and unemployment crisis, a lot of people are in need of financial aid due to the lack of job opportunities. Many are looking for work but, unfortunately, those who need money the most lack the tools and skills that make good employees. Thus, they tend to lose their jobs quickly and end up right back where they started. Many people in the townships want to work, but they just don't know how.

Unemployment is much higher for women than for men in South Africa. Philani, an organization that functions in six townships, devotes itself to helping women make a living, support their families, and escape the cycle of poverty in a way that also makes life in the townships better for everyone. These citizens are some of the most soulful and passionate people, and it is a shame that more people don't get to experience their amazing personalities because of the fear of entering the townships. In spending a lot of time at the Philani centre in Khayalitisha, I met Narsassana. She told me how hard it was to keep a job, take care of her five children, and make her way out of the township lifestyle. Narsassana was hired by Philani to work in their Educare preschool programme.

As if it were not hard enough for Narsassana to find employment, her house is constantly being broken into and the few items she owns are stolen because the burglars know she is away from the house all day. She explained the hardships of simply going to work each day: "I leave every day to try and make a living for myself, but every night I come home and my house has been broken into," Narsassana said. "I had to send my children to live further away with my mother because it was unsafe for them to live with me when I leave."

What Narsassana does every day is courageous and challenging: just to make a living for her family, she sends her children away to keep them safe and then leaves her house vulnerable to robbers. Philani encourages all of their outreach workers, like Narsassana, to inspire each and every

> **"It is horrifying to imagine that almost half of the world (over three billion people) live on less than $2.50 a day, while the richest man in the world can spend a million dollars a day and still live well for the rest of his life.**

woman living in the townships by going right up to their front door and telling them their personal stories about how they are changing their lives on their own, without help from a man.

As the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, it becomes increasingly evident that downsizing and maintaining a simpler lifestyle is becoming more common. While there are 2.2 billion children in the world, 1 billion of these live in poverty.[2] Unfortunately, changing these statistics is going to take time, but we have to start by educating people and giving them opportunities to start new lives for themselves and their families. unc

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Notes

1 Anup Shah, "Poverty Facts and Stats," *Global Issues*, 10 September 2010, http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats.
2 ibid.

The UN Chronicle *announced a writing competition for its Facebook fans between the ages of fourteen and twenty to choose one of the eight Millennium Development Goals and write whether, in their opinion, it was achievable by 2015, the target year. We present four winning essays from fans in Jamaica, Nepal, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic.* —Ed.

Let Countries Customize The MDGs

1 · ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

By NICOLETTE JONES

I believe it is unrealistic for any country to achieve all eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the target year. Moreover, the improvement in some MDGs may work to the detriment of other MDGs.

The goal I chose to focus on is MDG 1, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, which has three target indicators: reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day; achieve full, productive, and decent employment for all, including women and young people; and reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

What is extreme poverty and hunger? These words mean different things to people living under different conditions and in different countries. Using one US dollar per day as the poverty marker could be problematic in some economies. In India, for example, $1 is equal to ₹44. When sugar prices increased to ₹50-60 per kilogramme, what could be purchased for ₹44? The point I am making is that having a fixed amount of $1 is problematic because the exchange rate fluctuates, and ten years ago what could have given a family a basic meal, could probably not even buy a kilogramme of flour today.

MADAGASCAR—What is "adequate" food? It means an amount and variety of food sufficient to meet all of one's nutritional needs for a healthy and active life. The right to food is more than the right to basic staples or to sufficient dietary energy.

FAO PHOTO/MARCO LONGARI

In his book *Introduction to the Sociology of Development*,[1] Andrew Webster stated that "poverty is a relative term, a condition that can only be defined by comparing the circumstances of one group of people or of an entire economy with another." Webster explained that the problem of defining poverty arose "since the measures one uses to compare populations will depend on a whole range of assumptions about the adequate standards of living which some enjoy and which some do not."

Sociologist Oscar Lewis posited the theory of the culture of poverty in his book by the same name. He said that the lifestyle of the poor was different from other members of society, thus there was a culture of poverty with its own norms and values.[2] Lewis' theory tells us that poverty is not only a social or economic phenomenon, but also a psychological one. Poverty and hunger usually go hand in hand; however, the poverty line cannot focus only on food costs. What about the costs of electricity, water, medication, and even schooling? With so many factors involved, how do you universally define extreme poverty and hunger, and how do you meet the MDG target?

In 1996, the Jamaican Government put in place the National Poverty

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"What is extreme poverty and hunger? These words mean different things to people living under different conditions and in different countries.

Eradication Policy and Programme (NPEPP). According to the 2009 *National Report of Jamaica on Millennium Development Goals*, the NPEPP included "rural electrification, a Social Investment Fund that has greatly assisted early childhood institutions, social services, water and sanitation projects, rural feeder roads, inner-city infrastructure."[3] In 2002, the Jamaican Government also introduced the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH). According to PATH, "Children are the main beneficiaries, but PATH also covers the elderly poor, other destitute poor, persons with disabilities, and pregnant and lactating mothers."[4]

These efforts could have been the vehicles fuelling Jamaica's achievement of MDG 1, or so it is said on paper. The 2009 Report indicated that Jamaica had achieved two targets in MDG 1: to halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people below the poverty line; and to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. In 1990, 28.4 per cent of Jamaicans were living below the poverty line, but by 2007 it was reduced to 9.9 per cent. The proportion of the population living below the minimum level of dietary consumption went down from 8.3 per cent in 1990, to 2.9 per cent in 2007. However, the report stated that the achievement of MDG 1 was "vulnerable to exogenous shocks and thus is likely to be unsustainable under the global recession."[5]

I believe that achieving MDG 1 is much more than putting statistics on paper. Development is more than numbers, it is about people. What each country must do in attempting to achieve the MDGs, is make the goals specific to their country. The United Nations must give an outline and it is up to the leaders of countries to tailor the programmes to fit their specific situation, thus achieving the MDGs, including the first goal, on their terms. A statistical report does not show progress in development and may be deceiving; what is important is what is not on paper.   unc

Notes

1 A. Webster, *Introduction to the Sociology of Development* (2002),16.
2 O. Lewis, *Culture of Poverty.* (Holborn & Langley, 2006), 50.
3 *National Report of Jamaica on Millennium Development Goals* (2009) 12.
4 ibid.
5 ibid.

A Problem of Priority, Not Scarcity

1
ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

By ABHISHEK RAMAN PARAJULI

"A home of plenty: clothed and fed our sturdy children play;
While other children cry for bread not half a world away."
— Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith

With the wealth of resources at the world's disposal, for this hymn above to represent the truth in 2015, the target year for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), would be a shame to humankind. It is not fair, therefore, to ask today whether the MDGs are achievable. It is not fair for the 925 million people who do not have enough to eat and the 1.4 billion

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AFGHANISTAN—Seed testing and processing.

FAO PHOTO/GIULIO NAPOLITANO

who live in poverty. But most important, it is not fair because the world has what it takes to achieve the MDGs. What is lacking is a sense of urgency, the urgency that unceasingly drives the lives of those who suffer.

While many regions are not on target for achieving the goals, there is so much to be hopeful for. There is much we have done, yet so much more we can do. And let us ask the crucial question—why is there still room for hope?

Hope can be found in the fact that while progress has been slow, progress has been made. The latest World Bank report *How's the World Doing?* states that forty-five out of eighty-four countries are on track to meet the goal of cutting poverty in half by 2015 and, compared to 1990, 27 per cent fewer people would be living in poverty in 2015. By forgiving the debts of poor nations, more money has been freed for development. Before debt relief, under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, eligible poor countries spent more on debt services than on health and education combined.[1] Also, rich nations are doing more to meet their commitments: in 2009, for example, leaders of the group of eight industrialized nations, the G8, pledged $20 billions to help their poor counterparts with investments in agricultural development.[2] These are just small steps, but the world is heading in the right direction.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the world spent $1.531 trillion on defence in 2009, a 49 per cent increase since 2000, while aid commitments made in the 1970s were still far from fulfilled. We have more resources if we choose to use them. Ours is not a problem of scarcity, but one of priority.

Change is in the air, and that is another reason to be hopeful. Innovation has driven us to better means of finance, action, and awareness. UNITAID, an international

facility hosted by the World Health Organization for the purchase of drugs against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, and funded largely through small fees added to airline tickets, has raised $1.5 billion since 2007.[3] The microfinance revolution, through organizations such as the Grameen Bank and Kiva, has brought entrepreneurship to the poorest with exemplary results in reducing hunger and poverty.[4] Within the United Nations there are also winds of change, with increased momentum in implementing the proposals made in *Delivering as One*, a report by a high-level panel to make UN agencies more cohesive and efficient in fulfilling the MDGs.[5]

> **"The Millennium Development Goals are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. This gives reason for hope, as we have multiple angles to tackle problems. Achievements in one goal will drive further achievements in other goals.**

Technology is leading this change as well. Social media and the Internet make disseminating ideas easier, transferring funds safer, and development more inclusive. As we learn from the mistakes of the past, technology is helping us climb the steep learning curve faster.

Eradicating hunger and poverty is a massive challenge, and when setbacks such as the recent food and financial crisis wipe away years of hard-won progress, hope can fade quickly—but hope should not be lost.

More massive than the challenges we face are the opportunities we have, and developed nations can do so much

more to help. Hunger and poverty cannot be fought effectively if trade barriers restrict entry into lucrative markets. The estimated annual cost of these trade barriers is over $100 billion, which is much more than what developing countries receive in aid.[6] Tax havens are another serious problem for some developing countries, which lose an estimated $124 billion in revenue from these offshore assets.[7] Not acting promptly is to encourage those corrupt elite in some developing nations to continue cheating their populations with impunity. The rhetoric of developing nations taking a lead in their development will remain just rhetoric unless they are given access to markets and corruption is fought effectively.

The Millennium Development Goals are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. This gives reason for hope, as we have multiple approaches to tackle problems. Achievements in one goal will drive further achievements in other goals. In its report *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Nutrition*, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that the cost of malnutrition to national economic development is estimated at $20-30 billion per annum and, according to the World Food Programme, eradicating iron deficiency can improve national productivity levels by as much as 20 per cent. With equal access of girls to education, more women could add to the growth of this critical sector and educate the generations after them. Action on any of the MDGs can reinforce the others and uniformly achieve the promise made at the Millennium Development Summit of "making the right to development a reality for everyone and freeing the entire race from want."[8]

Many battles along the way will be lost. There will be new challenges, but as we maintain hope the war against hunger and poverty will not be lost.   unc

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Commitment is the Key

ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER 1

By CARLOTA ÁGREDA

LIBERIA—Refugees receive food at the Voice of America camp near Monrovia.

UN PHOTO/JOHN ISAAC

the world is on a deadline. The clock is ticking, and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a global priority for governments. There is no doubt that the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, global warming, and disarmament has received more coverage recently. But one issue that affects all, yet still goes under the radar, is hunger. That is why I will be focusing on MDG 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Over a billion people currently suffer from malnutrition and under-nutrition, and even though there are bilateral and multilateral programmes and initiatives and official development assistance, hunger is still not a mainstream issue. Those that are not directly affected by it don't realize that in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia—two regions in the world with the most extreme cases of hunger and with some of the largest populations—people are living on less than a dollar a day. Even most people in developing countries in Latin America don't know what it's like to live under such awful conditions.

Progress has been made by numerous joint plans of the United Nations and governments, but it is not enough. By 2015, over 500 million people should no longer be suffering from malnutrition. It is easier said than done, and it sounds pretty on paper, but what the world needs right now is action—and a conscience. As a first step, current humanitarian aid should continue and

"A society that faces physical and cognitive challenges in its population has fewer opportunities for succeeding in a world where the underprivileged have to perform more to prove themselves.

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be reinforced as a short-term solution. For those in dire need, the use of ready-to-use therapeutic foods is paramount. These foods cannot be underestimated as they have the capacity to feed large numbers of people, most importantly, children in such emergencies as the earthquake in Haiti or the floods in Pakistan. However, a transition period comes next, where the short-term plans meet medium- to long-term plans. This is where it becomes complicated. Our final goal is to guarantee food security for everyone.

