



# Global Issues Series: Poverty

## Overview:

This one-hour workshop explores the causes, dynamics, and current status of global poverty. Through role-playing, simulation, and discussion activities, participants will be able to examine poverty through actually playing out the parts of the impoverished. The group will be challenged to undertake a system of natural-born privilege and recreate a system of wealth distribution. These activities are supported by a list of provocative discussion questions, a handout that presents the present statistics of global poverty, and a list of resources for joining in on the campaign to end poverty.

## Category:

poverty, hunger, wealth distribution, privilege, problem-solving

## Bonner Connection:

This activity challenges participants to explore poverty and global wealth distribution through experiential activities and problem solving.

| expectation | explore | experience | example | expertise |
|-------------|---------|------------|---------|-----------|
|             | ♥       | ♥          |         |           |

**VALUES: international perspective, community building**




## Level:

Great for introduction activity to global poverty as well as a reinforcing exercise for those familiar with poverty/hunger.

## Type:

storytelling, role-playing, simulation, critical thinking, problem solving, discussion

## Focus or Goals of this Guide:

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <p><b>Head:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will better understand the causes and dynamics of poverty</li><li>• Participants will be better equipped to critically analyze poverty, hunger, and wealth distribution and therefore better contribute to the anti-hunger movement</li></ul>      |
|    | <p><b>Heart:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will actually play the role of those in certain socioeconomic roles, giving them a simulated experience of poverty that will better prepare them to support and empathize with those who are not as fortunate</li></ul>                           |
|  | <p><b>Hands:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will walk away with a series of brainstormed policies/solutions to wealth distribution</li><li>• Participants will have their own fast fact sheet and resource listing to anti-hunger and poverty-relief organizations around the world</li></ul> |

## Materials:

- Desks for participants
- Poster if no chalkboard/whiteboard available
- 1 copy of "Poverty Biographies"
- Participant copies of "Poverty Fact Sheet"

## How to Prepare:

Cut the "Poverty Biographies" into 6 pieces by character.  
Write "Donors" on the chalkboard/poster board.

## How to Do/Brief Outline:

The outline has the following parts:

- |                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Poverty Stories              | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 2) Wealth Distribution Activity | suggested time 45 minutes |
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## **Part 1) Poverty Stories**

*Adapted from the United Nations CyberSchoolBus website*

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Divide the students into three groups, representing the three income groups in our world today - high-income, middle and low-income groups. 15% of the students represents the high-income group, 30% of the students will be in the middle group and the rest (55%) represent the low-income group. Tell the high-income group to stand at one end of the classroom. Have the middle-income group sit at desks near the middle of the classroom. Lastly, have the students in the low-income group sit on the floor on the other side of the room.

Then, hand out the following slips of paper to a participant in the according group:

Low-income: Jant Omar, Jose Martin, Anna Hernandez

Middle-income: Sam Baker, Katrina Vaclavkova,

High-income: Edward Simpson

Once the class is divided into the three income groups read the following to the class:

Everyone on this earth has the same basic needs; it is only our circumstances that are different. As we gathered today, you were given your lot in this world that has been created. Look around, as you can see that equality and balance don't exist here.

It is important to notice that no one section of this room represents one country. Every country around the world has people who fall into the income groups represented today.

Now, I want to introduce the three segments of the world to you.

*(Move near the high-income group)*

This group represents 15 percent of the world's population with a per capita income of \$8,900 or more. As a group, your income group is able to afford a nutritious daily diet. You have access to the best medical care. You were born destined to go to school; the only uncertainty is how many years will you study after high school.

As part of this income group your family has access to credit and money that most others do not. You and your family live in comfortable and secure housing. Your parents own at least one car,

and probably have two televisions. When your family takes their annual two-week vacation, your parents don't worry about their jobs disappearing.

It's a good life because you and your family have access to everything you need and security to enjoy it.

*(Move near the middle-income group)*

This group represents roughly 30 percent of the world's population. Your parents earn between \$725 and \$8,900 a year. The levels of access and security you and your family enjoy vary greatly. You are the folks who live on the edge. It would take losing only one harvest to drought, or a serious illness, to throw you and your family into poverty.

Your parents may work as day laborers, domestic help, or perhaps as migrant workers. You may go to school - for a few years anyway - especially if you are a boy. Your parents were born into this harsh life and hope that you will have an opportunity for a better one.

Your family probably owns no land and lives in overcrowded housing with shoddy plumbing. Your village or town offers electricity, but your family must ration their use. If only your parents could get better skills training, they might have a chance at a higher-paying job. Maybe, if your family is lucky, your parents can find a way to join a community credit group to get access to a small loan.

