

The World Revolution

# Overview of Global Issues



# Peace, War & Conflict

## War & Conflict

Since the end of the Second World War in 1945 there have been over 250 major wars in which over 23 million people have been killed, tens of millions made homeless, and countless millions injured and bereaved.

In the history of warfare the twentieth century stands out as the bloodiest and most brutal - three times more people have been killed in wars in the last ninety years than in all the previous five hundred

War: An Overview, Peace Pledge Union

One year into the new millennium the world still wrestles with a welter of problems left over from the 20th century. There are still more than three dozen major active conflicts (those with over 1,000 casualties, both military and civilian) in the world.

Center for Defence Information, The Defence Monitor

In armed conflicts since 1945, 90 per cent of casualties have been civilians compared to 50 per cent in the Second World War and 10 per cent in the First.

New Internationalist - Issue 311 "Peace"

3 out of 4 fatalities of war are women and children.

UN World Food Programme, 1998.

War and internal conflicts in the 1990s forced 50 million people to flee their homes.

UNDP Human Development Report 2000

## Children and War

Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.

In the past decade, around 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict, three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, and countless others have been forced to witness or even to take part in horrifying acts of violence.

Graca Michel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, UNICEF

In the wars of the last decade, more children were killed than soldiers. Child victims of war include an estimated 2 million killed, 4 to 5 million disabled, 12 million left homeless, and more than 1 million orphaned.

UNICEF, *State of the World's Children*, 1995, p. 2.

## **Child Soldiers**

In dozens of countries around the world, children have become direct participants in war. Denied a childhood and often subjected to horrific violence, some 300,000 children are serving as soldiers in current armed conflicts. These young combatants participate in all aspects of contemporary warfare. They wield AK-47s and M-16s on the front lines of combat, serve as human mine detectors, participate in suicide missions, carry supplies, and act as spies, messengers or lookouts. Child soldiers are being used in more than thirty countries around the world. Because of their immaturity and lack of experience, child soldiers suffer higher casualties than their adult counterparts.

Human Rights Watch

While most child soldiers are aged between 15 and 18, many are recruited from the age of 10 and sometimes even younger.

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

## **Women and War**

During armed conflict, women and girls are continually threatened by rape, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual humiliation and mutilation. They are at heightened risk in all settings, whether at home, in flight or in camps for displaced people.

UNIFEM, *Women, Peace & Security*

## **Small Arms & Light Weapons**

More than 500 million small arms and light weapons are in circulation around the world – one for about every 12 people. They were the weapons of choice in 46 out of 49 major conflicts since 1990, causing four million deaths – about 90 per cent of them civilians, and 80 per cent women and children.

Human security is under increasing threat from the spread of small arms and light weapons and their illegal trade. They have devastated many societies and caused incalculable human suffering. They continue to pose an enormous

humanitarian challenge, particularly in internal conflicts where insurgent militias fight against government forces. In these conflicts, a high proportion of the casualties are civilians who are the deliberate targets of violence – a gross violation of international humanitarian law. This has led to millions of deaths and injuries, the displacement of populations, and suffering and insecurity around the world.

UN Conference Brochure - Illicit trade in Small Arms, 2001



## Nuclear Weapons

The threat of nuclear weapons has been a fact of life on earth for more than half of the 20th century. The size of nuclear arsenals worldwide peaked in the 1980s and remains at approximately 30,000 warheads today, including strategic and tactical weapons. The sophistication of the science and the political dependence on the doctrine of deterrence -- the threat of "mutually assured destruction" as a strategy for security -- have both increased steadily since 1945.

Despite the end of the Cold War, some 5,000 nuclear weapons are on hair-trigger alert, ready to be launched on a few minutes notice.

A typical modern 150-kiloton hydrogen bomb could cause somewhere between 736,000 and 8,660,000 deaths, depending on the population density of the target city.

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

## Nuclear Spending

Since 1940, the United States has spent almost \$5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programs. The amount spent through 1996 is 29 percent of all military spending from 1940 through 1996. This figure exceeds all other categories of government spending except nonnuclear national defense and social security.

