

Outside of these situations, however, our first response to poverty should be to ask *why* it exists. Conventional answers to this question – climatic conditions, poor soil, cultural factors, overpopulation, religious taboos, etc., provide no more than partial answers at best, and at worst are examples of "blaming the victim".

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist." (Dom Helder Camara)

Poverty today is widely recognized as being the result of injustice. The injustice that causes poverty exists at two levels. First of all, it exists within the poor countries themselves, where small and powerful elites, often linked with military and industrial power centers, effectively run the country, ensuring that the economy is geared to maintaining this group in their position of power. Often this means ignoring or even suppressing the rights of people to satisfy their basic needs for clothing, food and shelter, as well as less immediate needs, such as the need for adequate education and health care and the need to participate in the public affairs of their community.

The other level at which this injustice exists is at the international level. The exploitative pattern of colonial times, which set up the poor countries as sources of cheap labor, cheap natural resources and cheap land, is maintained largely by the operation of giant multinational corporations.

The situation enables us in the developed world to live comfortably at the expense of people in poor countries. For example, we can only enjoy a cup of tea at a reasonable price in Australia because the people who pick the tea in Sri Lanka are paid miserable wages and suffer from poor working conditions.

The minimum wage for tea-pickers, in Sri Lanka, is 28 rupees for men and 24 rupees for women, per day.

Two kilos of rice cost 20 rupees and would feed a family of six for one day.

This analysis of poverty, which sees it as being primarily the result of injustice built into social, economic and political systems, shapes our response to poverty.

When we speak of *development* in this context, what we are talking about is the development or growth of human beings. We are not talking about the provision of physical or social infrastructure – roads, bridges, water supply, education or social services – however necessary and helpful these may be. We are talking about enabling people to achieve their full potential – to become all that they are capable of becoming.

"The goal of development should not be to develop things, but to develop people." (Cocoyoc Declaration)

7. Discuss the process of development/liberation and of oppression portrayed in the film. Do you see any examples of this process at work in your own lives, in our society?
8. This cat's "conscience" expressed the issues in the mindset and language of a western cat. How do you think a person from West Ugamindanamadeshania would express it?
9. What are the differences between government and private aid – which do you think is more beneficial?
10. The mouse in the film mentioned that food aid sometimes contributed to the problems rather than solving them. What are his reasons?
11. Is building modern hospitals the best way to provide health care in Third world countries? Give reasons for your answers.
12. The cat is obviously going through an internal struggle – in what ways, do you think? What do you do with your own internal struggles with issues of this type?
13. Can you give some examples of ways in which poor people can alleviate their poverty by being better organized?
14. "I'm thinking about you cats" is the last sentence in the film. What did the cat mean?

Justice Issues

Poverty in the world today is not only widespread, but growing – the gap between rich and poor is greater than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

In 1950, the average worker in a low income country earned \$164 a year, while his counterpart in an industrialized country earned \$3,841. The latter's income was 23 times that of the former.

In 1985, however, the equivalent figures were \$260 and \$11,430, and the worker in the industrialized country was 43 times better off.

Average incomes therefore increased by 58% in the low income countries over the 33 years, but they increased by 204% in the developed countries.

The traditional approach to this situation has been to assist people who are affected by poverty – to help them to cope with their poverty, without asking probing questions about how they came to be poor in the first place, and about why they remain poor.

Increasingly today, this is seen as an inadequate approach. Of course, there are situations of extreme hardship, such as natural or man-made disasters, where the urgency of the need overrides all other considerations, and immediate assistance is called for, as is the situation in many parts of Africa today.