time for revision
Louis de Bernières goes back to school in post-conflict Nepal
Educational Special Report

Education, the facts

Rocky road ahead

Bestselling novelist Louis de Bernières on how schools are faring in Nepal following years of destructive civil war.

A new Nepal?

Gareth Thomas, Under Secretary of State for International Development on his visit to post-conflict Nepal.

Education beyond borders

Gordon Brown pledges support for education in the wake of violence.

Joined up schooling

Ground-breaking partnership between schools in Uganda and the UK.

“We will do for education what the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières achieve for health.”

Gordon Brown

Front cover: 11-year-old Bhawana Bista in Nepal, doing her homework. This page: A young girl plays on a swing in a village near Kathmandu.

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Global news

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Education, Education, Education was the mantra of the UK's incoming government in 1997. A decade later, as a new Labour Prime Minister takes office, education in the developing world is taking centre stage. Gordon Brown recently outlined a vision in which “we will do for education what the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières achieve for health, and seek to provide education not just in places of comfort and peace but everywhere in the world – behind frontiers in conflict zones and fragile states.”

In this issue of Developments, Louis de Bernières, the novelist who found fame with his Captain Corelli’s Mandolin, describes his own first-hand experience of education in a post-conflict country following his recent visit to Nepal. We also highlight the educational benefits of the rising numbers of school links. In the Masindi district of Uganda, for example, results have leapt in recent years, explained in part by their partnerships with pupils and teachers in UK schools. At the same time, members of schools in the North have been hugely enriched by the experience.

While brickbats tend to match plaudits following the annual G8 summits, the recent meeting in Germany saw another major funding boost for the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative, designed to accelerate funding for universal primary education. The world is making progress on education. According to the recent Global Monitoring Report the number of primary aged children not enrolled in school fell from 98 million in 1999 to 77 million in 2004.

Microfinance, another vital tool in liberating poor communities, received a welcome shot of publicity with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Prof Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank. “I have always maintained that poverty was not created by the poor,” he explains in our feature on page 28, “but by society’s institutions that became a ‘disabling environment’ for them.” Microcredit is is also central in what Prodeepta Das on page 31 calls “the silent revolution of women’s self-help groups” in India.

When you’ve read the articles, why not make your views known to other readers? Check out our relaunched website where you can join the development debate.

Martin Wroe and Malcolm Doney

“Before we formed our self-help group, we were cheated by the shopkeeper.”
An extra year of education for African girls can increase their eventual wages by 10-20%.

In Africa, children whose mothers receive five years of primary education are 40% more likely to live beyond the age of five.

The number of out-of-school children in India (6-10 years) decreased by almost 6 million between 2001 and 2003.

57% of the 77 million out of school children are girls.

To reach the goal of full access to primary education, 1.6 million teachers need to be hired in Africa alone.

100 countries now have equal numbers of boys and girls in primary schools, and another 18 are on track to achieve gender parity by 2015.

Every minute an extra 13 children were enrolled in primary education globally between 1991 and 2004.

If the world is to meet the UN target of getting all children into primary school by 2015, then it has to make the sums add up. That means rich countries providing up to $11 billion of new aid every year for a decade. It’s not rocket science. It’s education. And it works.

Abolishing school fees for parents in Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya has helped more than 1,000,000 extra children to enrol in primary school, in each country.

In Yemen nearly 200,000 more girls started school in 2004 than in 2002.

Between 2000 and 2004 Niger enrolled 400,000 new pupils and recruited more than 10,000 new teachers.

In 1999, over 1,000,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa lost their teachers to AIDS.

At the current rate of progress, at least 75 countries mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, will not achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015.

There are 94 girls in primary school for every 100 boys, up from 92 in 1999.

38 million children do not go to school in Africa.

Around 1 in 3 of children not in school live in ‘fragile states’ (where the government is either unwilling or unable to deliver services). Many of these states are affected by conflict.

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rocky road ahead
Nepal is one of our fantasy countries. It gets described as a ‘remote Himalayan kingdom,’ although no country is remote to those that inhabit it.

It is certainly a country that has been poleaxed by civil war, and is beset by inequalities. There are women who are born into the ‘badi’ caste of prostitutes, and a high proportion of the population belong to the caste of ‘dalits’, traditionally called ‘untouchables’ in English. For most of them life is a constant and impossible struggle against disadvantage and prejudice.

I visited a tiny Dalit village (Chihan Dada) on a mountainside at Janachetana, and a young dark-skinned woman clutching a baby to her chest told me that being a Dalit is like being subjected to continuous violence, even though no-one is actually striking you.

You don’t get revolutions where most people have a genuine hope of improvement and too much to lose, and it was easy for the Maoists to recruit Dalits. It seems extraordinary that there are still any Maoists anywhere. The Shining Path in Peru has gone, and the Chinese themselves have very conspicuously exchanged Maoism for state capitalism. I was fortunate to have my perplexity dissolved by talking to two Maoist officials, in the garden of a hotel in Baglung. They were fluent in Maoist jargon, but neither of them had the mad glint of fanaticism in their eyes. You can talk about ‘base and superstructure’ and perpetual revolution and imperialism, but it seemed clear to me that what they want isn’t a Maoist hell, but a normal multi-party democracy.

They accept globalisation as an inevitability, and they want a mixed economy. They want a proper constituent assembly, a free press, and a free compulsory, secular state education system that recognises and promotes the equality of Dalits and women. They want, as far as possible, for early education to be in the children’s native languages. All that seems to remain of Maoism as it was, is a kind of ‘no drinking, no fun’ puritanism, control freakery, and a suspect personality cult of one of their leaders, who calls himself Prachanda. The odd thing is that, now that the fighting has stopped and Maoists have been incorporated into the government pending elections, an awful lot of non-Maoists are finding that they can share some of Prachanda’s ambitions for Nepal. The communists stopped fighting just in time. Whilst their military tactics had

Best-selling novelist Louis de Bernières reports on how schools are faring in Nepal following years of destructive civil war. Pictures, Ben Hewitt/Save the Children.
been very successful (and classically Maoist) they had been making the classic communist mistakes, which became very obvious to everyone as soon they penetrated the Kathmandu valley. Quite apart from their incomprehensibly stupid and wanton destruction of the infrastructure, which had set the country’s development back by fifty years, they had alienated a very substantial proportion of the population by means of compulsory mass mobilisation and revolutionary terror. In telling the stories about this, one has to bear in mind that the police and the army were doing very similar things.

The Education Journalists Group has collected statistics detailing region by region the arrest, abduction, torture and disappearance of teachers. It is a very varied picture, and both sides are almost equally to blame, but the field in which the communists particularly shone was that of disappearance, and there are still 165 teachers missing. One can only presume that they are dead.

Sita is an internally displaced person. She lives with her four children in a tiny house by the river in Beni. It has a mud floor, no windows, and a tin roof held in place with rocks and old tyres. Like so many other Nepalis, her husband works in India, and the money arrives very erratically, sometimes not for a year at a time. At the back of the house she has a dusty little plot where she grows maize, courgettes, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, fava beans, and nasturtiums. She fled her village near Myagdi (Magdi) because she had become frightened of seeing the dead people and exhausted soldiers. The Maoists had been making her cook for them, and had been demanding a ‘tax’ of 5000 rupees, not least because her...
Nepal is emerging from 11 years of civil conflict, during which time the army and Maoist insurgency cost 13,000 lives. Just last year Nepal was under autocratic rule by the King, only to be dislodged by the people’s protest, which shook off ties to its feudal past. Now, the recently formed interim government has pledged to build a New Nepal founded upon political dialogue, cross-party consensus and greater inclusion for all the people.

Significantly, even during the most acrimonious and bloody periods of the conflict in Nepal, discussion channels with the Maoists were kept open with the hope of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Patient and persistent dialogue has paid off, and, a year in the making, the interim government sees ministries and responsibilities shared out between old adversaries – including for the first time, the Maoists.

On my recent visit to Nepal I was the first overseas Minister to meet with the Maoists since the end of the conflict. I welcomed their inclusion in the interim government but emphasised that they must refrain from intimidation tactics and violence during the elections and respect the peace agreement.

Continuing dialogue with the Maoists throughout the conflict meant that UK aid programmes could continue, and so, despite the conflict, levels of development in the country are still improving. For example, I visited a community forestry project which has reversed the damaging impact of deforestation and has particularly benefited women and other excluded groups. Nepal is an ethnically diverse country with a huge inequality of opportunity between urban and rural dwellers, men and women and different ethnic groups. Rural dwellers live an average of a five hour walk from the nearest road, women hold only 18% of seats in the parliament and only a third of dalits (formerly called ‘untouchables’) can read. But elections, scheduled for November, can significantly increase representation of these groups.

Education is one of the highest priorities for the poor and excluded and, with peace, people’s expectations are rising. The UK maintained support for education throughout the conflict and continues to do so. A school I visited in the east of Nepal illustrates the challenges – facilities are very basic and there are 40 children in every class. While UK money is helping this school improve, the vital task is to build a strong education system across the country, with enough school buildings and teachers. This will help stabilise the fragile political environment.

If the challenge is immense, the interim government’s appetite for a lasting peace is a match for it. And with such clear political will comes a delicate balancing act: it is right that the people of Nepal see the dividends of peace, but there is a fine line for the interim government to tread between promising them what they deserve and what can realistically be delivered.