So, like everyone stuck in the middle, your family feels squeezed, and they just hope that the bottom doesn't fall out from their world.

*(Move near the low-income group)*

This group represents the majority of the world's population - roughly 55 percent. The average income is \$725 a year - about \$2 a day - although many of your family's earn much less. Most of you are from poor countries such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Haiti, or Cambodia.

Every day is a struggle for your family to meet their basic needs. Finding food, water, and shelter can consume your day. For many mothers, it would not be uncommon to walk five to 10 miles to find clean water; spend several more hours working in the fields and of course taking care of the children. School is a luxury few of you will ever experience. Most of you girls don't even bother to dream about school. Healthcare is out of the question, so for most families death is all too familiar, with families expecting to lose two to three of their children before they turn five.

Many of your family's are homeless or living in structures so flimsy that a hard rain or strong wind becomes life threatening. Many of you are frequently hungry. It is quite likely that your family doesn't get the minimum number of calories their hardworking life requires.

If your parents do work, they are probably tenant farmers or landless day workers. They reap few benefits from the crops they work on; they would prefer to grow food for you to eat themselves.

*(To the entire group)*

No one can choose the circumstances into which they are born.

Then, have the participants who were given characters read their bios in order of low-income to high-income. These bios are available on the “Poverty Biographies” worksheet attached to this training guide.

After they read their biographies to the group, finish by reading the following passage aloud:

*(Address the entire class)*

This is just a brief glimpse at how people live around the world. As we look into the different origins of poverty, I would like you to think about these characters that you have just been introduced to.

Facilitate a brief 10-minute discussion using the Poverty Fact Sheet about where each of those characters may fall on the poverty scale and which factors could be contributing to their poverty.

Emphasize that these characters are representative of unfortunately true stories. Articulate that children are born into these situations – situations that are already steeped in histories of struggle and conflict. They are born into a set of privileges that often are so strong that they are locked into a certain social standing for their entire lives. Very few have the opportunity to gain more privilege. This next activity will demonstrate how wealth distribution and natural-born privileges create and perpetuate poverty.

### **Part 3) Distribution of Wealth**

Suggested time: 40 minutes

*Adapted from David Shiman with the Human Rights Resource Center of the University of Minnesota*

#### **Part I: THE DISTRIBUTION (10 minutes)**

Hand out the pre-made bags of raisins (M&Ms, raisins, whatever) as directed in the materials/preparation section of this guide. Explain that participants are just entering the world, and these bags represent the privilege that has been given to them. Allow some time for others to realize the disparity, then ask participants to divide up into groups with others who have the same number of raisins.

- 1) GREAT WEALTH AND POWER (those with six or more raisins – the smallest group);
- 2) SOME WEALTH AND POWER” (those with three to five raisins – the middle group); and
- 3) LITTLE WEALTH AND POWER” (those with two or fewer raisins – the largest group).

Then, remind the group that these raisins represent their privilege (wealth and power) in the world. The amount they possess will affect their capacity to satisfy their needs (e.g., basic education, adequate food and nutrition, good health care, adequate housing) and wants (e.g. higher education, cars, computers, toys, television and other luxury items). Those participants with six or more raisins will have their basic “needs” and most of their “wants” met; those with three to five raisins will have their basic needs met, and those with two or fewer raisins will have difficulty surviving due to disease, lack of education, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter.

Tell participants that they may, if they wish, give raisins to others; however, they are not required to do so. Tell them that those who do share will be honored as “DONORS,” with their names placed on the board. Allow a few minutes for participants to redistribute the raisins if they wish. Then ask for the names of those who gave away raisins and the amount each gave. List them on the board or chart entitled “DONORS.” Ask if anyone changed category as a result of giving or receiving raisins and record these shifts on the chart.

Explain that some people in their country (and perhaps in their community) and in every country around the globe lack adequate necessities, such as food, education, health care, and shelter. Point out that others, often in the same community or country, are able to acquire almost everything they need and want.

### **Part II: THE REDISTRIBUTION (15 minutes)**

Give each group the task of creating a plan for the fair distribution of the raisins (the world’s wealth). Each group should prepare to: a) show why their plan is fair, b) explain what needs to be done (if anything), and c) describe what the group plans to do and why. Give the groups ten minutes to devise their plans.

Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to explain their plan to the others and answer questions. After the plans have been presented and discussed, announce that a vote will now be held on which plan to adopt.

When participants are ready to vote, announce the following: Participants with six or more raisins have five votes, those with three to five raisins have two votes, and those with two or fewer raisins have one-half vote. This strategy reinforces the fact that the distribution of power often reflects that of wealth. Have participants vote and tabulate the results. Announce which plan is to be implemented. Carry out this plan, redistributing the wealth if necessary.