Agricultural productivity, access to technology, microfinance loans, debt relief, and capital management courses can help with sustainable development, job creation, and to wean countries from continuous dependence on aid. Food for Education programmes, an initiative in some African countries by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme, should be expanded to cover more regions since having an educated and healthy population is key to development. Many people are not aware that what one eats during infancy has consequences in the future, and that a society that faces physical and cognitive challenges in its population has fewer opportunities for succeeding in a world where the underprivileged have to do more to prove themselves.

All said and done, commitment is the key for achieving any Millennium Development Goal. We are more than halfway through the target date, and there is still much to do. More people should be motivated and inspired at a young age. Children and teens should understand that they really can make a difference, no matter how small, and realize and feel the gratification of doing something for others.

Apathy is extremely dangerous when we are just four years away from the deadline, but with the right amount of enthusiasm and the will to make a difference, I am sure that MDG 1 is achievable. unc

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Settle the Social Debt Owed to People

2
ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

By PAMELA MARTÍNEZ ACHECAR

millions of children around the world face the uncertainty of accessing quality education and consequently are left without a choice in what they wish to do with their lives. The goal of making education universal provides a way for governments to begin to settle the social debt owed to populations worldwide.

Education is a human right, which is why world leaders have committed to guarantee primary education for all as a first step towards making education universal at all levels. This goal, along with seven others, make up the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed to by 189 nations in September 2000. The objective is to drastically reduce extreme poverty, while promoting gender equality, health, and environmental sustainability, by 2015.

In 2000, it was estimated that approximately 103 million school-age children were not attending classes, nor did they have the possibility of doing so. Since then, significant progress has been made. By 2007, the number was cut to an estimated 72 million. According to projections by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) there might still be 56 million illiterate children in 2015.

Enrolling and consequently remaining in school are often conditioned by gender, family income, residence, language, ethnicity, and disability. However, since universal education implies guaranteeing the right to all children—including indigenous populations, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and children in conflict zones—governments have a responsibility to provide alternative means of education in response to specific circumstances.

The main obstacles to this objective are the lack of economic resources and the added burden from the current financial crisis. Progress towards universal education will not be under way, simply because education

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> **"The necessity to invest in education is incontestable, but efforts are often botched by the need for sustainable financing, considering the long gestation periods before tangible results emerge.**

UNICEF PHOTO/LEMOYNE

TURKEY—Village of Karaali in Ankara Province. Yaprak, 10, accompanied by her sister and mother, does her homework near a window at their home. Yaprak attends a "child-friendly" school, together with all the girls in the village.

budgets are not being designed to meet the needs. Moreover, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that approximately 18 million teachers would be needed in order to impart quality education to of the world's children by 2015.

Gender inequality is also an obstacle. The latest UNESCO report *Education For All* states that girls were still less likely to be schooled than boys.

One does not have to be an expert to infer that the four years until the 2015 deadline is not enough to transform and expand the world's education systems, satisfy the demand for teachers, or multiply the resources assigned to education in the poorest countries.

The necessity to invest in education is incontestable, but efforts are often botched by the need for sustainable financing, considering the long gestation periods before tangible results emerge. Moreover, the success of said investments depends on the availability of dependable information in order to prepare diagnostics and identify exclusion mechanisms so as to formulate best

practices and achieve key projects such as the completion of schooling.

SCHOOL MEALS

Hunger and poverty conspire against children's academic integration. In light of this, the World Food Programme (WFP), along with numerous organizations and teachers unions, have focused their resources to combat it. WFP's initiatives such as school meals and take-home rations can double primary school enrolment within one year. The first offers vital nourishment to poor children who attend school, while the second provides basic food items to families who send their daughters to school.

Schooling has improved substantially, but at a slow pace which is not compatible with the timeframe of the MDGs, which were overwhelmingly ambitious from the very moment they were contrived. Also, many unforeseeable obstacles have emerged along the way. It is thus evident that policy makers should outline their plans of action in realistic and achievable short- and intermediate-term goals in

order to create more favourable conditions to optimize teaching and learning processes.

Unfortunately, results from investigations do not paint a promising scenario. The list of pending issues far overreaches the resources destined for them. If we engage in a careful analysis in the current globalized context, we might conclude that universal primary education is further away than we had foreseen, and it threatens to slow down if decisive action is not taken now. unc

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ALMOST ALL OF THE MOUNTAIN GLACIERS IN THE WORLD ARE NOW MELTING, MANY OF THEM QUITE RAPIDLY. THERE IS A MESSAGE IN THIS.

AN INCOVENIENT TRUTH - AL GORE

WATER, OUR LIFE!

By JOAN NASSIWA KWAGALA

A group of high school students lead a community project on water, health, and the environment in Kampala, Uganda.

a team of girls from Gayaza High School in Kampala, Uganda, sat down to discuss water issues within the school and the surrounding communities with the deputy head teacher, Mr. Ddungu Ronald.

Our teacher invited us to participate in a global environmental programme and introduced us to GreenContributor, an organization based in Canada that connects schools worldwide and offers students opportunities to become involved in collaborative environmental programmes. Through their connections, we collaborated with two other schools in Uganda—the Parvatiben Muljibhai Madhvani (PMM) Girls' School in Jinja and the St. Peter's Secondary School in Nkokonjeru.

We e-mailed teachers and students, inviting them to join an online classroom to discuss water scarcity in their communities. We had forty participants, including an active member from PMM, Amina Sharifa, whose creativity contributed much to the discussion through her researched examples and similar situations in different countries.

In the second and third week, we discussed water availability and its usage in and out of the school, and conducted a water audit. We calculated the average amount used in our school, which pumps water from a bore well. Unfortunately, the students in my school waste water without regard for the many people who barely have a drop. It was important that we undertook this activity to reflect on this problem.

In the fourth week, the team visited the nearby community well. It was disheartening to see people fetching dirty water from the well situated near toilets and contaminated with algae. A good number of the children interviewed said they suffered from typhoid, and the adults told us that treatment was expensive, costing at least 90,000 Uganda Shillings, or forty-five dollars.

Later on, in a pilot project at a primary school in our neighbourhood, we researched water scarcity, including a sensitization programme, hoping to change the attitudes of adults and children. GreenContributor supported us with a water programme curriculum and a water treatment manual from the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (SODIS). The SODIS method treats drinking water with sunlight and the use of polyethylene terephthalate bottles, also known commonly as PET. The Uganda Health Marketing Group supported us by introducing the use of the Aquasafe tablet to treat water and donated eleven water tanks. Today, there is a water champion at every water point in our school to ensure that the tanks are filled and the water is treated.

WHAT DID WE DISCOVER AND LEARN WHILE WORKING ON THIS PROJECT?

Statistics from our pilot school showed that 30 per cent of the students missed school daily due to one or several waterborne diseases. We even learned that almost 25 per cent of the students taking part in GreenContributor programmes in Kenya missed school daily because of these diseases. Why should a child lose the basic right to go to school because he or she becomes ill from contaminated water? We discovered that the greatest cause of illness is ignorance of the dangers of drinking unsafe water.

We also learned traditional ways of conserving water when our school water pump was vandalized and there was not a drop of water in the entire school. We harvested rain water!

We ventured outside of the school gates and connected with elderly and young people on matters of the environment. This brought us closer to our communities.

My friend Martha said, "I really have gained a lot from the project and I hope to continue with it wherever I go. This is a life-changing activity." Another friend, Patience, said, "I want to do anything in my power to ensure proper water conservation and preservation. I have understood the value of water in our society."

The international perspective provided by GreenContributor completes the learning cycle where we are able to connect with many schools around the world. We plan to use the GreenContributor model of being a Nodal school and, together with the assistance of teachers and support from GreenContributor and other organizations, reach out to other schools in our community (and hopefully our neighbouring countries), educate the students about the importance of water hygiene, treatment and conservation, and solicit the active participation of parents and elders in this cause.

We are proud to be a part of this cause. Never give up! unc

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D AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

The key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals lies in sharing resources, opportunities, and benefits, and in ensuring that those who wield power become responsible and accountable.

By ANIRUDH JAGANNATHA RAO, NEERAJA MATHUR *and* AKORSHI SENGUPTA

every day is a new beginning for hope and betterment in the village of Charampa in Orissa state, India. On an ordinary day two years ago, at the crack of dawn, Lila, a mother of three, hurried to the village well. She went to draw water for her home and for the tiny patch of land where she grows vegetables and jowar, barely producing enough for two meals a day. Today, due to erratic rainfall, the well had nearly gone dry and the land almost became infertile. Lila sighed, "My husband went to Cuttack to find work. He never returned. I have to feed the family. Without rain, what should I do? I have a ration card. We walk all the way to the fair-price shop, but there is nothing in stock or the grains are rotten!" Her eldest daughter, Mala, dropped out of school at age nine to help with the household chores and care for her younger siblings. School for Mala was humiliating—there was no closed toilet for girls.

Lila approached the village council several times with little luck until one day, Mr. Mohan, a civil servant from Tamil Nadu state, was deputed to Lila's district. Previously, Mr. Mohan had undertaken several successful poverty reduction projects, including the creation of women's self-help groups, provisions for micro credit, and implementation of the free midday meal scheme for students in government primary schools. Mr. Mohan transferred these experiences to Charampa. Additionally, he enlisted various non-governmental organizations to train the villagers in watershed management to ensure a sufficient water supply during the dry season and, under his supervision, the fair-price shops improved the villagers' access to grain storage and food distribution services. Today, Lila does not suffer from a lack of rain; the stored water is sufficient for dry spells. Her family does not go to bed hungry, and all of her children go to school.

There is much emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in India, yet there are many achievement gaps. Greater integration of initiatives for the MDGs could quicken the pace. Even if the MDGs were achieved, how could the results be sustained and the remaining gaps bridged? For example, MDG 1 calls for halving by 2015 the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day. What about the remaining half? What if some people fall back into poverty? Solutions must be sustainable. For this to happen, it is vital to understand the links between the MDGs and to adopt an integrated approach. In this article, we try to identify sustainable solutions linking the three MDGs concerning poverty and food security, environmental management, and gender equality.

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FOOD SECURITY

Food production in India is deemed sufficient for its entire population of little over one billion, yet nearly 200 million Indians remain hungry every day. One reason for this is the unequal distribution of food. The Indian Government spends nearly ₹500 billion every year on the Public Distribution System (PDS) to ensure food security. This system is still inadequate. In most villages, people walk miles only to be sent back because supplies are not available. If they miss the stipulated distribution day, they lose the opportunity to buy the entire month's supply. In Tamil Nadu, however, the government has worked to establish fair-price shops so that no one needed to walk more than 1.5 kilometres. While in states with high levels of hunger, such as Orissa and Bihar, supplies are further reduced by corruption, the PDS in Tamil Nadu has overcome this problem by ensuring that 94 per cent of the fair-price outlets are run by cooperatives and women's self-help groups to increase transparency. In doing so, Tamil Nadu has established a nearly universal distribution system, and malnutrition rates in the state have gone down considerably.

As in Tamil Nadu, various state governments need to select efficient and committed officials to take charge, and rope in people's participation that has been found is necessary for the success of any welfare scheme.

Since 1996, the PDS in India has been restructured, resulting in the neglect of nearly 57 per cent of the economically vulnerable population. The Indian Government has

> **" Millennium Development Goal 1 calls for halving by 2015 the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day. What about the remaining half? What if some people fall back into poverty? Solutions must be sustainable and it is vital to understand the links between the MDGs and adopt an integrated approach.**

many schemes to improve food security: the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the National Food for Work Programme, and the Antyodya Anna Yojna. However, these schemes are only partially successful because they overlap and their implementation is weak. Schemes with common objectives should be integrated for efficient resource management. However, even if the schemes worked, many people would remain deprived. To overcome this, the Indian government could use information technology to identify and target the correct strata of the population.

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT

Current food production in India may be sufficient for its population, but the future bodes uncertain due to climate change. Ecological poverty is high in India despite an abundance of natural resources. There is scarcity of water for irrigation. Previously, monsoons were predictable and agriculture was planned around them. However, global climate change and erratic rainfall patterns have since begun to adversely affect agriculture. Farmers have neither regular rainfall nor sufficient water reserves. Irrigation subsidies have benefited the farmers greatly, but have also caused land degradation in some areas due to excessive water use. There is an urgent need for widespread community-based watershed management.