Current levels of development in Nepal are low: a fifth of the provinces have no road connections; HIV and AIDS is a growing problem; and 12 women die every day in pregnancy and childbirth. The government knows that it must tackle these issues, but as in other post-conflict countries, the key to long-term development is to build a lasting peace. The UK’s existing support for health, education and road building is now complemented by significant new financial backing for the peace process. Alongside aid from other donor countries, the Nepali government will use this to monitor the peace agreement, re-settle some of the 40,000 people forced to move by the conflict and provide education for former soldiers.

There is a palpable sense of determination in the step of the people of Nepal. The politicians are learning how to govern and not rule, and a New Nepal may be just around the corner.
Education

husband is in the Indian army, and India
is an imperialist enemy.
Sita has three children at school, and
she has to pay for their uniforms and
exams, so she breaks stones for five hours
da day, with her smallest one by her side.
Many women break stones for the roads
in Beni. You see them squatting by their
piles of rocks, with their hammers. One of
them uses a small cast iron frying pan
as an anvil. They look at you wearily.
Sita never went to school, and there is
no school in her village. There are two
hospitals in Beni, one of them run by the
state. She doesn’t want to go back home.
I am horrified by the thought of her
having to break stones, but she says,
“O no, life is very good here. Thanks to
breaking stones I have some money, and I
never had any money before.” She expects
that thanks to the school and the hospital
her children will have a better future, and
she definitely doesn’t expect anyone to
feel sorry for her. “It’s good compared to
the village. This is life. Wherever I can
stay, I will stay – this is life.”

Beni is a pleasant town delightfully
situated under three mountains, at the
confluence of two rivers. One night 7,000
Maoists came down the mountain sides,
pushing in front of them civilians who
had been made to carry torches. A mine-
field was laid down across one of the
streets. The guerrillas occupied the
school, persuading some of the local
youth to come and join them, but then
the army retook it, so that it was wrecked
by both sides. The very formidable head-
mistress demanded that the soldiers
leave the next day. Surprisingly, they
agreed to go after three days. The school’s
roll doubled to 600 almost overnight
because of those fleeing the countryside.
The school was full of bullet holes. The
government couldn’t come up with the
money, but Save the Children donated
$2,000, and the school was reconstructed
over seven months. It is a tatty but
pleasant school with a big courtyard
where the staff and students enjoy
exactly the right kind of respectful
but affectionate relationship. Save
the Children introduced what they call
‘Child-Friendly’ education, and now there
is a good atmosphere and much less
pointless rote-learning.
Not many students from the town went
to fight with the Maoists, but apparently
40% of the youth in the villages did so. At a
centre for underprivileged children, I sat
talking under a tree to four young men
who had been abducted by the Maoists.
All of the boys have stories about how
they escaped the Maoists. One was

Education beyond borders

“We will do for education what the Red Cross and
Médecins Sans Frontières achieve for health and seek
to provide education not just in places of comfort and peace
but everywhere in the world – behind frontiers in conflict
zones and fragile states.
Some children can spend their lives living in conflict, or refugee camps, and if we do not
reach out to these children, we will miss a generation. We need an Education Beyond Borders
initiative that will help ensure that education needs are met in humanitarian emergencies,
with a co-ordinated approach and rapid deployment of education experts led by UNICEF
and Save the Children…”

Earlier this year, Gordon Brown outlined a vision of delivering education to children affected by conflict.
rescued by the International Red Cross, aided by an aunt, and the others worked up the courage to surrender to the army. They say that they have some sympathy for the Maoist ideology but in practise there was autocracy and discrimination. People were not treated equally, and it was horrible to see innocent little children having to carry weapons. It was a hard time for teachers above all. They came under pressure or attack from both sides, since education is always at the heart of ideological struggle. Nepal had many private schools, which achieved by far the best results, and so the Maoists took a particular dislike to them. They closed or destroyed these schools everywhere that they took control. In the mid-west region it was 83%. I talked to one teacher who had been abducted in order to construct 687 metres of road. Out of 239 captive workers, 25 were teachers of both sexes. When they had finished with him his captors contributed towards a debt that he had to pay off, and sent him home. When he got back he was beaten by soldiers who thought he was a Maoist.

Mir Bahadur Thapa was working in a very poor school where they had to charge the parents a fee after grade eight. The Maoists objected to this, and demanded 500 rupees a month from each teacher, but Mir could only find 300, so one night, thirty people arrived and poked him with rifles. He said “OK, kill me,” but instead they pinned him down and smashed the bones of his arm with 25 blows of a hammer. They killed his mother and father. Amazingly, a police helicopter responded to a call, and he was taken to hospital. He is a farmer now.

The displacement brought about by the war has not only deprived schools of their buildings and teachers, and children of their education, but has caused an invisible army of children to vanish into poorly paid domestic work. One boy has to get up at 4am to cook for a family of seven. After the children have gone to school, he goes to his own school, and when he returns he works in the kitchen until 9pm, after which he studies. He is given a different quality of rice from the rest of the family, and has to subsist on leftover bones and vegetables. They water down his sauce. He says that one day he wants to be a social worker and campaign for equal rights.

Nepal is not a country that provokes despair, and nor does it tempt one to mutter “basket-case” under one’s breath. It is true that it is corrupt, that good infrastructure is desperately lacking, that it is a political mess, and that the civil war has set it back decades, but you don’t see beggars on the streets, and everyone is furiously busy in their various forms of semi-employment. The people are immensely charming, and, being composed of so many races, often very beautiful. The children in the schools are as bright-eyed and alert as squirrels, and there is plainly no shortage of intelligence or hope. There is also no shortage of smiling and saintly people like Bhabilal Sharma, who works at Janachetana Primary School half way up a mountain. In the sky above, a posse of choughs harass an eagle, and nearby a solitary Dalit woman sits on the path, overseeing a goat, her sole occupation. At the school there are 96 children, some of whom have come back specially at the weekend in order to greet us with necklaces of tiny marigolds, and the headmaster looks amazingly like Freddie Mercury. Bhabilal Sharma has worked as a teacher for 27 years, and his pride in his tiny pupils as they write their names for me on the blackboard in Nepali and in English is very touching. The children obviously love and trust him, he touches them gently on the head and speaks to them softly, and it reminds me of what has gone altogether missing in British education. He says that in the rainy season the roads are impassible, and you routinely run out of basics such as chalk, but at present the government is in too much disarray to fund or supply the schools properly. It is NGOs such as Save The Children that make Bhabilal’s work possible, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.


MORE INFORMATION
Louis de Bernières visited Nepal with Save the Children as part of their Rewrite the Future campaign, giving children in post-conflict situations the chance to go back to school.

www.savethechildren.org.uk
Creating links between children in UK schools and in African schools is gaining recognition as a vital tool to raise awareness of global inequality and to foster a sense of global citizenship. A new publication, *The World Classroom*, offers a guide to teachers on how to set up links with schools in developing countries and arrange visits for teachers and students.

Here, Bristol headteacher David Hussey recalls an invigorating exchange of experiences with a partner school in Uganda, while over the page Derek Nkata and Bill Dalton report on the ground-breaking partnership between schools in the Masindi district of Uganda and schools in the UK.

**joined up schooling**

Arafat is five and is playing happily with a wind-up plastic helicopter. He is seated on the ground circled and supported by a car tyre that helps him to balance, allowing him to use his hands. Although he is visually impaired with severe learning difficulties, he explores the toy carefully and has learnt how to wind it up. He laughs when he releases the rotor blades – perhaps at the air on his face, the noise it makes or the vibration on his hands. His mother is telling me how much progress her son has made since he started being formally educated, and his teacher Harriet sets out her aims for his education.

I am the the headteacher of Briarwood, a special school in Bristol for pupils with severe learning disabilities like Arafat. So, the content of our conversation is normal – because I would expect every child at my school to have similar targets – but the context is remarkable (for me at least). I am standing outside a hut in the Ugandan bush and Harriet is the special educational needs co-ordinator for the Kamurasi Demonstration School in Masindi, Uganda.

This pioneering mainstream primary school – which already had to cope with the challenge of teaching up to 140 pupils in a class – took the decision to provide education for all the children in their district. Over 140 pupils with special educational needs now attend the school, with needs ranging from sensory impairment to severe learning disabilities.
My connection with the Kamurasi School started with the recognition by our school team that, because we educated pupils from a diverse community in Bristol, we were well placed to develop a global link. Bristol has already developed school links across the globe. Now Briarwood joined the 16 schools in Bristol who have a partnership with a school in Masindi, Uganda.

Our global school partnership began in February 2006 when one of our teachers Rachel spent a week at Kamurasi. We had collected resources that would be helpful to our partner school in educating pupils with special educational needs – tactile books, and cause-and-effect toys that would motivate the children to explore the world around them – despite the obstacles to learning presented by their disability. Each class sent photographic and written material that would help a Ugandan child begin to understand the everyday lives of the Briarwood pupils.

Rachel later returned armed with photographs and resources from Uganda as well as a passion and enthusiasm for the dynamic work of the Kamurasi School. The passion and vision of people you have met is not easy to convey, and it was only when Ntairahu Byoona the Headteacher from Kamurasi visited Briarwood the following September that we fully understood what Rachel had experienced. Leadership development has high priority in Bristol and I have had the opportunity to learn from eminent and famous educationalists from around the world. However, I wasn’t prepared for the master class in change management that I received in the week Byoona spent in my school.

Following the Ugandan Government’s decision that all primary aged Ugandan children had the right to education, all primary schools faced large classes. Despite this, the Kamurasi team took the decision that “all children” would be taken literally and admitted children with special educational needs into the school. This pioneering approach meant the school attracted pupils with special educational needs from a wide area. The daily journey to school is too difficult for many of these children, so the school has provided a dormitory.