Stephen Schwarz, Brookings Institution, Atomic Audit: 1940-1996.

## **Nuclear Testing**

Since 1945, there have been 2,046 tests worldwide, about one nuclear test every nine days for the last fifty-one years. Wherever nuclear weapons testing has occurred for whatever reasons there have been environmental problems. Radioactivity has leaked into the environment from underground nuclear tests, large areas of land are uninhabitable as a result of atmospheric and underground nuclear testing, and indigenous people, their children and their children's children's health and livelihoods have been affected by nuclear weapons tests.

Greenpeace

## **Military Spending**

Current global military spending has reached \$781 billion annually; more than the total income of the poorest 45% of the global population.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Report, The State of the World's Children, 1999. World Bank, World Development Indicators, 1998.

49% of all federal tax revenues go towards current or past military costs.

Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1999.

## **Landmines**

The global landmine crisis is one of the most pervasive problems facing the world today. It is estimated that there are between 60 and 70 million landmines in the ground in at least 70 countries. Landmines maim or kill approximately 26,000 civilians every year, including 8,000 to 10,000 children. Those victims that survive endure a lifetime of physical, psychological, and economic hardship. At least 75% of landmine victims are civilians.

Adopt-a-Minefield ([www.landmines.org](http://www.landmines.org))

# **Human Rights & Social Justice**

Children

Children suffer many of the same human rights abuses as adults, but may also be targeted simply because they are dependent and vulnerable. Children are tortured and mistreated by state officials; they are detained, lawfully or arbitrarily, often in appalling conditions; in some countries they are subjected to the death penalty. Countless thousands are killed or maimed in armed conflicts; many more have fled their homes to become refugees. Children forced by poverty or abuse to live on the streets are sometimes detained, attacked and even killed in the name of social cleansing. Many millions of children work at exploitative or hazardous jobs, or are the victims of child trafficking and forced prostitution. Because children are "easy targets", they are sometimes threatened, beaten or raped in order to punish family members who are not so accessible.

Amnesty International Report - Children: The Future Starts Here

## **Child Labor**

At least 250 million children between the ages of five and 14 are working in developing countries. Approximately 120 million of these children work full time, and tens of millions of these work under exploitative and harmful conditions.

Many of the world's working children labor in occupations and industries that are dangerous or hazardous. In agriculture, large numbers of children are exposed to harmful pesticides during their formative years. Others work in occupations and industries--including mining, construction, manufacturing, and services--in which they are exposed to toxic and carcinogenic substances. Working children often perform tasks that are beyond their physical capacity, such as lifting and carrying heavy loads or handling dangerous tools and equipment. Work hazards affect children to a greater degree than adults, in some cases causing irreversible harm to their future development.

U.S. Department of Labor, *By the Sweat and Toil of Children*

## **Children and Armed Conflict**

Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.

Graca Michel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, UNICEF

## **Women**

### **Women and Poverty**

Millions of women in developing countries live in poverty. The feminization of poverty is a growing phenomenon. Women are still the poorest of the world's poor, representing 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. When nearly 900 million women have incomes of less than \$1 a day, the association between gender inequality and poverty remains a harrowing reality.

UNIFEM, Strengthening Women's Economic Capacity

Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, and yet earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.

World Development Indicators, 1997, Womankind Worldwide

## **Women and Armed Conflict**

During armed conflict, women and girls are continually threatened by rape, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual humiliation and mutilation. They are at heightened risk in all settings, whether at home, in flight or in camps for displaced people.

Approximately 80 per cent of people displaced by conflict or human rights violations are women and children. Displacement, internally or across borders, is disruptive and dangerous. It deprives women of the security of their community and exposes them to hunger, disease, violence and sexual assault.

UNIFEM, Women, Peace & Security

## **Violence Against Women**

Violence against women and girls is a major health and human rights concern. Between 10% and 50% of women report they have been physically abused by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Between 12 and 25% of women have experienced attempted or completed forced sex by an intimate partner or ex-partner at some time in their lives. Forced prostitution, trafficking for sex and sex tourism appear to be growing. Studies on the trafficking of women and children estimated 500,000 women entering the European Union in 1995.