Development strategies need to be a coordinated effort of the government, the farming community, and nongovernmental organizations. University students often undertake such projects as part of their curriculum. Through these projects, every college can link with a village and have students innovate and contribute to watershed management, as well as to educate and empower the farming community, while the government can provide monetary assistance to build these watersheds.

GENDER EQUALITY

For women in rural India, the most common source of livelihood is agriculture. About 55 to 65 per cent of all agricultural work is done by women. In a year, a woman works approximately 3,000 hours compared to the 1,200 hours by a man. During the off-season, unskilled women have no means of earning a living. In addition, as they cannot easily carry out strenuous physical work, their scope for earning a livelihood is further limited. Watershed management could relieve women from hard physical labour and give them time to acquire new skills.

Male-dominated work areas deny equal opportunities and compensation to women. Women have very little autonomy in their households and society. Empowerment of women begins with literacy and education. India recognizes education as a fundamental right, yet 45.4 per cent of all

Indian women are illiterate. Female illiteracy in rural India is not easily addressed and, although the situation is improving, girls who wish to go to school often face obstacles. Schools are few and far between. Many parents allow their sons, but not their daughters, to walk miles to school. Traditionally, Indian society expects girls to look after the family and help with household chores. Girls are consequently discouraged from attending school, especially beyond the age of twelve. Moreover, rural schools often lack private toilets for girls, which is a significant deterrent.

The implementation of governmental policy for non-formal education to increase female literacy has been fairly successful in India: female tutors now teach girls at their own homes in rural areas.

We believe that men need to be sensitized to the issues of gender inequality. Religious and spiritual organizations could do a lot to promote equality. There is a need for widespread awareness of the problems, solutions, and legal provisions relating to gender.

The key to achieving the MDGs lies in sharing resources, opportunities, and benefits, and in ensuring that those who wield power become responsible and accountable. The MDGs are achievable—what is required is a focused and integrated approach. Let's work together for a better tomorrow! unc

Has Communication Become as Complex as the Devices Themselves?

By RAMÓN QUIÑONES CINTRÓN

"The Times They Are A-Changin'".[1] Or are they? I believe times have already changed. More than we could have imagined. Our ability to communicate has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, from the advent of the mobile phone to the proliferation of laptop computers, and then the marriage of both into smartphones. As technology continues to advance into more versatile and effective ways to communicate, the way we use these methods are almost as complex as the devices themselves. This increases our scope and reach as individuals and, subsequently, as groups of individuals in search of a common goal or ideal. That's why, with the arrival of social media services across new technology sources, activist groups and social institutions alike are finding a changing way to spread their messages and organize their activities.

With new technology, the interfaces through which we can add and actively talk to friends and upload and share information and media have become a powerful tool the likes of which humanity has not seen before. The recent surge of social media sites and services has started an internet "boom" of user-generated content. And while it seems that most of this content is whimsical in its nature (see YouTube videos like David after the Dentist, Twitter accounts like Feminist Hulk, and Facebook status posts from historical figures like Galileo and the Pope), recent examples of organizations and institutions that have incorporated the use of these tools show that they're very effective for purposes other than mere entertainment.

Social media, which for the purposes of this article will be considered as the group of online sites and services like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, has been repurposed by activist organizations all over the world. Social media facilitates the aggregation of interests, letting users "like" certain groupsproducts, ideas, etc., and follow the pages linked to these objects. People who like pages find themselves able to share interests with others and receive regular updates on whatever they've liked. These services increase the reach of these organizations, providing them with the means to spread their message beyond the scope of traditional media. For example, the computational matrix Wolfram-Alpha estimates that Facebook.com receives around 6.8 billion daily page views, with around

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SOCIAL MEDIA   INTERNET   DIGITAL DIVIDE
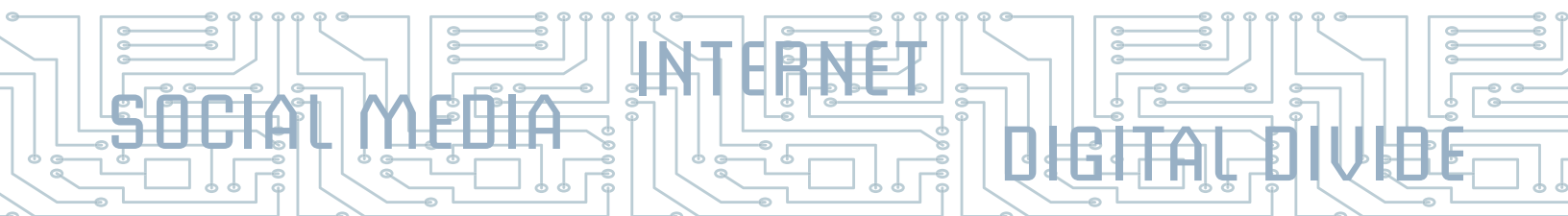
> **"Social media facilitates communications that were once time consuming during the analogue or early digital age, and only available to those with more resources, money and power.**

540 million daily visitors.[2] While not all users are likely to view the pages of specific activist groups and organizations, it provides a larger base than they are used to.

Social media also provides a cost-effective way of promoting and advertising a specific cause, as these services are free to the general populace. As an example, long-standing organizations find new aid in social media sites and services. Non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International now have new media channels through which they can send their message and, more important, target particular sectors. A quick Facebook search shows around 30 fan pages (pages that users can like)related to Amnesty International. The most popular of these 30 would be Amnesty International's main page, followed by pages run by Amnesty International's regional chapters in Denmark, the Russia Federation, United Kingdom, and United States, among others. Each of these pages has thousands of followers (people who have liked these pages) and publishes news and alerts on situations they have been following or the individuals they have been trying to fight for. The ability to operate this way naturally progress into a strengthening of the overall structure and framework of activist organizations.

The environmental movement found great support in the proliferation of information through social media. The "Earth Hour" group on Facebook is a pledge that users make to turn off lights and other electronics, in hopes of spreading the information on global warming. CNN's SciTechBlog reports that in 2009, the Earth Hour group comprised around 628,000 members, and the related Earth Hour video posted on this site has been watched some 57,000 times.[3] This is a great step forward in the battle against global warming, as misinformation and myths run amok throughout the population. These types of events raise awareness and reach a user base that transcends geographic boundaries.

Another movement that found strength through social media was the student strike at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in May 2010. Students protested changes in the policies of the UPR system regarding scholarships and exemption.

These protests turned into a student strike that lasted almost three months. Prompted by the need of steady, live communication, strike leaders created an online radio station called "Radio Huelga" (Strike Radio),[4] which informed students of the happenings around the strike and the negotiations that followed.

It stands to note that not only small organizations and movements benefit from these new tools and services that social media has brought into the mix. Political parties and journalists find aid in the user base that surrounds these websites. Barack Obama's presidential campaign is a prime example of social media being employed in order to gain electoral support through tweeting throughout the campaign trail, and providing video uploads of rallies and speeches.

All things considered, the use of social media catalyses social and political activism. It facilitates communications that were once time consuming during the analogue or early digital age and only available to those with more resources, money, and power. It helps to level the playing field between smaller movements and bigger, well-established interests by equipping the former with the tools to cheaply and effectively promote their beliefs and ideals through a mass media outlet. In essence, social media tools constitute a paradigm shift, in terms of not only communication, but also in the way organizations achieve their goals.   `unc`

Notes

1 Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'".
2 http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=Facebook.com
3 http://scitech.blogs.cnn.com/2009/03/27/ready-for-earth-hour/
4 http://radiohuelga.com/wordpress.

Are "Twittering" Youth Agents of Positive Change?

By ALANDA KARIZA

The United Nations *World Youth Report 2007* stated that there are approximately 1.2 billion people—18 per cent of the entire world population—between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four living in the world. Youth is a powerful force for change and youth activism is on the rise, with a lot of young people taking action for social transformation. Youth are engaging with their communities and making their voices heard. This activism is being carried out through a variety of media and is conducted differently in nearly every country in the world. Young people can choose to hold rallies and protests on the streets, attend public hearings, or even organize grassroots movements within their communities. Since the Internet is used by 30 per cent of the world's population, as some estimates have it, it has also become a preferred tool for young people to foster positive change.

The term "social media" might be unfamiliar to some people. Facebook.com, the most popular social networking website, is the second most accessed website on the worldwide web. As of January 2011, Facebook.com had more than 500 million active users worldwide, and half of them log into the website everyday. Approximately 70 per cent of its users live outside of the United States. Other popular social networking websites include YouTube, Twitter, and MySpace. These websites allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, where users can create a profile and share anything they want about themselves, including photos, videos, and web links. They can also play games with other users, listen to music, and become "fans" of artists who are also users of such social media websites.

According to a study done in 2008 by Forrester Research, young people spent most of their time on the Internet visiting social networking websites—it was a daily habit for at least a quarter of the young people who participated in the study. Recognizing the close ties of young people with social networking websites, a lot of their peers are accessing them to communicate their ideas and activities, including those aimed at catalysing positive social change. Social networking websites have a lot of features that are beneficial to spreading the word of youth activism.

Let's take Twitter as an example. Anyone can join Twitter for free, open an account, and share news through their account. On Twitter, any text—known as a "tweet"—can be shared, but it must contain 140 characters or less. This "tweet" can only be seen by people who "follow" a person and are able to read their updates. Subsequently, if a Twitter user would like to share what he or she has read, Twitter provides the "retweet" feature, through which news can be shared worldwide in minutes. Anyone can write whatever they want, and they can share it

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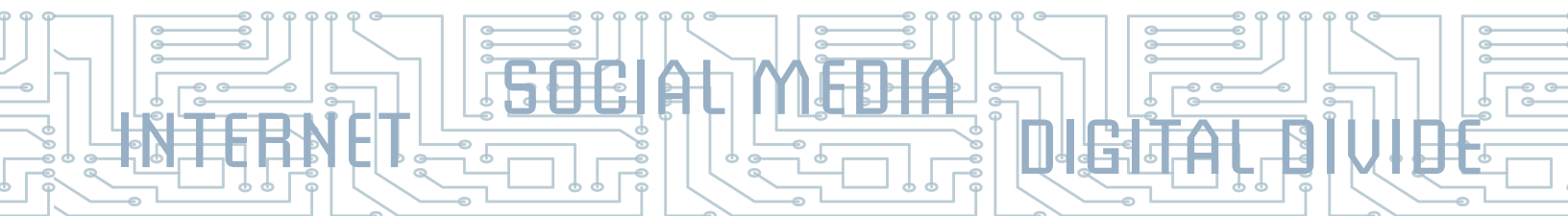
SOCIAL MEDIA

INTERNET

DIGITAL DIVIDE

> **"There is still a wide digital divide between developed and developing countries in terms of using and accessing communications technology. In 2009, only 5 per cent of people worldwide had broadband internet at home.**

instantly with Twitter users across the world. The ease of sharing information is advantageous in nurturing youth activism. In short, the Internet, along with its social networking websites, has connected youth from all over the world.

To Write Love On Her Arms (TWLOHA), a non-profit organization in the United States dedicated to finding help for young people struggling with depression, self-injury, and suicide, has been using social networking websites to communicate its message. More than 112,000 people are following the organization's tweets, and more than 720,000 are supporting its cause on Facebook. Through these websites, the youth-led TWLOHA has engaged a lot of people in their cause.

In Asia, organizers of the Indonesian Youth Conference 2010 spent months promoting the event to youth in the country. They utilized their Facebook account with 23,000 fans and Twitter account with 4,500 followers to connect to young people.

Through these two social networking tools, the organizers encouraged young people to engage in discussions by posting provocative questions twice a week. The organizers also promoted the conference's website, which allowed people to sign up and post their opinions in the Write Your Aspiration! column. Right before the event took place, the website had a discussion board and 1,200 active online contributors who communicated through the column.

The United Nations system has also used social media to connect with more people. Helen Clark, Head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), just launched her Twitter account: her Twitter handle is @HelenClarkUNDP. Like the *UN Chronicle*, UNDP has an official Facebook account to inform people about their programmes and products. Many other UN offices also utilize social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter.