The school also learnt about pupils like Arafat who couldn’t benefit from inclusion in the school because their level of disability was so high. Their response was the Kamurasi home based project. Harriet, the Kamurasi special educational needs co-ordinator visits the 15 children in the project in their homes. She is educating the families to the potential of their children (many parents think all they can do is provide care for their children), providing resources and her expert advice on how children with profound disabilities can be helped to be independent, to develop communication and to have a better quality of life. She visits the children every week even though she not only teaches a class in the school, but also supports the other teachers in the school in developing appropriate teaching strategies for the pupils with special educational needs.

The school recognises the high financial burden on a family with a child with disability. While we talked, Arafat’s mother pointed to a small goat nearby and explained that this was Arafat’s goat, a gift from the school. When this goat had produced two more goats, it would be returned to the school who would give it to another child. Harriet also showed me the brick-making site that the school has provided so parents can earn additional income.

To continue our work, the two schools have now successfully bid for a Global Curriculum Project grant funded by DFID through the Global School Partnership programme. The partnership between Briarwood and the Kamurasi School has the power to make great changes. Our schools are altering their curriculum to embrace global citizenship, we exchange resources, we are sharing our imaginative solutions to complex challenges and we are learning from each other’s vision of inclusion for all children.

David Hussey is headteacher of Briarwood Special School for pupils of three to 19 years with severe learning disabilities.

www.brianwood.bristol.sch.uk
Making the Connections

Earlier this year, International Development Secretary Hilary Benn and Chancellor Gordon Brown launched The World Classroom, a publication encouraging UK schools to build links with their counterparts in the developing world. And the British government has an ambitious programme to link every school and college in the UK to an overseas counterpart by 2010. The hope is that this will usher in an explosion of North-South links. In which case, it will be built on the foundation of the lessons learned from a number of existing partnerships. Partnerships such as those in the Masindi district of Uganda.

The school partnership programme has been somewhat ad hoc. Surprisingly little is known about the current number or form of school linking arrangements – or the benefits to both northern and southern partners. The guess is that about 5,000 out of 34,000 schools in the UK have international links and that about 1,000 of these are linked with a school in a developing country – principally South Africa, Ghana, Uganda and Pakistan.

Four hundred of the developing country schools are part of wider, capacity building programmes promoted by Link Community Development (LCD) and supported, in varying degrees, by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). The school partnership programme in Masindi, Uganda was first set up in 2000 as part of a unique partnership between Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Link Community Development (LCD) and Masindi district Education Department. Masindi was one of the poorest districts in Uganda, hosting many internally displaced families from war torn Northern Uganda, as well as refugees from the DRC, Sudan and Kenya. Before the link was developed, the district’s educational performance was among the lowest in Uganda. School partnerships between Ugandan and UK primary schools were part of a larger district-led programme designed to improve the quality of education following the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda in 1997.

During the early implementation of UPE the explosive demand for six years of free basic education had to be matched by a rapid school building programme, alongside an equally speedy expansion in teacher recruitment and training. Issues of quality soon began to emerge. Perceptive local officials in Masindi saw the prospect of the gains universal education brought being threatened as parents saw their expectations disappointed – schools and districts struggled to cope with a rapidly expanding roll along with new district responsibilities.

Consequently, a partnership with the district, LCD and VSO was formed and set out a programme for school improvement that had head teacher training, district staff capacity building and school linking at its core. This was to be a long-term programme. And one of the principal objectives was to be a sustained improvement in the performance of pupils. Significantly, the first partnerships were with key stakeholders in the district, this collaboration between the district Education Department and NGOs underpinned the whole programme and has contributed greatly to its success. Link schools and their community representatives took part in training in various aspects of school management and strategic planning. At the same time the district’s capacity to improve education was enhanced with emphasis on school monitoring, evaluation and support functions.

In this way, linked schools received sustained and regular support by district and NGO staff for their linking programmes. The integration of the school linking programme within a wider district and school’s capacity building strategy was a key factor in ensuring southern schools gained maximum benefit from the north-south link. The district partnership also ensured that the school’s own development plan corresponded to that of the district, and was the focus for the allocation of all resources generated from both Uganda and the UK.

The UK linked schools complemented this support by corresponding with the school, exchanging information and making available a modest grant to support the Ugandan School’s Development Plan. Exchange visits were fostered and were a key element in the partnership. Northern partners sent a member of their staff, often the head teacher or another senior manager to its partner school for a number of weeks. They lived locally in the school’s community, joined the school’s staff and further supported the Masindi School in implementing the improvement objectives set out in its School Development Plan. Where possible, a reciprocal visit was arranged for a southern teacher or head teacher to visit its partner school in the UK.

An important and vital feature of this linking arrangement has been the consistent support extended to both UK and Masindi schools throughout the linking experience. Schools in the UK benefit from an experienced UK-based staff that provides wide-ranging support. Similar support is offered to southern schools with largely southern staff. Both teams work closely together and are familiar with both contexts.

Nearly 100 schools – over 50% of Masindi district schools – are currently linked to UK counterparts, representing nearly 23,000 children. From being one of the poorest performing districts in the annual national Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) Masindi is now one of the top five. This is the fastest improving district in Uganda against a wide range of quality and performance indicators.

While these striking improvements cannot be attributed solely to school partnerships, the school partnerships play a vital role in the Masindi school improvement programme. The Masindi experience points clearly to the value of north-south school partnership arrangements in the context of a wider structured programme of school improvement.

There are also clear benefits for northern schools. These include a broadening and enrichment of the curriculum together with a greater support of its global dimension and a heightened cultural awareness. It goes without saying that central to the success of these initiatives is the importance of exchange visits. No amount of reading or research can compensate for that jaw-dropping introduction to your partner’s educational ‘world’.

There is a real prospect that 20,000 schools in England alone are likely to be involved in a linking programme in the next few years. These target-driven northern schools need clear evidence of the benefits to both the northern and southern counterparts of this undertaking. School linking has evolved on the basis of a number of untested assertions, many of which may indeed be valid. Fortunately, there is a promise of research in this area. In the meantime we depend largely on the evidence of success stories like Masindi

Derek Nkata and Bill Dalton worked together in Masindi from 2000-2003. Derek as District Education Officer and Bill, a former schools inspector, as a VSO volunteer.
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A mine worker in Sierra Leone holds a small diamond. © Espen Rasmussen/Corbis
Gold, diamonds and platinum are symbols of romance and fidelity, but how can we tell whether their history is benign or bloody? Louise Tickle reports.

If you’re about to buy a diamond, then you don’t just have your credit card bill to worry about. At the forefront of many people’s minds, after seeing the recent Hollywood blockbuster Blood Diamond (right), are questions such as, where has it been sourced, who has mined it and who has profited from its sale?

The same goes for the gold or platinum in which your sparkler is set. Gemstones and precious metals are some of the most valuable commodities to come out of the earth. To the developing countries in which they’re mainly found, this mineral wealth provides enormous riches. The only question is, for whom? The supply chains along which these precious metals travel from the mines to the twinkling lights of the jeweller’s shelf can be destructive, exploitative and dangerous to those who work at the rough end of the industry.

The issues facing gold and diamond mining are similar – blood diamonds and dirty gold both fuel conflict, destroy communities and can devastate the environments from which they’re extracted. However, there are two separate processes taking place to try to ensure that their respective industries both come clean about the problems, and also sort out their act.

But neither the Kimberley Process for diamonds, established in 2003, or the embryonic fair trade standards for gold, are quite there yet. And so, despite the recent media hullabaloo in Britain around the ethics of where your engagement ring has come from, it is currently impossible to guarantee that the rock is conflict-free. Neither can you be sure that your wedding band isn’t tainted with the misery of exploited miners.

Sonya Malder, policy analyst at CAFOD, which is currently campaigning against so-called ‘dirty gold’, illustrates the point. “One process is called heap leaching, when cyanide is poured over the ore to get the gold to bond with it. In the San Martin mines, in the Siria valley of Honduras, a government study found dangerous levels of cyanide in the water,” she explains. “Gold mining is also a water-intensive industry, and in the same area, which is already prone to drought, local people are now having to buy in their water because thousands of litres are being used by the mines.”

Leonardo DiCaprio (left) and Djimon Hounsou in the film Blood Diamond.
And there’s the environmental impact too – one gold ring produces 18 tonnes of waste.

Communities can be displaced when mining companies want to explore an area and may not be adequately compensated, but most alarmingly, gold extraction can precipitate social conflict and even war. “In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is evidence of different militia trying to control areas where gold is mined,” says Malder. “This kind of thing can escalate with devastating consequences.”

Greg Valerio, founder of the Chichester-based fair trade jewellers Cred, claims to be absolutely certain that there is “conflict gold coming out of Columbia.”

“A British company is trading there, selling gold back here through the jewellery fabricators, and that money is funding the drug habits of the paramilitaries That very gold,” he adds, “ends up on our jewellers’ shelves, and nobody, at the moment, has a way of tracing it back.”

But more and more customers are now demanding guarantees that their expensive purchase isn’t hurting poor communities. “We’re seeing our business double year on year, so I know the appetite is there,” Valerio says. Having just collaborated on an ethically sourced engagement ring collection with designer Katherine Hamnett, and now taking calls from luxury jewellery houses wanting to buy his wedding bands, he feels that the consumer mood has irrevocably changed.

Greg Valerio is a prominent campaigner in the Association for Responsible Mining (ARM), currently fighting for the rigorous gold-mining standards he has helped develop to be adopted by the international Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO). He is clearly frustrated at the slow pace at which ethical certification is moving.