WHO Fact Sheet, Violence Against Women

Worldwide, a quarter of all women are raped during their lifetime. Depending on the country, 25 to 75 percent of women are regularly beaten at home. Over 120 million women have undergone female genital mutilation. Rape has devastated women, girls and families in recent conflicts in Rwanda, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia, Uganda and the former Yugoslavia.

UNIFEM Press Release, 1999

## **Women and Decision-Making**

Women hold only 12% of parliamentary seats worldwide. In the least developed countries it can be as low as 8.5%.

Equality In Practice, DFID Report, 2000, Womankind Worldwide

Women hold only 1% of executive positions in the world's biggest international corporations.

Focus on Women, UN, 1995, Womankind Worldwide

## **Women and Education**

There are 876 million illiterate people in the world - two thirds of them are women. This figure is not expected to decrease significantly in the next 20 years. Two thirds of school-age children in the developing world without access to education are girls.

World's Women 2000, UN, Womankind Worldwide

## **Refugees**

Today, no continent, and barely any country, in the world is untouched by the global refugee crisis. At the beginning of 2000 an estimated 14 million people were living as refugees, uprooted from their homes and forced to cross an international border.

Huge though they are, the global refugee numbers hide an even greater displacement crisis: that of the internally displaced, those people who are forced to flee their homes, often for the very same reasons as refugees - war, civil conflict, political strife, and gross human rights abuse - but who remain within their own country, do not cross an international border, and hence are not eligible for protection under the same international system as refugees. There are an estimated 30 million internally displaced persons in the world - the number may be even higher.

Human Rights Watch

## **Labor Rights**

### **Bonded Labor**

Bonded labour - or debt bondage - is probably the least known form of slavery today, and yet it is the most widely used method of enslaving people. A person becomes a bonded labourer when his or her labour is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan. It is estimated that some 20 million people are held in bonded labour around the world. Bonded labourers are routinely threatened with and subjected to physical and sexual violence. They are kept under various forms of surveillance, in some cases by armed guards.



## Sweatshops

A sweatshop is a workplace where workers are subject to extreme exploitation, including the absence of a living wage or benefits, poor working conditions, and arbitrary discipline, such as verbal and physical abuse. Sweatshops are continuously being discovered all over the world. In the U.S., these conditions exist in many low wage industries that employ immigrants, such as the garment industry.

Sweatshop Watch

## Child Labor

At least 250 million children between the ages of five and 14 are working in developing countries. Approximately 120 million of these children work full time, and tens of millions of these work under exploitative and harmful conditions.

# Environment & Nature

## Forests

Half of the forests that originally covered 46% of the Earth's land surface are gone. Only one-fifth of the Earth's original forests remain pristine and undisturbed.

In North America, 56% of the coastal temperate rainforests, once extending from California to Alaska, have been destroyed.

Latin American Forests are being lost at alarming rates. The rate of forest loss in Mexico is estimated at 600,000 to 2.5 million acres per year. The lush forests that blanketed half of Panama at mid-century may cover only 10% of the country by the year 2000.

Natural Resources Defense Council (? / RAN)

Forests cover about a quarter of the world's land surface, excluding Greenland and Antarctica. Global forest cover has been reduced by 20 percent since pre-agricultural times, and possibly as much as 50 percent. Forest area

has increased slightly since 1980 in industrial countries, but has declined by almost 10 percent in developing countries. Tropical deforestation probably exceeds 130,000 square kilometers a year. Less than 40 percent of forests globally are relatively undisturbed by human action.

World Resources Institute

## Rainforests

Rainforests cover 2% of the Earth's surface, or 6% of its land mass, yet they house over half the plant and animal species on Earth. They originally covered at least twice that area. Rainforests are being destroyed at a staggering rate. According to the National Academy of Science, at least 50 million acres a year are lost, an area the size of England, Wales and Scotland combined.

Despite the small land area they cover, rainforests are home to about half of the 5 to 10 million plant and animal species on the globe. Rainforests also support 90,000 of the 250,000 identified plant species.