We can see from these facts that social media is one of the most effective tools for bringing people together and catalysing positive change. Nevertheless, there is still a wide digital divide between developed and developing countries in terms of using and accessing communications technology. In 2009, only 5 per cent of people worldwide had broadband internet at home. In Africa, only 5 per cent of its entire population went online in 2007. Therefore, using social media to connect with people in developing countries is less efficient. This should be a reason for young people in developed countries to try to connect and exchange ideas with youth leaders in developing countries who have

Internet access. In turn, these youth leaders should be able to spread their message and create positive movements in their respective countries.

Fortunately, by the end of 2008, there was a big rise in the number of mobile phone subscriptions in the world. There were 4.1 billion subscriptions, with 60 per cent of the users in developing countries. A survey conducted by TakingITMobile has also shown that youth use mobile phones to generate citizen media. As its name suggests, citizen media is content generated by private citizens who disseminate their messages globally to fundraise, raise awareness, and spread solidarity. As surveyed, 27 per cent of the participants have been using their mobile phones to connect to social media. Therefore, young people who live in developing countries should be able to use social media through their mobile phones if accessing the Internet from home is too difficult.

Social media is an effective communications tool for youth activists. Youth in developed countries have proven this, and developing countries should create more access to social media tools in order to enable more people to create change.   unc

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SOCIAL MEDIA   INTERNET   DIGITAL DIVIDE
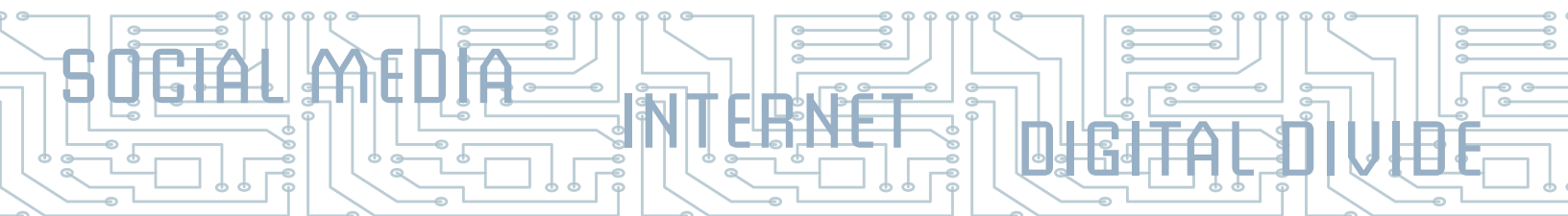
What About People Whose Concern Is their Next Meal, not Internet Connectivity?

By DIVYA MANSUKHANI *and* SAMYAK S. CHAKRABARTY

The ripples from the invention of the Internet in 1989 continue to spread, with industrialized countries at the centre and developing countries at the periphery. But, an information gap remains between the two groups of countries. As a consequence, the term "digital divide" has entered everyday language, describing the disparity between those who have access to the latest information and communication technologies and those who do not. However, it is important to explore the nature of the digital divide and of a social divide within each country between the "information rich" and the "information poor."

As information and communication technologies become inexpensive and pervasive across the world, the question is whether it is the availability of and access to hardware and software, or more about social possibilities and the inclination of societies to engage with these technologies. We are in an emerging internet age in which information equals power. Therefore, societies that do not have access to information and communication

technologies suffer a serious setback, compounding the burdens of poverty, disease, debt, and illiteracy. Often, people in those societies do not even have access to a telephone—their concerns are focused on their next meal.

Of all the developing regions, Africa stands out as the least networked. A history of colonialism, poor physical and human infrastructures, large distances, and the absence of governmental stability in some parts have contributed to delayed socio-economic development and slow introduction of the Internet. One of the biggest deterrents in Africa is the extremely high cost of providing and accessing the Internet which, in turn, has prevented the emergence of sufficient demand to reduce overall cost.[1] Not ones to be left behind, many African countries have overcome this obstacle by using mobile phones not only for basic communication, but also for internet usage, health services, and even educational initiatives and programmes.[2]

If technological diffusion can be achieved, the Internet could provide multiple opportunities for social as well as

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INTERNET

SOCIAL MEDIA

DIGITAL DIVIDE
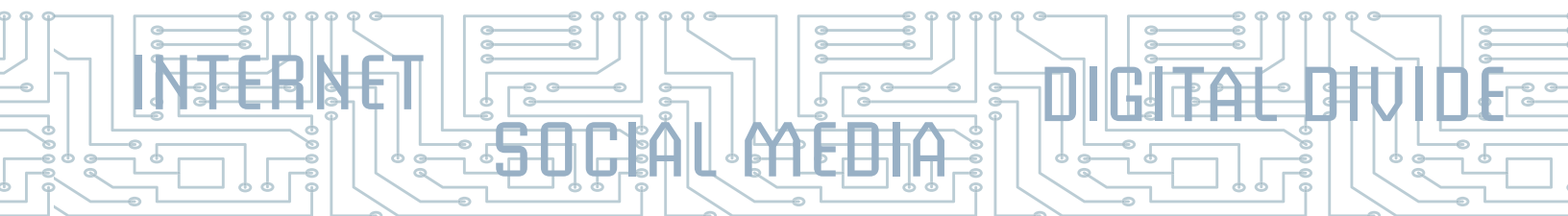
economic advancement. Rapid internet expansion represents substantial promise for developing nations, which can benefit greatly from the Internet's communication and information delivery capabilities. Electronic networking is a powerful, rapid, and inexpensive way to communicate and exchange information, and it is also crucial to scientific research and development efforts, many of which yield tangible economic benefits.

Access to electronic networks also strengthens the impact of the development community, comprising international agencies and non-governmental organizations working locally and abroad. It is also critical for connecting the world's younger generation on a single platform, such as through social media networks, thus strengthening bonds, the collaboration on ideas, and inter-cultural exchanges. This way, young people from different geographic and economic backgrounds can be brought together to adopt more progressive and productive lines of thought. A solid example of this would be how students who attended the India-Pakistan Youth Peace Conferences have started using digital media to stay connected and have even invited others from their campuses to join the conversations. Access to information affects political democratization efforts at the global level, as well as within countries.[3]

Due to dominating societal factors, especially in economically disadvantaged regions, the older generation tends to look at the Internet as a negative influence on their cultural fabric, thus preventing it from penetrating

> **"In an internet age in which information equals power, societies that do not have access to information and communication technologies suffer a serious setback, compounding the burden of poverty, disease, debt, and illiteracy.**

their societies. As a first step, they need to be educated about its utility and acquainted with its positive potential. In turn, this will enable the older generation to encourage their children to adapt quickly, learn to use the medium effectively, and gain more global exposure.

A working example of harnessing the power of the Internet in India can be found in an initiative by a private company called e-Choupal. The initiative leverages the Internet to empower small and marginal farmers who constitute the majority of the 75 per cent of the population below the poverty

line.[4] By providing them with farming expertise and services, as well as timely and relevant weather information, transparent pricing, and access to wider markets, e-Choupal is transforming the way farmers do business and the way rural markets work.

Another revolutionary initiative, the Millennium Development Goals eNabler, was recently launched by the United Nations Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development to help reach the UN Millennium Development Goals. eNabler was developed as an online portal where governments of developing countries can access vital information on best practices, information and communication technology solutions, and applications for their health, education, and development needs. eNabler also includes information on effective programme implementation and cost efficiency.

These examples show that the Internet can be used effectively to help bridge not only the developmental divide between the developed and developing countries, but also the social divide within countries, and help to improve the lives of people everywhere.   `unc`

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Achieve a Balanced Life, with Sports

By SHAKERA REECE

UNICEF PHOTO/TOM PIETRASIK

SRI LANKA—M. Chandrakumar *(left)*, 11, plays cricket with other students at Vadamunai Government Tamil Mixed School in tsunami-affected Batticaloa District in Eastern Province. His brother, M. Siranjeevithan, 13, also attends the UNICEF-supported school. Their father was killed in the civil conflict in Sri Lanka. Many of the students and teachers suffer from conflict-related trauma and stress. Chandrakumar and Siranjeevithan fish to help support their family and live with their mother in a makeshift shelter, some three kilometres from the school, for conflict-displaced ethnic-Tamil families.

SHAKERA REECE, 20, is Barbados National Record Holder of Women's 100m, a graduate of Rice University, and a recipient of the Stancliff Award for academic achievement and outstanding track and field performance.

*W*hen I was a child, the neighbourhood children would gather on the street in front of my house to play dodgeball. With the hot summer sun blazing down on our backs, we raced from side to side, bending and twisting, to avoid getting hit by the ball. I enjoyed every second of those games.

Cherishing these childhood memories, I have come to love sports, and I embrace them as a part of my life. I truly believe that sports can improve the health of children, raise their self-esteem, develop conflict-resolution skills, and sharpen focus and motivation. I have been a student athlete for most of my life, and sports and academics have always been a beneficial combination for me. On several occasions over the years, I have had the opportunity to compete internationally for my country, Barbados, and for that I am truly grateful. I have experienced how sports can enrich the lives of people in so many ways, and it is truly unfortunate when anyone is denied the opportunity to participate in them.

SPORTS AND EATING HABITS

Playing sports facilitates fun and exercise. It leads to improved community relations, better health, and longevity. However, nowadays, outdoor games with friends and neighbours have been replaced by more popular but sedentary past times, such as video games, watching television, and surfing the web. According to the World Health Organization, current obesity levels range from below 5 per cent in China, Japan, and certain African countries,

to over 75 per cent in urban Samoa. Childhood obesity is epidemic in some regions, and on the rise in others. Worldwide, twenty-two-million children under the age of five are estimated to be overweight.[1] Nutritional changes have led to increased consumption of energy-dense foods high in saturated fat and sugar.

Obesity and being overweight increase the risk of chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension and stroke, certain forms of cancer, and type 2 diabetes, all of which result in a reduced quality of life. Nutrition has a large impact on the performance of an athlete at any level of competition. Athletes who care about performance tend to pay greater attention to their diets. Therefore, by extension, involvement in sports can lead to better eating habits and healthier lifestyles.

SPORTS AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

The sports experience can also have a positive effect on a child's emotional and mental health,[2] as it offers fulfilment and provides a core group of people with whom the child can relate and interact. When a child joins a team, he or she automatically becomes

> **"Discipline and self-control can be mixed with the fun of sports. Congratulating the winner, respecting opponents, obeying the rules, and encouraging fair play promote equality for all.**

a part of an in-group, forming a special bond with teammates as they undergo the rigours of physically challenging and emotionally taxing training. Nevertheless, this nurtures self-discipline and self-motivation. When playing sports, children are encouraged to communicate, give positive feedback, and set and achieve goals, which boosts self-esteem. Though performance anxiety can be a problem for some athletes, when they do overcome it, stage fright can disappear and lead to a skill such as public speaking. In sports, sometimes there are disappointments and frustrations such as losing a game or missing a shot, but maintaining self-control in interacting with others, and respecting both authority and opponents show true sportsmanship. As such, true sportspersons should have good values which they seek to honour both on and off the field.

Life is unpredictable at times, and the ability to adapt to change is an asset. Athletes are physically fit, and they are also balanced mentally, and both of these states help with being more productive not only at play but also at academics, since physical exercise has been shown to improve attention span. It makes sense, therefore, to incorporate exercise regimes into school curricula. A well-rounded student athlete, enriched with the experience of interacting with peers outside of the classroom, can transfer the discipline and maturity into daily activities, including at the work place. Furthermore, athletes in all sports generally develop the skills of strategizing, compromising, and on-the-go thinking. So, even the capacity to be an independent thinker can lead to entrepreneurial success, as self-driven individuals have the tenacity to push through opposition rather than give up at the first sign of resistance. Sports also foster time management skills, as student athletes have to balance sports sessions, school assignments, and a social life.