This, he says, keeps small-scale miners in South American and African communities desperately poor and with no control over the market in which they must trade. Around 80-85% of global gold extraction and revenue is produced by the smallest number of people, because the big international mining companies like Rio Tinto have vast economies of scale,” he explains. “But small-scale mining represents 80% of the world’s gold workforce. These are poor communities who will often focus on agriculture for six months of the year, and it’s these people who will benefit from formal standards, auditing and accreditation.”

But as the members of FLO sat down at the start of this year to discuss the standards ARM had proposed, a fly began buzzing loudly in the ointment. Should the
That was gold. Now for diamonds. You might think that with the international, government-endorsed ‘Kimberley Process’ having been established in 2005, you’d be on safer ground when it came to buying a conflict-free diamond. Fortunately, you probably are, but the Kimberley Process is still not an absolute guarantee that ‘a girl’s best friend’ won’t have been smuggled out of a conflict area.

What you should get now when you buy a diamond is a stamp on your retailer’s invoice stating that it has been purchased from legitimate sources, and guaranteeing that the stone is conflict-free. But there is rarely any independent verification of this assurance. Campaigning organisation Global Witness says that until third party audits are embedded into the way jewellery retailers operate, that guarantee isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.

Having just brought out their second survey of UK jewellery retailers, Global Witness campaigner Annie Dunnebacke says she is disappointed at the lack of progress on transparency. Implementation of the industry-formulated minimum standards on diamonds is much higher than it was in the 2004 survey Global Witness carried out, she says, “but our position has always been that those minimum standards aren’t high enough.”

“77% of UK respondents this time round didn’t have any type of auditing procedure in place – though Tiffany’s had both internal and independent external auditing – so yes, we are disappointed.”

Dunnebacke points out that few diamond retailers tell customers anything about their sourcing policies on their websites, and notes increasing instances of online jewellery retailers saying they sell conflict-free products while simply inventing a spurious logo to ‘endorse’ their claim.

“They’re trying to sell diamonds after all, not talk about conflict,” she says wryly, “but another way of looking at this is as an opportunity and as a marketing tool. Retailers could choose to be very open with consumers who are increasingly ethically concerned, but then that only works if they can back it up.”

“A lot of the retailers I’ve spoken to say the problems are at the African end of the chain, with the rough diamonds. The polished end, when there have been so many intermediaries, they don’t have much control and have to trust that the Kimberley Process is working. But, you know, they are sourcing their diamonds from somewhere, so they have a responsibility.”

There is currently no such thing as a fair trade diamond: the closest you’ll get are the diamonds used by Cred, which are mined, cut and polished and certified in Canada, where the mining company must offer the government a deposit returnable only when they have restored the mined land to its virgin state.

Gold and diamonds have complex supply chains that will be hard to influence and harder to regulate. But just as increasing numbers of people refuse to buy eggs from battery chickens, or products made with slave labour, Greg Valerio says he wants to get the consumer to the point where it is unacceptable to buy jewellery that isn’t independently verified and certified as coming from conflict-free zones.

“It’ll take 15 years to do it I reckon,” he says. Best start saving up.

80% of gold mining is small scale, done by poor communities.
At least a billion people will be forced from their homes between now and 2050 as the effects of climate change deepen an already burgeoning global migration crisis.

That’s the prediction of a report by Christian Aid which says these future migrants will swell the ranks of the 155 million people already displaced by conflict, disaster and large-scale development projects. Most migrants will be from the world’s poorest countries, according to the report Human tide: the real migration crisis, which says that urgent action by the world community is needed to avoid the worst effects of this crisis.

“Forced migration is now the most urgent threat facing poor people in the developing world,” says John Davison, the report’s lead author. The report warns that the world faces its largest ever movement of people forced from their homes, and that the numbers of displaced people may even dwarf those left as refugees following World War II. It says that the impact of climate change is “the great, frightening unknown” in this equation because only now is academic attention being devoted to calculating the scale of this new human tide. “Even existing estimates, more than a decade old, predict that hundreds of millions of people will be forced from their homes by floods, drought and famine sparked by climate change.”

Security experts fear that this new migration will fuel existing conflicts and generate new ones in the areas of the world where resources are most scarce. It grimly predicts that a world of “many more Darfurs” is increasingly likely, and that most of those on the move will have to remain in their own countries – often at the mercy of the very governments which caused them to flee in the first place. Such “internally displaced persons” (IDPs), have no rights under international law and no official voice. Their living conditions are likely to be desperate and in many cases their lives will be in danger.

“Tens of millions of people in the poorest parts of the world are uprooted and lack basic assistance and protection,” said Dennis McNamara, Special Adviser to the UN Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, and Director of the Inter-Agency Division on Displacement in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “They are the world’s voiceless and often inaccessible refugees, their numbers can destabilise whole regions and may be an obstacle to building peace. Their problems must be urgently addressed, both for humanitarian as well as political and security reasons.”

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Forced migration an ‘urgent threat’

MORE INFORMATION

www.christianaid.org.uk

Displacement hotspots

Colombia is second only to Sudan for numbers of IDPs, with many living in crowded slums on the fringes of the capital, Bogotá. Originally forced to move by a decades-long civil war, this largely rural population is now seeing its land grabbed to make way for lucrative plantations.

In Burma, ethnic minority groups have been subject to decades of violence, displacement and persecution. The government is now using the space created to plan dams and other large-scale developments, including palm oil plantations, leading to further forced displacement.

In Mali, the Sahel belt of semi-arid land is one of the areas vulnerable to global warming. Already farmers here are finding it impossible to live off the land in the way they have done for centuries because of erratic and declining levels of rainfall. People have to move in order to earn the money to feed their families.
Kenyan banking on the move

Mobile banking has the potential to offer low cost, easily accessible financial services to poor people in Africa and other developing countries who do not have bank accounts, says Ndidi Njoku, Mobile banking consultant at DFID.

Mobile phones evolve at a frantic pace with new innovations constantly springing up. One new idea is to use mobile phones to provide banking services such as savings accounts, small loans and transfer services – sometimes referred to as Mobile phone banking or M-banking. An example of this is M-PESA, which in Swahili literally means “mobile money”. It is a mobile payment solution in Kenya that allows customers to complete simple financial transactions using their mobile phone. M-PESA targets mobile phone customers who live far away from the nearest bank branch or who cannot afford the charges associated with opening a bank account.

With nine out of ten people in most developing countries having limited or no access to a bank account or basic financial services, M-banking products like M-PESA provide an opportunity to tap into a market and provide affordable access to financial services to vast numbers of poor people.

Improving access to financial services, such as savings accounts, small loans, insurance, bill payments and remittances is vital to reducing poverty. Savings can help poor people to invest in productive assets like livestock, a loan may help to expand business activities and insurance can reduce vulnerability, for example, if a breadwinner becomes sick. Joyce (pictured, above right) is a catering worker in Nairobi. She has her wages paid into her M-PESA account. Using her mobile she regularly sends cash via text to her parents up country. She can also pay for goods in shops or even take out small loans.

Vodafone have recently announced a joint initiative with CitiGroup to market M-banking to Kenyans living in the West who regularly send money home to the families in Kenya. With the international remittance market worth $200 billion a year, the potential benefits to poor people living in developing countries are huge.

James Hole

MORE INFORMATION

The fish on your plate could soon be tracked from the moment it is caught to the moment it is eaten. That is the promise of a new system to beat illegal fishing which deprives poor communities of up to $9 billion in lost income every year – including $1 billion lost to Africa.

Initially a £15 million scheme has been set up to help fishermen in Sierra Leone stamp out the illegal trade, with a tracing scheme that will track fish being exported to the EU.

And the UK Government has been working with the UK Food and Drink Federation (FDF), which has a voluntary code of practice for tracking fish imports, to persuade EU policy makers to adopt a workable tracing system. This would both meet the needs of fishermen and stop criminals selling on illegally caught fish to the EU. An effective traceability system to responsibly source tuna, such as that used by FDF members, currently allows them to trace fish back to the boat, while developing a supply chain verification system that uses electronic systems throughout the chain.

“Every year billions of dollars are snatched away from poor people around the world,” said Gareth Thomas, UK Development Minister, “One way of stopping this is to have an EU-wide tracking system that protects poor fishermen and reassures UK consumers that the fish they buy from the supermarket freezer or fish and chip shop has been caught fairly and responsibly. It would build business confidence, lead to companies rushing to work with poor communities and help fishermen reap the benefits of their hard work.”

David Audley, President of the National Federation of Fish Friers (NFFF), which represents 10,000 fish and chip shop owners in the UK said that they “strongly advise all fryers to use fish from sustainable sources to ensure the British public can continue to enjoy their favourite fish and chips”.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing destroys fish stocks and marine biodiversity, depresses the market in legally caught fish, and drives legitimate fishermen out of business, said Ben Bradshaw, UK Fisheries Minister. “It’s driven by sophisticated criminal gangs who don’t care what or who they damage in the pursuit of easy cash. It’s a crime that should concern the world, because it plunders a world resource.”

www.fdf.org.uk

Termite power could take over

Brazilian scientists are creating biofuel plants to house termites who transform woody waste into sugars for ethanol production. The executive director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Achim Steiner, has hailed the programme, saying that within a few years termite enzymes could create ethanol yields outstripping those from crops like maize and even sugar cane. It is critically important to avoid a struggle between food and biofuel production when both essential sectors target the same crops – this would risk price rises and production shortages.