Rainforest Action Network

## Global Warming & Climate Change

If present rates of emissions of carbon dioxide continue, the Earth will experience a 1C (1.8F) warming by 2030 at the latest, and a 3C (5.4F) increase in temperature before the end of the next century. This amounts to a warming rate 10 to 100 times more rapid than the fastest warming period in the last 10,000 years. Global warming would have tremendous consequences including:

Widespread extinction of plant and animal species.

Sea level rise and coastal flooding. By 2050, the sea level will rise approximately 1.5 meters, flooding low lying areas. With as much as 50 percent of the world's population settled in coastal communities, it is estimated that by this time 150 million people will be driven from their homes and become environmental refugees. They would all irreversibly lose their land and homes.

Adverse impact on agriculture.

Increases in severe storms such as hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons.

Rainforest Action Network

The ten warmest years have occurred since 1983, with seven of them since 1990. Recent evidence shows the 20th century was the warmest in the last 1,000 years. The 1990s were the warmest decade and 1998 was the single warmest year of the past millennium.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Scientists predict that continued global warming on the order of 2.5-10.4 degrees Fahrenheit over the next 100 years is likely to result in: a rise in sea level between 3.5 and 34.6 in. leading to more coastal erosion, flooding during storms and permanent inundation; severe stress on many forests, wetlands, alpine regions, and other natural ecosystems; greater threats to human health as mosquitoes and other disease-carrying insects and rodents spread diseases over larger geographical regions; disruption of agriculture in some parts of the world due to increased temperature, water stress and sea-level rise in low-lying areas such as Bangladesh or the Mississippi River delta.

Union of Concerned Scientists

## Biodiversity & Species Extinction

Biological Diversity -- or "biodiversity" -- is the totality of genes, species, and ecosystems in a region.

World Resources Institute

The Earth's species are dying out at an alarming rate, up to 1000 times faster than their natural rate of extinction. Some scientists estimate that as many as 137 species disappear from the Earth each day, which adds up to an astounding 50,000 species disappearing every year.

Rainforest Action Network

Species have been disappearing at 50-100 times the natural rate, and this is predicted to rise dramatically. Based on current trends, an estimated 34,000 plant and 5,200 animal species - including one in eight of the world's bird species - face extinction.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The best estimates are that between 10 and 20 percent of all species will be driven to extinction in the next 20 to 50 years. The current and impending rate of human-caused extinctions is conservatively estimated to be 100 to 1,000 times the background extinction rate.

More than 2,000 species of birds (20 to 25 percent of the world's total) have become extinct through human action in the past two thousand years. In the past four hundred years, we have recorded extinctions of 484 species of animals (including 163 species of birds and mammals) and 654 species of plants. Almost all of these extinctions are known to have been caused by human actions.

Union of Concerned Scientists

Biodiversity is degraded and lost through such activities as the large-scale clearing and burning of forests, overharvesting of plants and animals, indiscriminate use of pesticides, draining and filling of wetlands, destructive

fishing practices, air pollution, and the conversion of wildlands to agricultural and urban uses.

World Resources Institute

## Oceans & Marine Ecosystems

We are in the midst of a global marine crisis. Earth's coastal and marine resources, and the ecosystems upon which they depend, are showing signs of collapse.

World Resources Institute

The ocean covers 71 percent of the surface of our world and plays a vital role in maintaining biodiversity, regulating climate and weather patterns, and providing food and jobs for millions of people worldwide.

As a result of destructive human activity, however, the health of our oceans and the life they support is in jeopardy. Commercial whaling much reduced from its former scale but still in existence, has severely depleted whale populations worldwide, driving some to the brink of extinction. Fish stocks are plummeting in virtually every ocean and sea. Seabirds, hundreds of thousands of sea turtles and marine mammals are entangled and drowned by irresponsible fishing practices every year.

Greenpeace USA

## Coral Reefs

Covering less than 0.2% of the ocean floor, coral reefs contain perhaps 1/4 of all marine species.

Coral reefs are among the most endangered ecosystems on earth. Coral reefs in 93 of the 109 countries containing them have been damaged or destroyed by human activities. In addition, human impacts may have directly or indirectly caused the death of 5-10% of the world's living reefs, and if the pace of destruction is maintained, another 60% could be lost in the next 20-40 years.