SPORTS FOR PEACE

Sports bring people together and facilitate problem solving and communication. The best way to dissipate anger is to introduce fun. In war-torn communities, for example, where sadness is often an overwhelming emotional state, bringing smiles to the faces of children is a great way to distract them from the pressures of life. By giving children a productive way to expend their energy, sports can be a vehicle to achieve peace. Discipline and self-control, values that promote accord, can also be mixed with the fun of sports. Congratulating the winner, respecting opponents, obeying the rules, and encouraging fair play promote equality for all. Fair play practices are tied to good moral values, such as the Golden Rule (the antithesis of conflict in sports), and have been used as a means to encourage peaceful behaviour. In 2001, the United Nations created the Office on Sport for Development and Peace to promote peace through sports.

Ultimately, sports can be used to achieve a balanced life—with the necessary time and space allotted to academic excellence and personal wellbeing. Choose a sport that you love, one that you always wanted to learn to play. Call up a couple of friends, get out there, do it for the fun, do it for the health benefits. Experience joy, victory, defeat, and enrichment, and witness improvements in your life on and off the court. You will achieve a sense of accomplishment. Get the thrill that you have been missing by being stuck in the office, lab, or classroom all day. Come out and play!　unc

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THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
Injecting Political Will

By ESTEBAN RAMÍREZ GONZÁLEZ

The Conference on Disarmament (CD)* has met in vain for years. After the successful negotiation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970 and, more recently, the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1992, the forum increasingly stagnated. The last time the Conference agreed to negotiate was in 1996—this time for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly but has yet to enter into force.

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MEXICO CITY: A TREE GROWING OUT OF AN EXPLODED GRENADE Youth at a side event related to small arms held at the Museo de Arte Popular, during the course of the sixty-second Annual UN Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference.

UN PHOTO/EVAN SCHNEIDER

> **"The problems of the Conference on Disarmament are part of a learning process towards sustainable governance, linking international and domestic spheres at the global level.**

Ever since, the so-called "single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community" has been unable to undertake substantive work. In 2009, a Programme of Work was approved, but the CD failed to implement it.

WHAT'S WRONG?

Serious institutional problems in the CD derive from a cold war inheritance:[1] the CD's rules and agenda have made it almost impossible to enable transparent and multilateral decision making.[2] The lack of review mechanisms prevents accountability and institutional reform. The consensus rule, however, remains the greatest obstacle in the CD. In fact, in an increasingly multipolar world, this rule allows individual states to preserve the status quo at the expense of collective progress towards disarmament.[3]

Sergio Duarte, the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament, has stressed the lack of political will. When Member States have been willing to negotiate, the argument goes, the CD has produced results.

Perhaps it is the minimal prominence given to disarmament in domestic politics that explains why governments seem to care little about the CD.[4] There are jokes about the fact that, while speeches at the UN Human Rights Council are closely monitored by foreign ministries, those at the CD usually

go unchecked. These two dimensions are closely interlinked: good institutions can help enable decision making by providing incentives and accountability, which translate into political will. The opposite also holds true.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The problems of the CD are part of a learning process towards sustainable governance, linking international and domestic spheres at the global level. While diplomats and policy makers stand at the forefront in tackling the problem, roots run deep into local politics. Global institutions have difficulty crafting sound policies while at the same time satisfying national and, sometimes, parochial constituencies. When bargaining at international fora, governments remain largely dependent on domestic coalitions, public opinion, and, in the case of democratic countries, voters.

And when was the last time that nuclear policy, rather than unemployment or health care, dominated election campaigns within any of the democratic nuclear powers? Not surprisingly, disarmament is not a primary concern for electorates or for their representatives. The lack of high-level political involvement means that experts and bureaucrats are often left to deal with the issue, and they often excel at perpetuating old practices and ideas in which they have been trained.[5] Take, for example, the regrettable taboo imposed on debates on security and disarmament. Behind the label of "national security," military plans and diplomacy go unaccounted for. Let civil society contribute to

human rights, development, or humanitarian issues, but not to disarmament—one can almost hear the experts say. However, this mentality shelters experts from public scrutiny and limits their capacity to think "outside the box."

Indeed, contrary to common practices in many Geneva-based United Nations bodies, including those working on the disarmament of conventional and biological weapons, such as the Governmental Expert groups on the Convention on Conventional Weapons and on the Biological Weapons Convention, the CD does not welcome the substantive participation of civil society. In 2010, for the first time in history, a non-governmental organization was allowed to address the Conference during official proceedings. If governments are ever going to move towards disarmament, greater public awareness, civic engagement, and civil society participation are required.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

The September 2010 High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations, convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, recognized many of these issues. The meeting emphasized the role of weak structures and mechanisms, and the lack of commitment and political will, both of which were sustaining the deadlock in the CD. Governments suggested reviewing the rules of procedure, setting a deadline for the CD before taking negotiations elsewhere, calling for a Fourth Special Session on

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* The Conference on Disarmament, established in 1979 as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, was a result of the first Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly held in 1978.

Disarmament, and broadening civil society participation. These proposals reflect biased and diverging priorities regarding the content of possible negotiations, yet they constitute an important step in openly acknowledging the problem.

Given the far-reaching implications of the current situation, I will propose four major changes that are required for sustainable progress in the CD:

Increased civil society participation. Greater visibility and political leverage derived from more open debates and participation can push governments to allocate more effort and resources, as well as political will, to multilateral bargaining. Civil society has contributed in the past to mobilizing public opinion and consolidating political support, for example, in the negotiation of international legal instruments banning landmines and cluster bombs.[6]

Broadening the agenda from national to human security. Disarmament negotiations continue to legitimize a vision of national security based on zero-sum gains and an overly-militaristic scope. Issues such as the underlying costs of weapons systems (and their negative effects on economic performance and development),[7] the serious environmental threat implicit in nuclear deterrence strategies,[8] and the incongruence between weapons of mass destruction and international humanitarian law should be brought to the forefront of the debate.[9]

Strengthening accountability mechanisms among governments, domestic constituencies, and legislatures. Increasing dialogue and engagement among parliamentarians, government officials, and civil society, for instance through ad hoc conferences, can contribute to holding governments accountable for their performance in disarmament negotiations.

Reforming the CD or seeking alternative multilateral avenues. The disproportionate weight given to the priorities of individual States is at odds with the legitimacy that the UN Charter places in majorities and with the current need for multilateral decision making. In cases of deadlock, the UN General Assembly, as the world's foremost multilateral body, has successfully facilitated bargaining processes. Given the legitimacy the CD derives from the UN General Assembly, a new Special Session on Disarmament could push the CD towards reform.[10]

Pursuing disarmament through multilateral engagement is difficult. As global problems become increasingly complex and intertwined, we must urgently learn from the failures of existing global governance institutions and mechanisms. Amidst the challenges of disarmament and international security, we must learn to make multilateralism work in order to "complete our education," as Arnold Toynbee said in 1933, "and we cannot do this at our leisure, for time is of the essence of the problem… a race between belated wisdom and premature death by suicide." unc

Notes

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> " The Conference on Disarmament does not welcome the substantial participation of civil society. In 2010, for the first time in history, a non-governmental organization was allowed to address the Conference during official proceedings.

"MY CHILD SHALL BE PROTECT

A former child soldier's commitment to his son

By QIUSHI YUE

if a war breaks out, my child shall be protected," said Willson Khama as he lay dying from tuberculosis six years ago.[1] Willson was only thirty-five years old and had spent almost half of his life as a child soldier with a guerilla group in Liberia during the country's civil war from 1989 to 1996. He wanted to make sure that his son would never have to go through what he had experienced.

Willson Khama was known as Rambo to his fellow child soldiers. After escaping the life as a child soldier, Willson changed from a fearless, strong, and skillful killer to a man who tried to avoid confrontation.

Prior to the outbreak of the first civil war in Liberia, Willson enjoyed a quiet childhood in a small town called Ball Mines near Monrovia. His family was living in a gated community and was well off. Amidst the conflict, one day, a group of rebels barged into his home and slaughtered his parents. Willson, just fourteen years old, was forced to watch his parents murdered and all of his family's possessions taken by the rebel group.

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"Guns n'Roses" by Alec Monopoly*

Willson fled to Monrovia with his friends, all of whose parents were also killed. The ransacked town was left behind in flames, screams, and blood. Just outside of Monrovia, Willson and his friends were stopped by other friends who blocked the road and robbed civilians of their money and food. They assured Willson that if he joined their rebel group, it would mean security, safety, and food. Willson felt he had no choice but to join. His first job as a child soldier was as a compound guard for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), one of the three factions engaged in the country's power struggle, and led by Charles Taylor.

Willson was asked to clean clothes and weapons, and to run errands for his seniors, some of whom were child soldiers themselves. He also spied on what was going on in the town. The information he provided caused people to disappear. Day and night, he received training on how to handle such weapons as the AK 47 and, as part of his training, was forced to watch the brutal torture and killing of the group's enemies.

When the NPFL took over Monrovia in 1992, Willson became a frontline child soldier. He was by then fifteen years old. Willson's guerilla "education" taught him to be heartless. Killing others became a means for revenge and to obtain justice against the rebel groups that killed his parents.

In addition to his famed fearlessness, drugs enabled Willson to commit atrocities. He admitted that almost 90 per cent of the time he was on opiates and marijuana. The rebel leaders made drugs compulsory for child soldiers in order to manipulate and control them, and retain their obedience.

After almost eight years as a child soldier, Willson found out that some of the people he had killed were his relatives. Moreover, many of his fellow child soldiers had lost their lives or limbs from gunfire, improper training, or carelessness when handling weapons. At the age of twenty-two, Willson finally laid down his weapons, knowing that the penalty for deserting his position with the rebel group meant death. He escaped by serving as a guard for a civilian group. To rid himself of his memories as a child soldier, he later moved to Malaysia, then to Thailand, and finally to China.

Willson's case is a dramatic example of the impact of war upon children. The civil war in Liberia, ended by the Abuja Accord in 1996, culminated in the deaths of over two-hundred thousand Liberians, including fifty thousand children.[2] Almost every youth in the country witnessed atrocities, and a good percentage of them committed atrocities themselves. About 21 per cent, or 4,306 of the disarmed combatants, were child soldiers under the age of seventeen. Although many of them remain traumatized and some still addicted to drugs, the situation is improving. Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said in an interview that many United Nations and Liberian Government programmes were assisting former child soldiers. According to Dr. Coomaraswamy, the aims were to integrate the child soldiers better, get them back onto their feet, and send them back to school or teach them new skills.[3] But she warned more needed to be done. In over fifty countries around the world, approximately 300,000 children have been forced to fight in armed conflicts.[4]
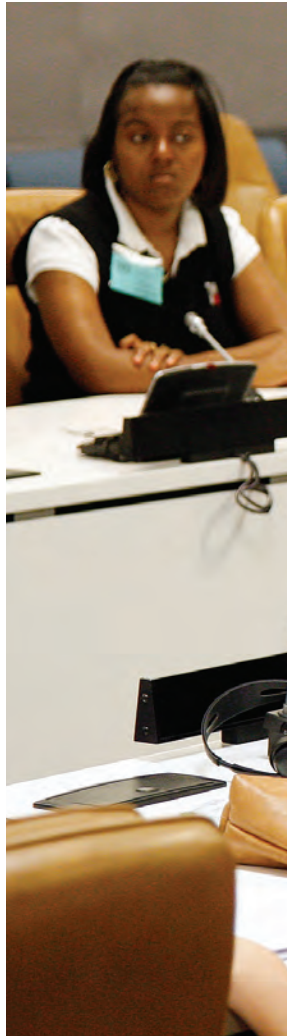
There is still hope, however. The international community has been strengthening its efforts to halt the recruitment of child soldiers, and countries have ratified a variety of treaties and conventions towards this goal. These include: the Rome Statute which has defined as a war crime the enlistment of children under the age of fifteen into the national armed forces or using them to actively participate in hostilities; the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Right of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; and the Paris Commitments to end the use of child soldiers. According to Dr. Coomaraswamy, the United Nations has as an objective to eradicate the use of child soldiers within twenty-five years, with the help of governments and people across the world.