A UNEP note said that termite-made fuels, based on their processing of cellulose wastes, would not only by-pass this problem, but maybe create skilled or semi-skilled jobs rather than the unskilled labour used on sugar or maize plantations. Some of a $5 billion investment into biotechnology announced by biofuel leader Brazil is expected to promote termite biofuel production, especially as Brazil is home to many termite species. Mr Steiner has been seeking Brazilian support to create global biofuel environmental standards.

Papua women get vote protection

Special separate voting booths will be set up for women in elections in Papua New Guinea, to prevent female voters being dragged into voting a particular way by husbands, relatives or even party activists. Intimidation of women voters in the Pacific island state is well-known, and has stymied female participation in politics. Few women contest parliamentary seats and currently only one elected member is female. There is no female governor or provincial administrator and only a handful of women are in senior positions in the civil service, according to the United Nations Development Programme, which has encouraged the initiative. It wants more equal opportunities for women in male-dominated Papua society.

“This can only happen when there are more women in power to take the decisions and make the changes,” said UNDP President representative Jacqueline Badcock.

MORE INFORMATION

www.fdf.org.uk
A groundbreaking new device is set to enable visually impaired people in Africa to access computers.

The Sightsavers Dolphin Pen, a lightweight pen drive with a screen magnifier and screen reader, was launched at the fourth annual Africa Forum to share information about the quality of services available for blind people. Sightsavers, a charity which works to combat avoidable blindness, says that, by bringing computer access to visually impaired people, the pen means they can develop the same skills and employment prospects as sighted people.

"Using the Sightsavers Dolphin Pen has given me so much more mobility and freedom," said Roger Bonner, who works for the Kenya Ministry of Education, and is himself visually impaired. "Only somebody who has been totally reliant on other people can fully appreciate my new status. I sincerely believe that this simple to use package will open up opportunities for many more people with similar problems to myself."

The pen is the result of a unique collaboration between Sightsavers and Dolphin Computer Access Ltd, the British accessibility software developer. A grant from IMFUNDO (part of DFID) funded 240 pens which were strategically placed in schools across Kenya, prior to the launch. The plan is now for the Pen to be made available at cost price in some of the world’s poorest communities.

"The Pen offers a new level of independence to blind and visually impaired computer users throughout the developing world," said Robin Spinks, Assistive Technology and Disability Adviser for Sightsavers, "For the first time, blind and low vision computer users can carry their assistive software on a pen drive and use it on any PC. This represents a huge step forward for visually impaired computer users in developing counties."

Sightsavers says that as a member of the Global Campaign for Education (a pledge from world leaders to get all children into primary education by the year 2015) it will make the Pen available in schools and universities wherever feasible, ensuring as many children as possible can use PCs.

**MORE INFORMATION**

www.sightsavers.org
www.yourdolphin.com
http://imfundo.digitalbrain.com/imfundo/

**New cancer centre for Haiti**

Haiti will get a national cancer treatment centre, capable of delivering radiation screening, diagnosis and therapy thanks to support from the International Atomic Energy Agency. The lack of radiography in Haiti means the incidence of cervical cancer is three times that in its Caribbean neighbour the Dominican Republic and 12 times that in the USA. The IAEA is funding training for local doctors to undertake three years oncology training in Canada. And it is ready to equip a planned national cancer centre in the capital Port au Prince with radiotherapy units and diagnostic equipment, working round-the-clock. Some 2,000 patients would be referred to the centre each year, half being women with cervical cancer. IAEA cancer therapy head Massoud Samiei said: "Cancer is seen as a disease of the rich, the aged; a disease of Europeans and Americans, but not here. More than half of new cancer cases occur in developing countries."

“Cancer is seen as a disease of the rich, the aged; a disease of Europeans and Americans, but not here.”
Net success on malaria

Pregnant women in Africa who sleep under insecticide treated bed nets can reduce their risk of miscarriages and stillbirths by up to a third. That’s among the findings of a new review by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which consolidates the results of four African trials involving more than 6,000 women.

It shows conclusively that bed nets reduced the number of miscarriages and stillbirths by one third in the most vulnerable women, those in their first pregnancies. The number of low-birthweight babies fell by a quarter among those who slept under a treated net.

Every year in malaria-prone regions of Africa, at least 200,000 pregnancies are lost through miscarriage or stillbirth, and between 80,000 and 200,000 infants die as a result of malaria infection during pregnancy.

“In many ways this research confirms what we already know, that bed nets save lives,” said Hilary Benn, commenting on the DFID-funded review. “But still not enough children and pregnant mothers in Africa sleep under insecticide treated nets. “We know what works in tackling malaria, but we need to do more of it. That means more bed nets to protect the vulnerable, better access to medicine so that malaria can be treated affordably and more research to find new ways of fighting the disease.”

Although the benefits of using bed nets may seem obvious, in some areas pregnant women choose not to use them. “Previous reviews provided the conclusive evidence that insecticide treated nets help save the lives of children under five years old,” said Paul Garner of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. “This review gives health professionals the information they need to explain the benefits of insecticide treated nets and encourage pregnant women to use them.”

Sewage cover-up gains credit

The World Bank will help finance the covering of four waste water lagoons in Bolivia’s largest city Santa Cruz de la Sierra by buying carbon credits created by the future reduction of sewage methane emissions. As well as being smelly and unpleasant, methane is 21 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Under the deal, explained Warren Evans, environment director at the Bank, the fund will buy credits worth 200,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent in destroyed methane, which will be captured by the new waste water treatment system, “converting it through combustion to carbon dioxide, and by that reducing the impact on the climate”. The Bank’s Community Development Carbon Fund (CDCF) is working with SAGUAPAC, a Bolivian sanitation and wastewater treatment cooperative which works in some of Santa Cruz’s poorest slums. The system will capture and flare methane generated by the decomposition of organic sewage.

Goats under the microscope

Black Bengal dwarf goats, a key leather livestock breed in Bangladesh, are being subject to genetic research in order to improve breeding techniques and the species’ health. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are undertaking the research, since Black Bengal dwarf goats are a distinctive element of the country’s estimated 30 million goat population which produces 20 million square feet of hides and skins each year. With growing arable farming reducing fallow land available for goats, the two agencies plan “to build up the capacity of national agricultural research systems” into the species, whose skins “are of excellent quality and fetch high prices”.

Malaria in Africa

- Malaria kills over one million people a year, mostly children in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More than 90% of all malaria deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Malaria accounts for between a fifth and nearly a half of hospital admissions in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Economic costs due to Malaria in Africa are estimated at $12 billion a year.
If we can measure what makes poor people happy, then we can improve pro-poor policies. That's the view of the director of Oxford University's new economics research centre, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute (OPHI), which rejects the idea that income is the most significant contributor to human wellbeing. Instead attention is being turned to yardsticks that seem to have little to do with economists' traditional concerns about production and consumption of goods and services.

Money is not the simple antidote to poverty says OPHI's director Sabina Alkire. "We asked poor people to rank what was important to them, and income never came first," she said. "Religion, relationships and inner peace came up as far more important than you might have imagined given standard development literature."

The institute is working on the development of a new set of human development indicators – measuring things like empowerment, inclusion, respect and safety. They say that the ways in which these indicators are measured need to be just as robust as conventional economic indicators, because this is the only way to get them factored in to economic policies and evaluate whether the policies are working. They will be arguing for the new indicators to become a global standard for measuring economic development.

"We're trying to add questions about dimensions of life that matter to poor people, that we haven't asked about before," said Dr Alkire. For instance, she explains, one important issue often overlooked by economists, is "the ability to go about without shame". Studies revealed, for instance, that "people were humiliated when they were made to queue". They said they felt demeaned "when your children won't play with my children because they're the wrong ethnicity," or "when they are treated as if they are dirty".

She believes that a society cannot move forward if its members live in constant fear of violence, if some people's lives are restricted by strict class or gender roles, or if working conditions are oppressive. Well-being depends on certain 'freedoms' being upheld as well as on economic assets.

The institute's emphasis on these freedoms echoes the work of Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen, one of OPHI's leading advisers and whose theories of human development play a full role in international development, and supported by VSO.

"The institute's emphasis on these freedoms echoes the work of Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen," says VSO's development worker, a lecturer on development at University of London's Birkbeck College, and one of the facilitators of ODI's workshops. "It would be even greater if the diaspora themselves grasped its significance."

"Many current interest has centred on remittances – the money sent home by migrant workers. In some countries, this is a larger sum than that received in official development assistance. In Bangladesh, for example, workers' remittances in 2005 were estimated at $2.2 billion, almost double the $1.4 billion in international aid in the same year. In Kenya, migrant workers remitted some $464 million in 2004 – not far below the level of international aid ($635 million) received in the same year.

Even comparatively small amounts of money sent home by individuals can have an impact on development. "Many of those children taking up primary school places – part of the drive to attain the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education – are paid for by money sent home by relatives," says Alache Ode.

Governments are waking up to the contribution made by their migrant workers. In some areas of Mexico, local government is match-funding remittances invested in community development, to maximise its effect. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) identified the diaspora as a fifth constituency for Africa, after north, south, east and west, and African embassies abroad now regularly invite in their diaspora for consultation. India has offered non-resident Indians tailored investment opportunities, perhaps influenced by the example of China. Foreign direct investment from Chinese living abroad has been a big factor in its economy's rapid growth since the 1990s. Bangladesh, Ghana and Nigeria – countries that receive large volumes of remittance transfers from the UK – are developing remittance ‘partnerships’ with DFID, which include a range of measures to make it easier and cheaper to send money home.

It's not just about money, however. There are also the 'social remittances' – the transfer of ideas, skills, attitudes and technologies through people. "Members of the diaspora share social and political capital, they are carriers of ideas between continents," Ode says, "and they also often have the clout to carry out advocacy on behalf of their different countries."