Environmental Defense Fund

## Freshwater Systems

Freshwater systems encompass a wide range of habitats, including rivers, lakes, and wetlands. Humans also rely heavily on groundwater, which is the only source of freshwater in some parts of the world.

The world's freshwater systems are so degraded that its ability to support human, plant and animal life is greatly in peril. As a result, many freshwater species are facing rapid population decline or extinction, and an increasing number of people will face serious water shortages.

By 2025, at least 3.5 billion people or nearly 50 percent of the world's population will face water scarcity.

More than 20 percent of the world's known 10,000 freshwater fish species have become extinct, been threatened, or endangered in recent decades.

World Resources Institute

## **Coastal Ecosystems**

Forty percent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometers of a coastline, an area that accounts for only about 20 percent of the land mass. Population increase and conversion for development, agriculture, and aquaculture are reducing mangroves, coastal wetlands, seagrass areas, and coral reefs at an alarming rate. Fish and shellfish provide about a sixth of the animal protein consumed by people worldwide. A billion people, mostly in developing countries, depend on fish for their prime source of protein. Coastal ecosystems have already lost much of their capacity to produce fish because of overfishing, destructive trawling techniques, and destruction of nursery habitats.

World Resources Institute

## **Overfishing**

World fisheries face a grim forecast. Forty-five years of increasing fishing pressure have left many major fish stocks depleted or in decline.

Sixty percent of the world's important fish stocks are "in urgent need of management" to rehabilitate them or keep them from being overfished. Furthermore:

35 percent of the most important commercial fish stocks show a pattern of declining yields and require immediate action to halt overharvesting.

Another 25 percent show steady yields but are being fished at their biological limit and are vulnerable to declines if fishing levels increase.

The harvest of overexploited fish stocks has dropped 40 percent in only 9 years.

World Resources Institute, Resources at Risk

## **Wilderness & Land**

## **Desertification**

Desertification threatens nearly one quarter of the land surface of the globe. The environmental impacts of desertification include a reduction in crop yields, a loss of plants and a deterioration in the quality of plant foodstuffs available to humans and animals.

The Guardian newspaper, Desertification special report, The Arid Expansion

Desertification is the degradation of drylands. It involves the loss of biological or economic productivity and complexity in croplands, pastures, and woodlands. It is due mainly to climate variability and unsustainable human activities. Seventy percent of the world's drylands are degraded.

Desertification is considered a major global environmental issue largely because of the link between dryland degradation and food production. If desertification is not stopped and reversed, food yields in many affected areas will decline. Malnutrition, starvation, and ultimately famine may result.

United Nations Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification

## **Wildlife**

Thousands of species of plants and animals are under increasing threat. Every day, added pressures such as loss of habitat, illegal trade, over-hunting, pollution, and the effects of climate change and economic development take their toll on the world's wildlife.

Some 34,000 plant species, or 12.5 per cent of the world's flora, are under threat. Giant pandas have lost half their habitat in the past few decades. The world lost more than 90 per cent of its tiger population in the 20th century: only about 5,000 remain. In the Pacific, leatherback turtles face extinction. Javan and northern white rhinos are the most threatened large mammals on Earth: only a few dozen remain.

World Wide Fund for Nature, Species Program

## **Wildlife Trade**

The international trade in wildlife is big business, estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and to involve more than 350 million plants and animals every year. Along with the loss of habitat and increased local exploitation of wildlife resources, unregulated international trade can pose a major threat to the survival of threatened and endangered species.

TRAFFIC, WWF / IUCN

## **Energy**

Global energy use has risen nearly 70 percent since 1971 and is poised to continue its steady increase over the next several decades, fueled by economic expansion and development.

Along with rising energy use comes a concomitant increase in greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels and an anticipated increase in global warming. Fossil fuels supply roughly 90 percent of the world's commercial energy; energy-related emissions account for more than 80 percent of the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) released into the atmosphere each year. By 2010, IEA projects that global energy consumption -- and annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions -- will have risen by almost 50 percent from 1993 levels.