However, quitting the army does not automatically heal a child—the impact of enlistment at such a young age is felt for life. Some former child soldiers worry about retaliation upon their present family, while others find it difficult to earn a living due to their lack of education and skills. According to Jane Ekayu, a Ugandan child trauma counselor and development worker, many child soldiers suffer discrimination in their communities because of the violent acts they had committed. Most of them were captured at a tender age—as young as six—and some spent up to fifteen years in the bush. By the time they were released, it was a tremendous challenge for them to cope with formal education. They had no homes to return to as their parents had been killed and their houses burned

> " Despite the plight they have faced, many former child soldiers have acknowledged their difficulties and started new lives. Their bravery in the face of such adversity is highly admirable.

TIMOR-LESTE—In honour of UN Day, 24 October, thirty-four students from the University of Timor-Leste's Peace Center held a Model UN Conference re-enacting the historic 1999 Security Council session in which the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor was formed.

UN PHOTO/MARTIN PERRET

YOUTH LEADERS MUST BE ACCOUNTABLE

By LUKA ORESKOVIC

LUKA ORESKOVIC, 18, is a student at Harvard University, and a member of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Ottawa, Canada.

today, there are 1.5 billion people worldwide between the ages of twelve and twenty-four, with 1.3 billion living in developing countries[1]—the largest generation of young people the world has ever known. As a key population, youth should be meaningfully involved in the formation of policy that affects them. It is likewise essential that young people have decision-making roles on youth-related issues. People of the same age group better understand their common needs, capacities, and limitations. As awareness about the importance of youth representation in decision making increases, so, too, does the involvement of youth advocates in programmes and events, such as the 2010 World Youth Conference in Mexico, the Youth Programme of the International AIDS Conference, and the Youth Symposium at the 2010 Women

NEW YORK—Students at UN Headquarters participate in a discussion on World Environment Day, observed every year on 5 June.

Deliver conference. The question is, how are the youth advocates selected, and are they the best people to speak on behalf of the world's youth?

MORE YOUTH, MORE PROBLEMS, BUT EVEN MORE SOLUTIONS

At the 2010 XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna, I witnessed a speech made by a young, HIV-positive Romanian man, who gave a basic report on what his life was like and the specific challenges he had to face. What made his speech so powerful to the one thousand health professionals and advocates in attendance was his honesty. "I'm sorry I cry, but I know how much I feared that I could infect my girlfriend, and that she would have to go through what I had to go through," he said. Many cried along with him.

To be effective advocates, we need to know what's really important. Sensitizing decision makers is hard, and credibility is a key ingredient for success. The point of view of

young people on the problems of youth is significantly different from that of an adult's. Nida Mushtaq, a member of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, a non-governmental organization comprised of youth between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age who promote the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents and youth, best summarized this: "Self advocacy," she said, "is the best advocacy."

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN KEY POPULATIONS

It is only relatively recently that developed countries have had youth adequately represented in both the media and politics. Youth representatives often apply for positions, which have become more and more competitive, simply to ensure that scarce media space is not allocated to self-promotion but, rather, to youth who sign up as genuine volunteers.

But what about youth leadership in the developing countries where the rest of the world's 1.3 billion youth reside? And

THAILAND: Students participate in an HIV/AIDS awareness class at a secondary school in Phayao.

are youth representatives really representing marginalized populations?

The youth delegates to the United Nations who are part of their national delegations are not always selected through a strict application process. In some countries, the selection processes are rigorous; in others, they are tokenistic or exclusive. Some countries and international organizations select youth representatives in accordance with governmental and organizational policies, resulting in tokenism and a lack of insight into youth perspectives.[2]

The 2007 World Development Report warned that despite a significant increase in the number of youth representatives in decision making, youth representatives could still be too few in number, possess heterogeneous priorities, or cease to identify with other youth once they obtain positions of influence, resulting in no change in the outcomes.

In specialized areas of youth advocacy concerning young women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth, or youth living with HIV/AIDS, representation, consultation, and decision-making power is essential for meaningful action. These key populations often encounter specific and troubling circumstances in their youth, and their status can best be advocated by members belonging to those groups or people working closely with them.

SEEING PROGRESS AND LOOKING AHEAD

At the same time, it is important to look at what has already been accomplished. The highest decision-making body of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, has already had three youth delegates, with movement towards room for more; the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) Special Youth Programme fellowship has expanded to include fellows at UNAIDS, while the UNFPA Global Youth Advisory Panel, which includes twenty-one people between fifteen and twenty-four years of age from all geographical regions and various international youth networks and organizations, has been working since 2004; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization now consults youth through an advisory group; the Youth Solidarity Fund of the Alliance of Civilizations recently increased the number of grant recipients for intercultural dialogue projects;[3] and the online resources of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Voices of Youth are now open to interaction between young people, and UNICEF consults with youth on certain matters of peer education.

It is essential that these new youth leaders are held accountable for their work and that they have a clear responsibility to the constituencies they represent—the youth of a town, a social group, a country, or the world. They must remember to involve new young people as they were once involved. They must listen to be able to advocate and speak, and they must be heard! unc

The author thanks Ekua Yankah at the United Nations Population Fund for her help in developing ideas for this article.

Notes

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3 UNAOC YSF provided grants to 6 youth-led organizations in 2009 and 18 projects in 2010. Also, UNICEF country offices and national committees include special boards of young people who are consulted on certain matters or peer education networks.

> " *A major psychological effect of war on former child soldiers is their lack of trust in others.*

UN PHOTO/TIM McKULKA

down. As a result, they lived in poverty. And on the occasions when the child soldiers returned home, they were in extremely poor health and required specialized medical services.[5]

A major psychological effect of war on these former child soldiers is their lack of trust in others. Agnes M. Fallah Kamara-Umunna, founder, and executive director of Straight from the Heart, a radio project in Liberia aiming to enhance the dignity of war-affected victims, said that one of the major challenges is making the child soldiers trust the professionals. "Everything that made them fight was based on deception. People they thought could never let them down, let them down," she said. As a result, "everyone looks like a liar to them."[6] Many professionals, including Ms. Ekayu and Ms. Kamara-Umunna, are providing psychosocial support and medical care through various methods, including one-on-one counseling; but they need more resources.

Despite the plight they have faced, many former child soldiers have acknowledged their difficulties and started new lives. Their bravery in the face of such adversity is highly admirable, and Dr. Coomaraswamy said that many of the rehabilitated child soldiers have shown resilience and strength of character: "They can overcome the experience and really rebuild their lives and become global citizens and advocates against these factors."

When Willson looked back on his childhood, he wished his experience as a child soldier had never happened. His tragedy should not be repeated. The world must work together to raise awareness about child soldiers, bring to justice those who recruit children in war, help fulfill the psycho-social needs of child soldiers, and ultimately make the world a safer place for all children. <mark>unc</mark>

*Alec Monopoly subverts the mass advertising establishment with graffiti art charged with compelling social messages. While the *UN Chronicle's* Youth Issue was in production, we spotted Mr. Monopoly's images on the streets in several New York City neighbourhoods, including the commercially driven Meatpacking District, known for its expensive boutiques and restaurants. At once gritty and playful, his images are a refreshing break from commercialism and a striking reminder of important issues such as peace and security. We thank Mr. Monopoly for providing the *UN Chronicle* with the original version of his "Guns n' Roses" poster.
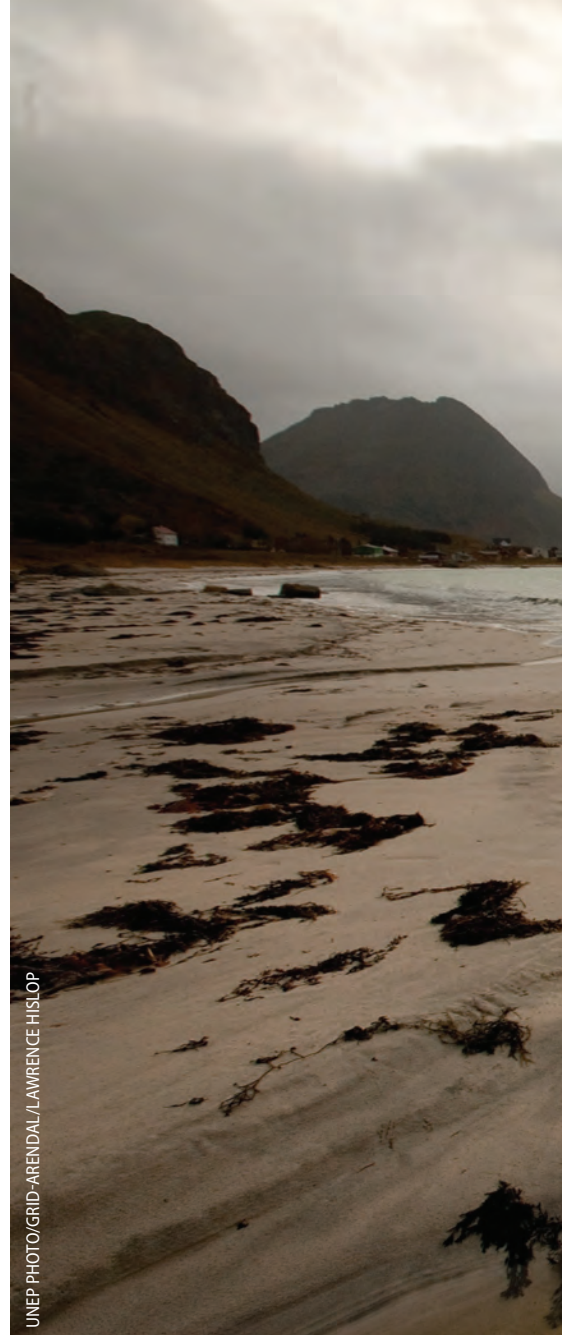
Notes

1 The author interviewed Dr. Jerry Darwin on 4 October 2010. During the last months of his life, Willson told Dr. Darwin of having been a child soldier.

2 "Liberia—First Civil War—1989-1996," http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/liberia-1989.htm.

3 Radhika Coomaraswamy, interviewed by author, 22 October 2010.

4 "Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," http://www.un.org/works/goingon/soldiers/abu_story.html.

5 Jane Ekayu, interviewed by author, November 2010.

6 Agnes M. Fallah Kamara-Umunna, interviewed by author, 25 October 2010.

SOUTH SUDAN—A stockpile of AK-47 rifles of the members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army burns at the launch of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme by the United Nations Mission in Sudan.

Adolescent Marriage Crossroad or Status Quo?

By RAND JARALLAH

RAND JARALLAH, 19, is a psychology student at Birzeit University, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territory.

"It wasn't an option," murmured a thirty-two-year-old woman with a troubled face who wished to remain anonymous. I felt her emotions so strongly that I wished I had a chance to change her life. "I was the oldest girl among my sisters," she said, "my aunt came to my father wanting his consent for my marriage to her oldest son. My dad could not let her down—his politeness resulted in my melancholy." She was married at sixteen. Deep down, I knew she wasn't the only one. Somewhere out there, even in my country, adolescent females suffer from similar situations.

As I left the woman's house, her situation hit me. I was furious and couldn't let go. I wanted to do something for her. What if I suffered like one of them? What if it was my sister, my cousin, or even my future daughter?

Adolescent marriage is a critical dilemma facing some societies today. It deprives girls of their rights, subjects them to abuse, and forces them to assume responsibilities beyond their years. Adolescent marriage strips them of their chances and rights to an education, a healthy lifestyle, personal development and growth. A vicious cycle results which can lead to their being widowed at a young age and shunned from society.

Some girls in South Asian societies are forced to marry, engage in sexual relations —with or without their consent—and raise children. This custom must be changed or even put to an end. As the United Nations Children's Fund publication *Early Marriage Child Spouses* states, the marriage of adolescent girls results in "the denial of childhood and adolescence, the curtailment of personal freedom and the lack of opportunity to develop a full sense of selfhood as well as the denial of psychosocial and emotional well-being, reproductive health and educational opportunity."[1]

A significant disadvantage faced by girls subject to adolescent marriage is the obstruction of education and personal development. This is a direct consequence, given that during the period of their lives when they would normally be experiencing childhood, they are instead preparing for adulthood and their contribution to their future families. Furthermore, young girls who would like to pursue both options—building a family and continuing their education—will be "both practically and legally excluded from doing so," if they are already married by adolescence.[1] Young girls are routinely withdrawn from school if an offer

> **"Young girls are routinely withdrawn from school if an offer of a good marriage alliance is made. Moreover, under these circumstances, parents believe that their investment in their daughters are ultimately wasted since, once they are married, they are expected to work in a different household.**

of a good marriage alliance is made. Moreover, under these circumstances, parents believe that their investments in their daughters are ultimately wasted since, once they are married, they are expected to work in a different household. Additionally, parents fear that if their daughters are exposed to school, they will be at an increased risk of premarital sex and potential pregnancies. Girls are, therefore, kept out of school.