But, she argues, both economic and social remittances are "worth even more if invested more completely – not just individual transfer within families – but in whole communities." She adds, "It is no good just thinking about family. Why hasn't that approach already worked? If you are simply educating the next generation to leave, that is not development."

Building the capacity of organisations thinking of community development beyond the family was the purpose of the two workshops organised by ODI, which is currently funded by DFID. "We want this programme to enable diaspora organisations to exploit their full potential in development and poverty alleviation," explains Betty Okot, ODI's policy and research officer. "We hope this initiative will encourage the diaspora to combine their resources in partnerships with counterparts in the development field across the world."

Judith Barrett
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**Helping to make poverty history**
A microcredit loan is often the only break that can move impoverished people up the rungs of the economic ladder in their communities. The fundamental premise of microcredit is that people can improve their incomes through hard work if given small loans to strengthen their businesses. This premise has been proven true by millions of borrowers who are now building their tiny businesses, supporting their families, and repaying their microloans so that others can have a chance at the one break they too need to succeed. These borrowers are actively changing the futures of their families instead of begging or waiting for the next instalment of charity aid, which may never come.

Sam Daley-Harris, director of the Microcredit Summit Campaign, reports in The State of the Microcredit Summit Campaign Report 2006 that in the autumn of 2006, 3,133 microfinance institutions served 113 million families during the previous year. While that is a laudable accomplishment, more than 500 million families that would almost certainly benefit from microcredit remain impoverished, and at least another 300 million more might benefit from it. According to our best calculations, we estimate that only one out of every eight people who could benefit from microcredit currently has access to it.

As a weapon to fight poverty, microcredit is as vital as education, health, human rights, and good government and yet, as Richard Weingarten, executive secretary of the UN Capital Development Fund, says, “The demand for microfinance services remains largely unmet, especially in Africa.” Less than 1% of World Bank funding goes to microcredit.

So, why does microcredit work so well in developing countries? The reason is the economies of developing countries are different from those of developed countries, often operating on a microscale, compared to the economies of the developed world. What may at first appear to tourists as a flea market when visiting a developing country is in fact the community’s version of a mega-mall where all exchanges of goods are in cash. In place of mass-produced name-brands, the market sells homegrown produce, household goods in small quantities, such as single bars of soap or a few squares of toilet paper, and clothing – much of it locally produced – plus a limited assortment of small luxuries that only a few shoppers can afford.

Many of the vendors work from dawn to dusk for incomes that, without a little credit, often do not meet their families’ basic needs. Every financial transaction has to be completed in cash, there are no banks or alternative sources for loans and no other access to financial services. A savings account is cash under the mattress or in your pocket. Accumulating enough cash to make a major purchase such as a car or a house is often impossible.

Business leaders, Phil Smith and Eric Thurman, argue that microcredit is the world’s most powerful weapon against poverty.

The sari seller of Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state in India, Shanti, a 28-year-old mother of two young sons, weaves delicate silk saris to sell in her neighbourhood. Born into the extreme poverty rampant in this region, Shanti’s weaving skills were hard won, and she has worked diligently since childhood just to survive. Though renowned for the quality of her saris, Shanti was earning only $2.60 a day, barely enough to allow her to care for her children. Desperate for the capital required to expand her business, she became indebted to a local loan shark who charged outrageous interest rates. Later, she learned about microcredit and took a loan for $60 that she invested in her business. Her income has since increased to more than $6 a day, and she is now free from crippling debt. Today, Shanti is able to focus on growing her business and creating a better life for her family.
Poor people don’t need to be told about business opportunities. They just need a little working capital.
In developing countries, most poor people do not have access to financial services. Either credit is not available from any source or only from unscrupulous lenders. Their interest demands are so exorbitant that no matter how good the business and no matter how hardworking the entrepreneur, it is impossible to get ahead. Yet, with just a tiny amount of fair credit, people are able to open and expand businesses by adding inventory or equipment, implementing a competitive advantage, or seizing a market opportunity.

With subsequent larger loans, businesses can grow, moving these families further up the economic ladder. This is real progress; perhaps the first progress some families have seen in generations and parents can ensure that their children will not suffer as they have. For this privilege they readily sign their names on the legal papers for microloans and work hard to reimburse their lenders.

Microenterprises are small-scale versions of the same types of businesses found in developed countries. Twenty hens and a coop constructed from scrap material become a poultry enterprise. A greengrocer’s may be a rickety wooden cart piled with mangos picked that morning by the driver or purchased from a local farmer. Hives, bees, and a collection of mismatched used jars are a honey factory. A 40-year-old truck is used to transport both goods for sale and paying passengers. A pedal powered sewing machine is the local equivalent of a clothing factory. An outdoor clay oven is the village bakery. With a microloan providing working capital, these businesses can support families and boost the grassroots economy for the whole community.

Being creative and turning every available resource into a business is vital to improving the lives of those in poverty.
Millions of miracles

2007 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus explains why social business enterprises are critical to ending poverty.

Despite many advances global poverty persists. Models that rely on government action or capitalism narrowly defined as maximization of financial profit are limited in their ability to put poverty where it belongs – in a museum. The key missing links are grassroots, private sector approaches that focus on the poorest of the poor, but in a way that is businesslike and allows for preservation of investor capital and financial sustainability over time. The potential of ‘social business enterprises’ formed along these lines can make a major impact on the global poverty crisis.

The Grameen Bank project, a for-profit, member-owned bank since 1983, shows that providing microcredit to the poor can be done in a successful and profitable manner. Today we have more than seven million borrowers, and 58% of them have already crossed the poverty line and most of the rest are heading in that direction. They have done this through their own efforts, supported by microcredit, microsavings, microinsurances, and a social development programme guided by the ‘16 Decisions’ that our clients developed in 1984. The Grameen Bank is profitable and can expand in Bangladesh with savings provided by the poor (and formerly poor) borrowers and other savers. While the Grameen Bank does not need additional support, other programmes in other countries will benefit from support, and Bangladesh can benefit from additional social business investments that improve the lives of the poor.

One example of a social business investment is the joint venture with the Danone Group of France (famous for its yogurt products) that will produce and sell fortified yoghurt especially formulated for malnourished children in Bangladesh. Another is the eye care hospitals that will bring world-class eye care to all levels of the Bangladeshi population with the poor paying less and the richer paying more for identical high-quality services.

I have always maintained that poverty was not created by the poor, but by society’s institutions that became a ‘disabling environment’ for them. The Grameen Bank became an ‘enabling environment’ that led to millions of small miracles which, collectively, provide an example of what can be done globally.

That the Nobel Prize was awarded this year half to me and half to the Grameen Bank to recognise our progress, makes us more committed to reaching new poverty-reduction milestones in the years ahead.

Professor Muhammad Yunus, from his foreword to A Billion Bootstraps
In India’s traditionally patriarchal society, women’s self-help groups are driving a silent revolution, claims Prodeepta Das.

In Indian mythology, the demon Mahishahura proved too strong for any of the gods, and a super god had to be created in the form of a goddess, Durga, to vanquish him. So, in India’s folklore at least, women occupy an exalted position. But in everyday India now, the story is different. Women toil at home and in the fields and lead a largely subservient life. In most households, women eat the last, what is left after everyone else has been fed – one of the major reasons for poor health among mothers and a formidable challenge for health professionals.

Despite the recent phenomenal advances in information technology in the sub-continent, much of the society remains stifled by anachronistic customs and traditions. As the majority of the population continue to live in villages, where old social mores are prevalent, the role of women is very much domestic. “Rural women are the most vulnerable group in Indian society” explains Susamma Varghese, lawyer and International Labour Organisation activist. “As for their living conditions, many of them see the poverty threshold as a distant horizon. Generally, they are far below it.” The patriarchal framework excludes women from taking economic decisions at the family as well as the village level. This is despite the fact that many women in lower socio-economic groups contribute substantially to family income by working in the fields. It is accepted that women, especially rural women, are the single most economically disadvantaged group in today’s India.
Self help

- But government and NGOs are beginning to recognise that women are central to galvanising social and economic progress in India. Given financial backing and technical know-how, women could become agents of unforeseen change. The key to this is in helping women out of the vicious circle of deprivation where they have no financial independence and are disallowed taking an active economic and political role in society. And empowering women to become entrepreneurs may just be that key.

- Independent income is helping women to look after their families better, and, with access to education and training, women can participate in local and national governance. In order to make all this happen women must have had to take strength from unity – in other words they have organised into groups.

- The genesis of women’s self-help groups goes back to 1971, when the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) was set up in Ahmedabad. The SEWA Bank was established in 1974 as a separate bank of the poor, self-employed women who included hawkers, vendors and home based workers, such as weavers, potters and those making incense stick rollers. These workers wanted credit at reasonable rates. And SEWA Bank did just that, not only to empower women, but also eradicating lending at exorbitant rates by loan sharks. In the three years to 1977, about 6,000 members were advanced credit of nearly Rs 2,500,000 (over £30,000).

- Elsewhere, the women of Dungarpur area in southern Gujarat were subject to frequent drought during the 1990s and had to pawn their land and jewellery. They formed self-help groups, comprising 10 to 20 members each. The local People’s Education and Development Organisation enabled them to recover their land with the help of microcredit. With microcredit they bought goats and other small livestock, developed small businesses, repaired roofs, produced handicrafts and purchased rickshaw taxis. Prior to this, only 3% of Dungarpur’s women knew how to read and write – now, the rate has reached 38%. They have secured health care for their villages and, as a result, child mortality has dropped.