World Resources Institute

## Urban Growth

The world's urban population is currently growing at four times the rate of the rural population. Between 1990 and 2025, the number of people living in urban areas is projected to double to more than 5 billion; if it does, then almost two thirds of the world's population will be living in towns and cities. An estimated 90 percent of the increase will occur in developing countries.

The current pace and scale of change -- over 60 million people are added to urban populations each year -- often strain the capacity of local and national governments to provide even the most basic services to urban residents. An estimated 25 to 50 percent of urban inhabitants in developing countries live in impoverished slums and squatter settlements, with little or no access to adequate water, sanitation, or refuse collection. In such situations, both environmental quality and human health and well-being are at risk.

World Resources Institute

## Transportation

Transportation of all types already accounts for more than one quarter of the world's commercial energy use. Vehicles are major sources of urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, the transport sector consumes about one half of the world's oil production, the bulk of it as motor fuel.

In 1950, there were only 70 million cars, trucks, and buses on the world's roads. By 1994, there were about nine times that number, or 630 million. If this kind of linear growth continues, by the year 2025 there will be well over 1 billion vehicles on the world's roads

In China there are only about 8 vehicles per 1,000 persons, and in India, only 7 per 1,000 persons; by contrast, there are about 750 motor vehicles per 1,000 persons in the United States

In developing countries, the growing use of internal combustion vehicles, especially in urban areas, will increase congestion, raise the demand for oil, worsen air pollution, and increase emissions of a variety of greenhouse gases, including methane, ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and, most important, CO<sub>2</sub>.

Worldwide, motor vehicle emissions account for more than 15 percent of global fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> releases. Because of their large vehicle fleets, developed countries are responsible for a commensurately large share of emissions. In 1993, developed countries accounted for about two thirds of total world CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from motor vehicles, although these countries represented only 16 percent of the world's population.

World Resources Institute

Notes: Acid Rain, Ozone Depletion, Consumption, Toxics, Pollution, Waste

## Poverty, Inequality and Economic Development

### Poverty

Although poverty has been dramatically reduced in many parts of the world, a quarter of the world's people remain in severe poverty. In a global economy of \$25 trillion, this is a scandal - reflecting shameful inequalities and inexcusable failures of national and international policy.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1997](#)

Half the world's people live on less than \$2 a day.

[World Bank, "Global Poverty Measures 1987-1998 and Projections for the Future," 1999.](#)

1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 per day.

[World Bank, "Global Poverty Measures 1987-1998 and Projections for the Future," 1999.](#)

Together, South Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific have more than 950 million of the 1.3 billion people who are income-poor.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1997](#)



## Women and Poverty

Millions of women in developing countries live in poverty. The feminization of poverty is a growing phenomenon. Women are still the poorest of the world's poor, representing 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. When nearly 900 million women have incomes of less than \$1 a day, the association between gender inequality and poverty remains a harrowing reality.

UNIFEM, Strengthening Women's Economic Capacity

Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, and yet earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.

World Development Indicators, 1997, Womankind Worldwide

## Education

Today, there are still 125 million children who never attend school. Another 150 million children of primary age start school, but drop out before they can read or write. Sixteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa (with almost half of Africa's 6-11 year-olds) have suffered a decline in enrolment rates. Today, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for one-third of the total out-of-school population. On current trends, it will account for three-quarters of the total in 2015.

One in four adults in the developing world – 872 million people – is illiterate, and the numbers are growing.

Global inequalities in the provision of education are enormous. Today, a child in Mozambique can expect to go to school for two to three years, with luck. A five-year-old European or North American child can expect to spend 17 years in formal education.

Girls account for two-thirds of the children not in school. Despite government commitments to close the gender gap, it is widening in many countries. For example, Ethiopia has one of the lowest rates of enrolment in the world, and one of the largest gender gaps. Fewer than one-third of 6-11 year old boys and one-tenth of girls are in school. In many schools in the developing world, the treatment of girls is tantamount to a system of apartheid.