An important fallout to tackle is the psychosocial disadvantages of early marriage when the adolescent girl is forced to engage in sexual relations while being denied her freedom and right to personal development. This leads her to intense psychosocial and emotional distress. In Ethiopia, Inter-African Committee researchers found that elders lacked interest in their young girls' suffering and believed that the traumas of premature sex and child-bearing were an "unavoidable part of life."[2] Further research on young married girls in some parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states in India showed that if the husband died before consummation, the young girl was considered a widow and became the property of all the men in the family. If she resisted their sexual advances, she would be cast out by the family with no source of income and left powerless. How do these practices give a girl the rights she deserves? When a very young woman between the ages of twelve and eighteen marries a much older man,

she is disempowered while her husband is empowered.

Moreover, the adolescent girl's reproductive and general health is at risk because early pregnancy increases her risk of dying from premature labour or other complications during childbirth. For women aged fifteen to nineteen, there is a greater chance of dying during pregnancy than for women aged twenty to twenty-four.[1] With regard to maternal mortality, a study conducted in Zaria, Nigeria, found the rate among girls aged below sixteen to be six times higher than that for women aged twenty to twenty-four.[1]

Families have always been the core of Arabian cultures. Marriage could be considered a legal, cultural, social, and religious channel into an acceptable sexual relationship. Early marriage is widespread in Oman, Yemen, Egypt, and in the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip. To cite some statistics, 17 per cent of women aged fifteen to nineteen are married in Oman and Yemen; 10 per cent of women aged fifteen to nineteen are married in Egypt; and 14 per cent of women aged fifteen to nineteen are married in Palestine.[3] Why do they get married so early? Virginity and family honour are recognized as essential in these cultures; therefore, parents marry off their daughters at a younger age, preferably under twenty. In Palestine, for instance, some women are forced to marry at an early age for financial

reasons because of the "ongoing political situation accompanied with unemployment and poverty."[4] Additionally, early marriage could be the result of a poor upbringing, which results in uneducated parents with little knowledge of the disasters of adolescent marriage.

If we could improve the situation, what would we do?

"Be the change you want to see in the world," said Mahatma Gandhi. Taking action by empowering women could be a starting point and, in any case, educating parents about adolescent marriage and its overall disadvantages could lead to better decision making. It is crucial to illustrate and explain to parents and adolescents how education could be a vital factor in leading a safe and healthy life. Of particular importance is comprehensive sex education, which includes teaching adolescents about their physiology, contraceptive use, and the risks such as childbirth complications and child and maternal mortality. unc

Notes

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PHILIPPINES—Ten million young people world wide aged fifteen to twenty-four are HIV-positive. Yet most young people lack the information and support to prevent HIV infection and nurture positive behaviours.

UNICEF PHOTO/PIROZZI

Adolescent Sexuality

By MONIQUE LONG

The question of one's sexuality transcends religious, racial, and cultural differences. Irrespective of skin colour, gender, gods worshipped, or how different cultures portray it, people everywhere explore their sexuality. Especially during adolescence, in a bid to discover and embrace who they truly are, questions such as "what is sex?" and "who am I as a sexual being?" plague the minds of young women and men as they struggle through the years between childhood and adulthood.

Across the world, adolescent sexuality is an important social and medical topic. Statistics show that most boys and girls become sexually active at around the age of fifteen or earlier.[1]

Many interpretations of adolescent sexuality can be examined in the way that different cultures adopt the practices of abstinence and contraception.

ADOLESCENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) examined sexual trends among fifteen-year-old students from thirty-five countries. The study showed that while the percentage of boys who engaged in sexual intercourse was often higher than that of girls, there were emerging trends indicating that as many or more girls than boys were sexually active when they turned fifteen.[2] However, while this changing trend was registered, the age at which most boys

first had intercourse remained younger than that of girls, showing that gender can influence adolescent sexuality. The study also indicated that the median age of first intercourse in most countries was sixteen to nineteen years for girls, and seventeen to nineteen years for boys. In Chad girls have their first sexual intercourse at 15.9 years, and boys at 18.8. Sub-Saharan Africa presented similar statistics that contradicted those gathered by WHO in which all countries recorded girls as becoming sexually involved at the same age or at an older age than boys.

How could this be? In parts of Africa, the prevalence of rape and the custom of early marriage regulate sexual activity. In South Africa, for instance, 116 in every one hundred thousand women have reported being raped; and in the rest of Africa, 42 per cent of women between fifteen and twenty-four years of age were

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> **"The practice of abstinence is subject to cultural, social, and religious differences, and its relevance and effectiveness are always in question.**

married before they turned eighteen, often to men who are up to fifteen years their senior.[3]

In examining adolescent sexuality and sexual behaviour, many cultures differ on the practices of abstinence and contraception.

ABSTINENCE

The practice of abstinence is subject to cultural, social, and religious differences, and its relevance and effectiveness are always in question. However, whatever its cultural variation, abstinence plays a major role in the regulation of adolescent sexual behaviour.

In some developed countries, abstinence is characterized by purity rings and chastity vows aimed at preventing sexual intercourse prior to marriage, while in some developing countries abstinence is enforced through female genital mutilation and other traditional practices, which are detrimental to the sexual development of adolescents.

The 2008 *Youth Reproductive and Sexual Health* report by the United States Agency for International Development[4] noted that the abstinence rate for women in Africa varied between 34 per cent in Congo and 96 per cent in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Senegal, while in Armenia and Viet Nam it was 100 per cent. In Eritrea, before the onset of puberty, 39 per cent of girls had gone through infibulation,[5] a particular method of genital mutilation considered to promote abstinence of intercourse due to painful consequences.

Despite the high rates of abstinence in Africa, the HIV/AIDS epidemic remains rampant, forcing one to consider whether abstinence could be a practical long-term solution against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. A study in the United States found that adolescents who took abstinence pledges would delay sexual intercourse for less than two years but, upon becoming sexually active, they were one-third less likely to use contraception than their non-abstaining counterparts.[6]

Although cultures within both developed and developing countries approach abstinence differently, it appears that neither female genital mutilation nor abstinence vows play a role in preventing the untimely initiation of sexual activity; instead, they seem to delay unhealthy sexual decisions rather than prevent them.

CONTRACEPTION

Contraceptive use is directly affected by sex education, the availability of contraception, its cost, and cultural practices.

A WHO study found that more than 70 per cent of sexually active adolescents in thirty-five countries used condoms.[7] In most cases, the use of condoms by boys surpassed that of girls. The fact that boys were more likely to use condoms could be indicative of the belief in most cultures that girls were expected to remain chaste, while boys were not, and were thus better informed than their female counterparts.

However, another study uncovered an alternate reality in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. In many cases, less than 25 per cent of youth admitted to using modern forms of contraception. Contraceptive use was found to be highest among older women with higher levels of education and living in urbanized areas.[8] Thus, during adolescence, contraceptive use was low and further influenced by social class and education levels.

As adolescents fight internal battles when they come to embrace their sexual identities, they are also forced to grapple with the influence of peers, family, cultural beliefs, and the media. Despite the differences in their experiences and the obstacles they face, all adolescents eventually come to an understanding of who they are as sexual beings. Adolescent sexuality is, and will continue to be, a topic of debate and interest. Regardless of a particular country or culture, similarities in the views, intentions, and practices regarding adolescent sexuality can be found around the world. Clearly, adolescent sexuality is a universal issue. unc

Notes

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7 See note 2 above.

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"We Have Become the Change Agents in Our Communities"

Students in Lusaka, Zambia, learn about tuberculosis and resolve to sensitize their peers.

By MADALITSO ZULU, TARA GARG, JIN KIM, INEZ DAWOODJE, DENNIS KAYEBETA, *and* IWELL BANDA

We would like to share an experience that opened our eyes to some issues that most of us take very lightly. Our teacher, Florence Lutale, introduced us to a global programme in collaboration with the Genius Group of Schools in Rajkot, India, and schools in the United States to share our experience on global infectious diseases. The programme is the brainchild of GreenContributor, a non-governmental organization. We identified tuberculosis (TB), which is often overshadowed by HIV/AIDS in terms of publicity. While conducting research, we found out that not many students at the International School in Lusaka had been in contact with anyone suffering from TB. Many in Zambia believe that it is a disease infecting poor people, or those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

We started our research on TB by visiting the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Lusaka where we met the HIV/TB service coordinators. We also visited a few neighbourhoods in Lusaka to meet with people. We learned that TB is a common airborne disease easily spread from person to person. It is caused by microscopic bacteria that usually harm the lungs, but may spread to other parts of the body. It is transmitted when infected people cough, sneeze, or spit without taking adequate precautions. The usual symptoms are chronic cough, fever, night sweats, chest pain, weight loss, and coughing up blood.

"Before I knew that I had TB, I used to have coughs with heavy sputum and I was experiencing sharp chest pains," said one of the patients we interviewed.

Cases of TB in Zambia have dramatically increased in the last ten years. TB is responsible for 16 per cent of adult Zambian deaths. From our partner school in India, we also learned that India accounts for nearly one fifth of global TB incidence.

The increase in TB cases can also be explained by the rising number of people infected with HIV/AIDS. When a patient has both HIV/AIDS and TB, they are said to be co-infected. Statistics show that 70 per cent of TB patients worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS. This is a startling statistic and it helped us understand that as HIV/AIDS weakens the immune system, people succumb to TB. At the clinic, we were told that if the patient was HIV-positive, there was more than a 50 per cent possibility that she or he would contract TB.
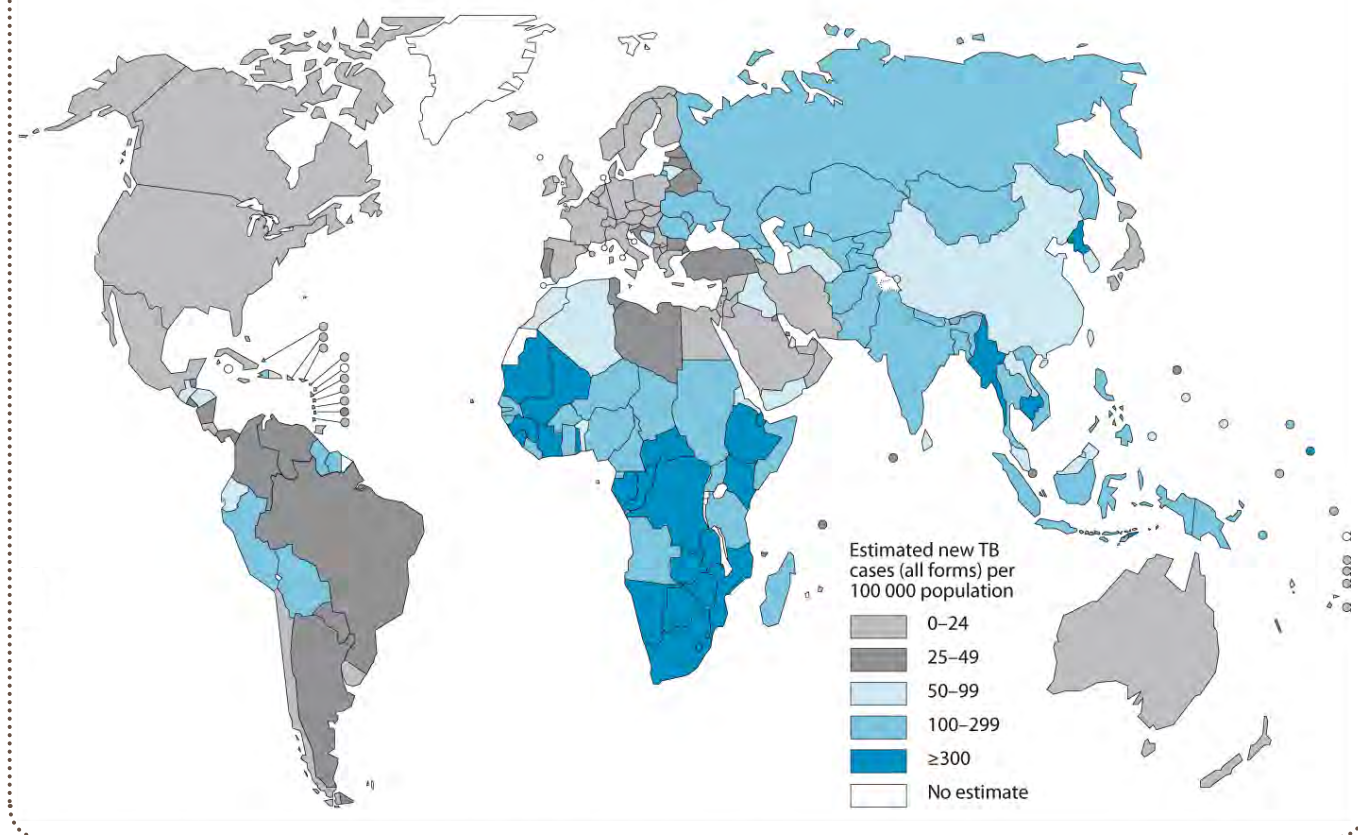
We met Catherine Nimuluwa, who is co-infected. She is an HIV/AIDS and TB counsellor working at the Chelstone Clinic in Lusaka. "I lost my husband to AIDS," she said. "I felt like it was the end of the world. I didn't want to be tested, but then all my family supported me."