- Today, one woman in every family is a member of a self-help group. One of the women, Rashmi, dramatically describes the change she has seen, “Before, we never left our houses, now we go to the town to deposit our money in the bank.”

- In Maharashtra’s Yavatmal district, the district officials and UNICEF have helped more than 800 women’s groups to take root. This has led to the setting up of several dairy and horticultural co-operatives and other livelihood projects. As a bonus, women are now taking charge of village education and other public services. In a small hamlet called Ganeshwadi, the women’s self-help group managed to save Rs 50,000 (£620) over three years, took a loan of Rs2.5 lakh (£3,000) from the State Bank of India to buy buffaloes, build a shed for the animals and set up a co-operative dairy business. They have now added rose farming. The social impact of self-help groups is as compelling as the economic effect.

- An alcoholic husband was offered a loan of Rs 5,000 to set up a shoe shop if he gave up drinking. The man courageously took up the offer and has never looked back. Widows, who are often looked down upon, are given support to be independent and girls are persuaded to go to school. Vimal Madavi in the village of Manakalmetha is a testimony to female empowerment. “Before we formed our self-help group, we were cheated by the shopkeeper when we bought seeds and fertiliser on credit,” she remembers. “He would charge us Rs 300 for the seeds, instead of Rs 200, and then 10% interest. When the crop was harvested, we would pay him Rs 420. Now the group gets a loan from the rural bank at 12% a year and passes it on to members at 3% per month. So, for the same seeds worth Rs 200, we now pay Rs 224.”

- The rise of self-help has been the most potent grassroots movement in modern India. The two states where it has blossomed most remarkably are Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The neighbouring Tamil Nadu government is keen not to be left behind. The state budget for 2006-07 has made provision for setting up 25,000 new groups benefiting at least 500,000 women. The massive growth in female dominated self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh illustrates a shift in the development paradigm. Shakti, an innovative programme started in the Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh in 2001, was designed to turn poor women into entrepreneurs, selling household goods. Rojamma in Kurumurthy is proud of how she has transformed her life: “When my husband left me, I had nothing. Today everyone knows me. I am someone.”

- Orissa, which is at the bottom of the development ladder, is also catching up fast. A young social worker, Subhashree Das set up a women’s self-help group in the capital city of Bhubaneswar. Called Asha (meaning hope), it brought together women from lower castes, who were abused by labour contractors and their own drunken husbands, with a view to liberating them from a life of violence and building their
capacity to fend for themselves. Each member was expected to save one rupee a day. The group started two units, a catering unit to provide lunches to working people in the city, and a laundry unit to service hostels, guest houses and hotels. Meherun Nisha, the cook who prepares the meals, is happy to be a part of Asha. “We work as a team and we know Asha is our only support,” she said. “When I think of my past, the rough times I had, no money for two square meals a day, I thank Allah, it is all over. Now, I can actually save a little for tomorrow.” In the interior, the self-help groups turn adversity into fortune. The women use locally available resources to make items for sale – turning reeds into brooms, growing mushrooms and bottling disinfectants. Khurda Cooperative Bank, the oldest in Orissa, has been pivotal in lending rural groups financial muscle. “To date, we have assisted 822 self-help groups with Rs 264 lakh (£350,000) credit advance against Rs 14 lakh (£17,000) of savings to engage in a variety of enterprises”, Mrutunjay Kumar Das, the Manager said.

“Mission Shakti commenced in Orissa in 2001 with a target to organise 200,000 women’s self-help groups by 2008 – under the principles of thrift and credit. This has already been achieved. Economic empowerment has encouraged women to participate in local governance, in managing schools and sharing political power with men. Ajit Tripathy, Chief Secretary to the government, is impressed.

“The impact of women’s self-help groups on Orissa is nothing short of a revolution without bloodshed,” he said. “It has brought about a massive change in mindset. The stereotype has been broken for good. Women have proved they can do everything men can do. Only better. And their loan repayment record is beyond expectation.” As a result the government decided to move the management of school meals from the teachers to the self-help groups. Additionally, some of the groups will have long leases of village tanks to try fish farming.

While the success of women’s self-help groups is undeniable, much of the evidence to date is anecdotal. The lack of speedy and reliable data is hampering research by academics at several institutions including Harvard, MIT, Stanford, University of California at Davis and University of Western Australia. Nevertheless, all the signs are that improvements brought about by women’s self-help groups will prove as momentous as the benefits from India’s advances in information technology.
Good governance in developing countries can only be achieved if the voices of the poor are heard and heeded, says John Madeley

"Goverance". It's a word that has gained increasing currency in the development debate over the last 20 years. And, since most countries are now democracies, people these days talk about 'democratic governance'.

But how do the poor see democratic governance? And how can donor governments best support poor, marginalised and excluded people who want a voice in the democratic process?

Well, poor people and organisations which support them spoke up loudly at a recent London seminar, The Politics of Democratic Governance: organising for social inclusion and gender equity. Pulled together by the NGO One World Action, the seminar heard activists from Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Nicaragua, Guatemala, India, Malawi and Zambia. Participants from DFID, EU institutions, academia and NGOs were also present.

The day focused on organising, engaging with and transforming political processes which are major challenges for marginalised groups. But it also debated new strategies and forms of political engagement designed to build equitable, gender-sensitive, democratic and accountable governance.

The activists who spoke are at the forefront of building democracy in their countries and while they employ a wide variety of strategies they have a common purpose: all seek to ensure that poor and marginalised people have a say in the decisions that affect them. They are all pressing for policy-makers to focus their efforts on supporting and strengthening genuine participatory democracy.

"If excluded and disempowered groups of citizens are to be effective participants in politics, they will need to build their political capacities to increase their bargaining power," said Helen O'Connell, One World Action's Head of Policy. "They need to become an undeniable presence in public and political arenas."

In the 2006 White Paper Making Governance Work for the Poor, Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn, states: "What makes the biggest difference to the quality of governance is active involvement by citizens – the thing we know as politics".

Common to all groups at the seminar was the desire to enable citizens to get actively involved. Gender featured prominently. For instance, Maria Eugenia Gomez of the Nicaraguan women’s group Grupo Venancia, said they focused on advocacy strategies that strengthen women’s leadership. Grupo Venancia helped women to advocate laws and public policies that promote their rights, held workshops and debates to help in this process, and trained women to stand for local elections.

“We are engaged on the task of building a citizenship that is aware of their rights, that is aware that the power and the resources are ours,” said Ms Gomez. “The authorities are public servants and only the administrators.”
The establishment of a modern and democratic society demands that all citizens should participate in the running of their affairs in making decisions, said Tamala Kambikambi, the Chair of the Zambia National Women’s Lobby. This meant, “periodically choosing their representatives and also standing for elective office without fear of intimidation”. She argued that, “the basis of democracy is the need for respect for human rights. Women are an integral part of society and should participate in decision-making in equal numbers to men. Therefore, a government that does not include women is undemocratic”.

“You cannot afford to work only at the grassroots level to promote women’s rights,” stressed Esmeralda Joj of Guatemalan NGO Tierra Viva. “You also have to work within the political structure.” Tierra Viva works with indigenous women and mestizo (people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry) to strengthen their participation in local development. She added, “This means training and supporting women to participate in local and national politics and to represent the views of poor women, especially indigenous women, who are marginalised from the decision-making process”.

Three activists from South East Asian countries – Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines agreed that existing political parties and structures in their countries have largely excluded women, failed the poor and the marginalised, and may be incapable of reform.

**Politics belongs to poor people, it’s not something that is done to them.**

The traditional political elites, they said, cannot be trusted to take into account the needs and interests of the poor. There is an urgent need to create an alternative system of politics and governance that empowers them. What is needed, they argued, are new political parties.

Maria Alcias-Garen of the Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines told the audience, “The prevailing political situation in our country today is patronage based. Democratic institutions are not working properly and there is crisis with representation”.

The way forward in Thailand is by building an alternative political party, according to Thai NGO, Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD). A political party is the best mechanism, it believes, to join social movement interests together and collectively bring people’s needs into the political process. “We need a new political party based on a ideology that is favourable to marginalised groups,” said Suryasai Katasila, CPD Secretary General. “The vision we have is of a party of the social movements over which they have control.”

Perserikatan Rakyat (PPR) of Indonesia also takes the view that social movements are best served through a progressive political party of the kind that did not exist under the old politics. “We urged people to remember that politics belongs to them,” Syaiful Bahari of the PPR. “It is not something that is done to them”. MANET+, a network of people in Malawi living with HIV/AIDS, has succeeded in getting their views taken into account in the formulation and implementation of national policy. This has been achieved by building strategic alliances with different partners.

Susan Loughhead, of DFID’s Effective States Team, told the seminar that working with civil society is a key aspect of its partnership with countries. “When civil society is at the heart of the development process, this helps to deliver better development outcomes,” she said.

“Democratic politics requires citizen participation; it’s about the right to participate, to make your voice heard, to representation. It’s about inclusion for all men and women.”

Graham Bennett, director of One World Action, underlined the importance of good governance in sustainable development: “A just and equal world is only possible if the poorest people are the makers of their own development, not the takers”. A strong and active civil society base, he said, “can effectively work with government to ensure that the needs and interests of the poor and especially women are reflected in policy and practice.”
A new plant breeding strategy promises to combat malnutrition, reports Yassir Islam.

growing goodness
Four year-old Immaculate plays happily with her sisters in their family compound, consisting of a handful of thatched mud huts, in eastern Uganda. As the sun drops behind a distant blur of acacia trees, Immaculate crouches and squints, trying to make out the drawing that her eldest sister is scratching out in the dusty earth. As she squints harder, her sisters laugh at her. In protest, Immaculate folds her arms and storms off. Her mother calls out to her to help prepare their supper. She already knows what they’ll be eating – atap (a traditional staple dish) with peanut sauce. It’s the dry season and it could be months before they have any vegetables to eat again. Soon it will be dark, but for Immaculate it is difficult to see. She is losing her eyesight, an early clinical sign of vitamin A deficiency. If her condition worsens, she could go completely blind.