Oxfam UK - Education Now Campaign- the issues

## Debt Crisis

The debt burden is the biggest single barrier to development in the Third World, the most powerful tool that western nations use to keep whole countries in bondage.

It is estimated that the Third World pays the developed North nine times more in debt repayments than they receive in aid. Africa alone spends four times more on repaying its debts than it spends on health care.

[DebtChannel.org - OneWorld.net - Beginner's guide to debt](#)

Structural Adjustment Programs, or SAPs, have particularly affected the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, whose economies are already the poorest in the world.

SAPs consist of measures designed to help a country repay its debts by earning more hard currency - increasing exports and decreasing imports. In a few countries SAPs appear to have had some good effect; in most they have worsened the economic situation. In all countries applying SAPs, the poor have been hit the hardest.

[Jubilee USA Network - A Beginner's Guide to the Debt Crisis](#)

In 1997 the foreign debts of 'developing' countries were more than two trillion (million million) US dollars and still growing. The result is a debt of \$400 for every man, woman and child in the developing world - where average income in the very poorest countries is less than a dollar a day.

[New Internationalist - Issue 312 "Debt"](#)

## Inequality

"The assets of the 200 richest people in 1998 were more than the total annual income of 41% of the world's people.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1999](#)

Three families - Bill Gates, the Sultan of Brunei and the Walton family - have a combined wealth of some \$135 billion. Their value equal the annual income of 600 million people living in the world's poorest countries.

[World Development Movement. WDM in Action, Winter 1999. Rebecca McQuillan \(article\)](#)

## Global Inequality - Inequality between countries

The richest 20% of the world population now receives 150 times the income of the poorest 20%.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1992](#)

The richest one-fifth of the world:

- Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%.
- Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%.
- Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%.
- Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%.
- Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1998](#)

The richest 20% of the population now receives 150 times the income of the poorest 20%.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1992](#)

The bottom line for poverty and incomes: The share of the poorest 20% of the world's people in global income now stands at a miserable 1.1%, down from 1.4% in 1991 and 2.3% in 1960. It continues to shrink. And the ratio of the income of the top 20% to that of the poorest 20% rose from 30 to 1 in 1960, to 61 to 1 in 1991 - and to a startling new high of 78 to 1 in 1994.

[UNDP Human Development Report 1997](#)

The income gap between the richest fifth of the world's people and the poorest fifth, measured by average national income per head, increased from 30 to one in 1960, to 74 to one in 1997.

[Human Development Report, United Nations Development Program, 1999.](#)

## **Inequality within countries**

Within nations, the income gap has been growing as well. Russia now has the world's greatest inequality, with the richest 20% having 11 times the income of the bottom 20%. Income inequalities have also grown dramatically in China, Indonesia, Thailand, other East and South-East Asian countries, and in the industrialized countries, especially Sweden, Britain, and the United States.

["The State of the World," Stephen R. Shalom](#)

The richest 1 percent of Americans earned as much after taxes as the poorest 100 million; in 1977 the top 1 percent only (!) had as much as the bottom 49 million. The poorest 20 percent are making less today in real terms (adjusting for inflation) than they were in 1977.

["The State of the World," Stephen R. Shalom](#), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

## **Food & Hunger**

826 million people remained undernourished in 1996-98

[UN Food and Agriculture Organization - State of Food Insecurity in the World 2000](#)

Hunger continues to plague an estimated 793 million people around the world, including 31 million in the U.S. Hunger kills. Every day, 24,000 people die from hunger and other preventable causes. Nearly 160 million children are malnourished worldwide.

Oxfam America - Hunger Fact Sheet

Almost 800 million people – about one-sixth of the population of the world's developing nations – are malnourished. 200 million of them are children.

Bread for the World (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

## Health

880 million people lack access to basic healthcare, and 1.3 billion lack access to safe drinking water. 17 million people die each year from curable diseases, including diarrhea, malaria and tuberculosis. 5 million of these people die due to water contamination.

Oxfam America - Fact Sheet

Each day in the developing world, 30,500 children die from preventable diseases such as diarrhea, acute respiratory infections or malaria. Malnutrition is associated with over half of those deaths.

Bread for the World (UNICEF, World Health Organization)