When she discovered that she was infected with both diseases, she said she felt devastated. However, her family's unconditional love and support made her see the positive side of life. "I decided to go back to school and study counselling," she said with a big smile. "I'm HIV-positive with three children, and I still have another fifty years ahead of me." Catherine will run for Miss Stigma, a pageant aimed at dispelling the stigma surrounding co-infected people. As we listened to Catherine speak with confidence, we felt that

MADALITSO ZULU, 12, TARA GARG, 12, JIN KIM, 16, and INEZ DAWOODJE, 16 are students at the International School of Lusaka (http://www.islzambia.org), Zambia; and DENNIS KAYEBETA, 17, IWELL BANDA, 17, are students at the Ibex Hill School in Lusaka (www.ibexhillschool.com.zm).

ESTIMATED TUBERCULOSIS INCIDENCE RATES, BY COUNTRY, 2009

Estimated new TB
cases (all forms) per
100 000 population

- 0–24
- 25–49
- 50–99
- 100–299
- ≥300
- No estimate

she was the kind of person young people needed as a mentor at our school.

A peer educator at Matero Main Clinic in Lusaka revealed to us some problems seen recently in the treatment of TB, including drug-resistant strains, poor adherence to medical instruction by patients, and risky behaviours such as drinking excessive alcohol, smoking, and multiple sexual partners.

TB has also caused people to lose their jobs. Patients fear revealing to their employers that they have been infected. An interesting example was cited by an employee living in Linda neighbourhood. When he told his boss of his condition, he was told to go home and the next day the employee received a letter stating that he was fired. The employee told us that he was disturbed by this discrimination and felt stupid and useless.

We felt bad and very angry at the boss who fired the employee, especially since the Ministry of Health decided that all TB patients in Zambia should receive free treatment. From that day, we began to share our views about TB to students in our respective schools. We were saddened by this story but glad that the GreenContributor project is empowering students to identify problems in society and find solutions. We hope that people would not be afraid to reveal their TB condition, but instead be treated and cured.

Another patient told us that when he realized he had TB symptoms, he went to be tested because he knew that TB was curable. He took his medication and, after seven months, was cured. He told his wife about it and the whole family was very supportive.

We interviewed the Minister of Education, Dora Siliya. She said, "Education is key to help in reducing or eradicating diseases such as TB. This is why the government in trying to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by building 1,600 extra classrooms by 2015, which will take in over 500,000 more students."

This article is an effort by us to raise awareness and enlighten people on the effects of TB all around the world. We have seen that information is more widely available now than before, yet there is still some way to go. We would like to begin by sensitizing students in other schools. Thanks to GreenContributor, we have become the change agents in our communities. We now believe that every person, including students, can play a major role and impact our communities positively. **unc**

The meaning of
TOLERANCE
reflections of a Palestinian girl
and an Israeli boy

By SIREEN TUTUNJI *and* GEDALIA GILLIS

Sireen Tutunji and Gedalia Gillis are alumni of the Face to Face/Faith to Faith*, annual dialogue and leadership programme for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim youth, planned and implemented by the* Interreligious Coordinating Council *in Israel, in partnership with* Auburn Theological Seminary *in New York. Programme participants meet biweekly in East and West Jerusalem in order to foster positive relations and tolerance of "the other," and to develop dialogue and leadership skills. They also act together to benefit the Jewish and Palestinian communities in the city through volunteer work.*

Sireen is an eighteen-year-old Palestinian Muslim girl who graduated from Beit Safafa High School *in 2009 with high grades. After the second intifada—a period of heightened Israeli-Palestinian violence that began in late September 2000—her family moved from Ramallah to Jerusalem, as it had become very difficult to pass the check points each day on their way to school and work in Jerusalem. Sireen's uncle was one of the many victims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and his death has shaped her outlook on life. Although she lives in a relatively closed, conservative, and traditional community, both of her parents are open-minded educators who work and coexist with Jews in Israel. Sireen is preparing for her future academic studies. In addition to her participation in the* Face to Face/Faith to Faith *programme in 2008, she returned to the 2010 summer camp in New York to participate in the* Leader in Training *programme of the* Auburn Theological Seminary.

Gedalia is an eighteen-year-old Israeli Jewish boy. In 1994, his family immigrated to Israel from Australia for Zionist reasons. He belongs to an orthodox family that is open minded and accepts differences, but also has a clear view on education and values. Gedalia recently graduated from Hartman High School *in Jerusalem and is*

currently studying for a year at the Ma'aleh Gilboa Yeshiva *at the kibbutz of the same name. Afterwards, he will be drafted into the army. Although he does not currently reside in Jerusalem, he still considers it his home.*

Gedalia and Sireen did not have any interaction or dialogue with young people from the opposite side of the conflict prior to their participation in the programme. This is a typical situation, since Jewish and Palestinian youths, for the most part, attend separate schools and do not interact in their daily lives. Despite this, both of them chose to join the programme and engage in dialogue. We present an excerpt.

GEDALIA: I wanted to have the opportunity to talk and discuss things, not in order to reach an agreement but to reach an understanding while remaining true to my own ways and beliefs, and to achieve mutual harmony. I think the goal needs to be understanding and acceptance of the views and beliefs of others. In Israel, there are so many divisions and each group tends to judge the others and tries to prove its superiority. I felt it was a sign of maturity that I could make a decision that was right for me and true to who I am, with the belief that one can be religious and committed in different environments and frameworks. I decided to join the programme, mostly out of curiosity, to hear the other side's opinion without any media distortion.

SIREEN: I started to suffer from the Israeli occupation as every one of my people has, which has played a big part in shaping who I am. I joined the programme because I wanted to become a new person who can communicate with the other side that I had never spoken to but always saw as soldiers killing my people in Gaza and inspecting me at the checkpoints. I knew that I couldn't live my life without communicating with the other side.

Taking part in this programme was the hardest, yet most powerful, experience of my life. At first, things were difficult for me because I had never had the chance to sit down with the other side before. I knew deep down that both sides were suffering. Hearing each other's personal and collective stories made us learn and better understand the other. My uncle died, and his cousin died, too. We were able to learn how to respect the other's opinions, and how to share our stories and feelings with the others. We learned how to support each other, and how to listen carefully and reply cautiously without hurting anyone.

GEDALIA: Dialogue itself is a very complicated and sensitive thing. The dialogue group we belonged to did not make it easy for itself. We were not ashamed to address the core issues; as a result I learned that true dialogue is more than urging both sides to find mutual ground.

SIREEN: At first I couldn't sit in the dialogue group. Dialogue is a very complicated and sensitive thing. I felt so angry and couldn't discuss the conflicting issues with the people that I considered my enemies. But as a Palestinian girl living in Israel, I felt it was my responsibility to represent my culture, my language, and my family to the Israeli people both inside and outside of the programme. I participated to represent my people, my family, my uncle, and, of course, myself.

GEDALIA: Participating in this programme forced me to take responsibility for my words and actions. When a terrorist attack occurs, or I read some terrible headline in the news, I do not let stereotypical or hateful comments leave my mouth, even when I feel the hate roaring within me. The dialogue sessions made me understand that the world I live in forces me to mature early and become an active part of the solution to the conflict. Today, I stand up to any hateful comments that I hear around me, and am determined to be a positive example to those around me.

SIREEN: The Face to Face/Faith to Faith experience has influenced my whole life. I wanted to become another person, not in changing my ideas or my points of view, but in being able to discuss any subject with many different people, without hurting them. My friends didn't accept me after I participated in the programme. They thought that I would be a different person after sitting down and talking with Israelis. They were right—I had changed, but it was in the positive way that I had wanted. While my friends may not have been very understanding, my parents provided me with the support that I really needed to continue in the programme. When I would come home from the dialogue still upset, my parents would give me the encouragement that I needed. They also set an example for me through their coexistence and positive relationships with Jews in the workplace and in the community.

SIREEN and **GEDALIA:** The main problem in the Middle East is the lack of respect on both sides. We live in Jerusalem, a mixed city where Jews and Arabs live side-by-side. No peace treaty can prevent violence in our city. The only thing that can bring change is by educating our generation to respect one another. The only solution is dialogue. It was a turning point for us when we acknowledged that we can build a relationship with someone who is different than us without trying to erase our differences, but by accepting them. Accepting the differences led to respect and mutual understanding. We are not happy with the situation in our land, but we feel that we can make it more liveable in the future for ourselves, our families, the people, and the country.

For us, tolerance is listening to and respecting opinions that differ from our own. We have learned that we do not necessarily have to agree with everyone about everything; however, we must be civilized and tolerant of the other. This involves allowing the other to behave and believe in what they want, and to avoid labelling their different views as wrong or evil. Participating in this dialogue has taught us that it is possible not only to sit and speak with the other side, but to actually be able to call them our friends. The true goal of interfaith dialogue is to create a community that contains all kinds of people living together and sharing ideas and conversations. unc

In memory of Serguei Vinogradov, a *Chronicle* *Colleague*

On 16 December 2010, a dear friend and colleague Serguei Vinogradov passed away. His vibrant life was cut short by an insidious and harrowing disease that he fought until the bitter end. Quite simply, Serguei did not know the meaning of the words "to give up." He was always a winner, always able to find a way out of what seemed to be the most hopeless predicaments

First as a translator and then as a writer for the *UN Chronicle,* Serguei was guided by his heart and sense of duty. He found himself many times in critical situations where he had to exert all his unbending will and use the enormous skill and expertise that he acquired during his service to take extremely tough decisions. In this regard, his mission with the Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo was probably one of the most stressful times in his career. Serguei's impressions of that time are well portrayed in his novel covering that tough period in his life. Serguei was not just a highly-qualified translator and journalist, but also a talented writer, and then Chekhov was for him a paragon without equal. His own writing was like Chekhov's—easy to understand, appealing, and insightful.

Serguei actually wrote two novels and a number of short stories. Even while sick, he worked almost daily on stories and essays. He was also a talented musician and a great connoisseur of music. He composed and played his own songs, some of which—with a little help from his friends—are due to be released soon.

Serguei, our friend, may your memory be cherished! We love you, we are proud of you and all that you have accomplished! We shall keep you in our memory forever!

—*Friends*

Perhaps there has never been a generation of youth so acutely aware of the dangers threatening its future. Among an estimated world population of seven billion, youth make up 1.2 billion or 18 per cent. What do young people think about a world whose leadership they are about to inherit? To find out, the UN Chronicle invited them from around the globe to take over its pages for this special Youth Issue.