Immaculate is not alone. According to the WHO, every year, up to half a million children around the world will go blind, simply for lack of vitamin A. About half of these children will die within 12 months of losing their eyesight, mostly due to increased risk of illness and disease, also caused by insufficient vitamin A. Others, with inadequate iron in their diets, may do poorly in school – lack of iron impairs cognitive development – and those who don’t get enough zinc are more susceptible to illness and may suffer stunted growth. These children are all suffering from micronutrient malnutrition, a lack of those nutrients required in minute quantities by the body for good health.

“The problem is not just restricted to children,” says Howarth Bouis, Director of HarvestPlus, an international alliance of research institutions and implementing agencies that seeks to reduce micronutrient malnutrition by breeding staple food crops rich in vitamins and minerals. “More than two billion people worldwide lack sufficient iron in their diets, and billions suffer from zinc deficiency. This greatly compromises their capacity to work and live life to the fullest, whether as children or adults. When you add hunger, poor sanitation and inadequate health care into the mix, the combination can be deadly.”

Fresh fruits, vegetables, and even dried fish, that could provide Immaculate’s family with the necessary micronutrients, are often available at the nearest trading centre, but they can’t always afford to buy them. They also live several hours walk away. Twice a year, health workers visit the centre, which has a room used as a ‘clinics’ where they invite parents to bring their children to receive vitamin A capsules. While most children under five in Uganda get vitamin A supplements, those like Immaculate, who live in isolated rural areas, often fall through the cracks. If her mother can afford not to work on the day that the health workers are at the centre, she’ll take her to get a capsule. She knows she should go twice a year, but it takes more than half a day to make the round-trip and sometimes this just isn’t possible.

For millions of the world’s poorest people, especially those who live in remote regions, staple crops such as rice, maize, and cassava make up the bulk of their diet, day in and day out. And it is these same staple foods that, ultimately, may hold the key to better nutrition and health. Typically, efforts to fight micronutrient malnutrition have centred on fortifying commercial foods and providing vitamin supplements. While these approaches can work, especially in urban regions, they are costly and have not been able to reach all those in need – particularly the poor living in remote rural areas. The HarvestPlus strategy is different. Through a novel approach known as biofortification, staple food crops are bred to contain higher levels of micronutrients. When these biofortified crops are consumed, the micronutrients are absorbed by the body along with other nutrients. As a result people are able to grow and eat for themselves the nutrient-rich biofortified foods that they need.

Breeding biofortified crops, testing new varieties, and releasing the most promising ones can take several years. Once these varieties are developed, plant breeders test them in target regions where micronutrient malnutrition is high and where the crop is traditionally consumed. The goal is to maintain, or even improve, crop performance in the field, while ensuring that – once harvested and cooked – the crops still provide a viable source of nutrients. Biofortification can also cause colour changes to the food – so convincing consumers to accept these new varieties, and include them in their diets is as critical as developing them.

“This is an unprecedented opportunity to improve micronutrient nutrition among the poor,” says Bouis. “Through HarvestPlus, plant breeders, nutritionists, and marketing and behavioural change experts are all working together to redefine agriculture as a tool for public health.”

Results have been promising. Plant breeders have found that staple food varieties can be developed that contain sufficiently enhanced micronutrients levels. An efficacy trial with high-iron rice in the Philippines was credited with improving the iron-status of women. In Africa, another trial confirmed that a betacarotene rich variety of sweet potato, could improve the vitamin A status of children. HarvestPlus is now adapting these new sweet potato varieties to growing conditions in Africa, and to local tastes. While these results are being validated, HarvestPlus scientists continue to make headway in developing more crops that can deliver micronutrients to malnourished people – directly from field to plate. Even to a secluded family compound nestled in the savannah plains of eastern Uganda.

Melinda Gates Foundation announced a $25 million grant to support HarvestPlus innovations. DFID and other donors have also provided funding. Despite the long gestation period, the potential impact on global hunger could be enormous. Bouis paints such a scenario: “The World Bank estimates that prevalence of iron-deficiency anaemia among preschool children in India is more than 75%, impairing the healthy physical and mental growth we take for granted in the North. It means that millions of these children are not being reached by conventional strategies. If we can even provide half of their iron needs through biofortification, the impact would be substantial.”

The basic building blocks are already in place. Underused varieties of staple food crops with naturally occurring higher levels of micronutrients are being pulled from publicly-held germplasm banks around the world and crossed with agronomically superior lines. Plant breeders are creating new biofortified crops that not only grow well and fill empty stomachs, but also provide some of the micronutrients that are essential to improving nutrition and health.

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Africa

His new book *The Bottom Billion* has been hailed by figures as disparate as Sir Nicholas Stern and George Soros – and in this opinion piece, economist **Paul Collier** recommends three policy steps to the G8 to reverse Africa’s decline.

In the 1960s the economies of countries with a total population of around a billion people have been diverging from the rest of the world at an accelerating rate, a trend that will generate unmanageable social pressures. Most of these countries are in Africa, and so it is appropriate that the region has been on the G8 agenda again this summer. Aid and debt relief – the priorities to date – are part of the solution, but they are not potent enough instruments to fix Africa’s problems. We have other instruments and we need to use them. Africa faces three distinctive economic problems, each amenable to a distinct policy.

1. **The region has failed to diversify into labour-intensive manufactures.** While much of the region cannot hope to break into global markets, countries such as Kenya, Ghana and Senegal are well-suited for manufactured exports. Unfortunately, they have missed the globalization boat. Asian cities now have massive concentrations of manufacturing activities geared for export, that generate ‘economies of agglomeration’ which lower costs of production. For example, 60% of the world’s buttons are now made in one Chinese city. How can Africa compete in the manufacture of buttons? Africa’s coastal cities need to be pump-primed over the entry threshold constituted by these agglomerations – and for this they need a temporary advantage over Asia in Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) markets. Both Europe and the US already attempt to provide this through ‘Everything-but-Arms’ (EBA) and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). We impose tariffs on goods from Asia but let them in duty-free if they are made in Africa. The trouble is that while AGOA, despite weaknesses, has raised African exports of garments to the US market by around tenfold in five years, EBA is flawed and ineffective. Africa needs a pan-OECD scheme because at present African firms face different rules for different markets. Such a scheme would also open other important markets like Japan. If such a scheme included the best features of AGOA and of EBA trade policy it has the potential to create millions of jobs in Africa.

2. **The resource-rich countries have almost all failed to harness windfalls for sustained growth.** In a new analysis of how high commodity prices affect commodity exporters, I find that without good governance, after a few years of boom, the long-term effects are catastrophic. If history were to repeat itself, the economies of Africa’s major exporters would eventually contract by around a quarter. The current high level of commodity prices, together with new discoveries, present Africa with a huge opportunity. It would be a tragedy if history were repeated – but it will be unless the incentives are changed through institutional reform.

Because these windfalls inevitably accrue to governments, the key to change is better accountability in public spending. Democracy is not enough – the recent Nigerian experience shows how elections can be manipulated. Accountability depends upon a range of effective checks and balances which are currently missing, because nobody has an incentive to supply them. We need new international standards and codes. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a modest beginning. The international banks remain home to corrupt African money under a veil of secrecy. If the money is linked to terrorism the banks are legally required to report it, but if it is merely money looted from the poorest countries in the world the banks can remain silent.

There are no international standards that recommend appropriate savings strategies for managing windfalls. When Ngozi Nkomjo Iweala became finance minister of Nigeria she had to invent a savings rule, defending some of the extra oil revenues from instant spending. Nor are there recommended procedures for selling mineral rights. Just as all OECD companies are now required not to bribe, so they should be required to win the contracts for resource extraction through verified auctions instead of through secret deals. There are no recommended guidelines for the transparency of public spending that comes out of resource revenues. At the absolute minimum there should be clear rules for the competitive tendering of public investment projects. For example, when Nigeria introduced such rules, only very recently, costs fell by 40%. The checks and balances that help natural resource revenues to be harnessed for development are an internal African struggle, but international standards help. They provide both a rallying point and a benchmark for internal reform efforts. The Nigerian reformers promptly adopted the present limited form of EITI as the foundation of their programme for change.

3. **Much of Africa faces high risks of internal insecurity from coups.** Partly this is due to decades of economic failure, and partly because the typical country is too small to reap security economies of scale. Africa needs a stronger international security presence – prolonged peacekeeping in the fragile post-conflict situations, and ‘over-the-horizon’ security guarantees elsewhere. Both of these should be conditional upon clear standards of governance which could be set by the African Union. The model is the provision of external security for Sierra Leone, probably the most effective form of aid Europe has ever given to Africa. Trade preferences, standards and codes, and security may not play as well on the streets of Europe as doubling aid, but they are likely to be more effective on the streets of Africa. Before dismissing them as fantasies, think how Europe was restored. The Marshall Plan was complemented by trade policy (GATT), by standards and codes (OECD and EC), and by security (NATO). By taking the steps I have outlined here I am convinced the leaders of the G8 can really make a difference.

More Information

Paul Collier is Professor of Economics at Oxford University and Director of the Centre for the Study of African Economies. His new book *The Bottom Billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done* about it is published by OUP.
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