### **Part III: DEBRIEFING (20 minutes)**

Facilitate a discussion around these questions. If you’re running out of time, skip

to the real-life application questions toward the end, specifically drawing out dialogue about global policy and perspectives of the “haves” and “have-nots”.

- How did you feel about the way in which the raisins were acquired and distributed?
- Were you treated fairly?
- Did some people give raisins away? Did you give away or receive raisins? Why or why not? How did this feel?
- What determined whether or not people gave away raisins? Knowing what the raisins represented? Having one’s name displayed? Feeling guilty? Something else?
- What aspects of this game represented how the world’s wealth and power are distributed?
- How did the members of the different groups feel about their situation? Did the recommended plan for fair distribution reflect whether the group had more or fewer raisins?
- After playing this game do you have a better understanding of the situation or attitude of poor people/nations? Of the situation or attitude of wealthy people/nations?
- Why were some people given more votes than others? Was this an accurate representation of those with more or less power in the world?
- Who are the “haves” and the “have nots” in the world today? Which countries are the “haves” and the “have nots”? Who are the “haves” and “have nots” in our country today? In our state or community? Why?
- Should the “haves” be concerned about the situation of the “have nots”? For what reasons? economic? moral/religious? political? Why might the “haves” give money or resources to the “have nots”? Is this a way to solve the problems of poverty?
- What might the “have-nots” do to improve their situation? What are some actions that “have-nots” have taken around the globe and at home to address the inequalities of wealth and power?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power throughout the world? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power in this country? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?

# Poverty Biographies

*Cut these biographies into 6 strips of paper*

## **Jant Omar, low-income**

Hi, my name is Jant Omar. I live in Zaire, Africa. As a girl at the age of 13, I was told I had to quit school to help my mother find clean water and food each day. I don't think it's fair at all, because my older brother still goes to school. But, my mother is sick and needs help with the daily chores to feed the family. I loved school and I miss my friends. Other girls who must quit school never go back. I don't know if I ever will. And then what?

## **Jose Martin, low-income**

I'm Jose Martin. My dad was hurt today at his job picking coffee, which was the only income my family had. In El Salvador, it's hard to find good jobs that can provide what a family needs. We don't have enough money to go and see a doctor and dad's worried about where the money will come from if he can't work while recovering. I already work and am beginning to think about starting my own family. But if my own family is still struggling, I guess that will have to wait.

## **Anna Hernandez, low-income**

Hi, I'm Anna. I live down the street from Jose and my parents make a living by selling the fruit we grow in our yard at a local market every day. Because many of my parents customers have been laid off or hurt from working at the coffee plantation like Jose's dad, they're buying less fruit and now we can't buy corn, our staple food, for our own family.

## **Sam Baker, middle-income**

I'm Sam Baker. I live in a big city in the United States with my mom. She works at a clothing factory. I'm pretty lucky compared to some of my friends, I have food and clean water and live in a safe home. But, there are lots of things we don't have. My mom is always insecure about making ends meet. She wants me to buy my own car but we just can't get enough money together. The bank won't give us a loan. Because I don't have a car, there's no one to take my little sister to tutoring class, so she's having a hard time in school. With my mom working like this, there's no way I can go to college and leave my sister home alone and put more financial stress on my mom.

## **Katrina Vaclavkova, middle-income**

Hi, I'm Katrina. I live in the Czech Republic. My mom's a nurse and my dad is an accountant. We're able to buy clothes, music, and most things that I want. We live in a nice apartment. I go to a good school and all of my needs are met. I'm getting ready to go to college and I'm applying for some scholarships that should help my parents pay for it. I'm so excited to go!

## **Edward Simpson, high-income**

Hello, my name is Edward Simpson. I live in England with my family. My parents do quite well for themselves and have given my 3 sisters and I a lifetime of support and love. We're more than provided for. We live in a big house, three cars, and vacation once or twice a year. Our housekeeper keeps things clean so my parents can relax when they come home from long days at work. My parents also teach us financial responsibility – we each get a weekly allowance. This way, I can focus on school and don't need to work.



# Poverty Fact Sheet

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## Over 1 billion people are living in **extreme (absolute) poverty**.

These people are living on less than \$1 a day and not able to afford the most basic necessities to ensure survival. 8 million people die every year from absolute poverty.

## Over 2.7 billion people are living in **moderate poverty**.

Moderate poverty, defined as earning about \$1 to \$2 a day, enables households to just barely meet their basic needs, but they still must forgo many things we may take for granted like education and healthcare. The smallest misfortune (health issue, job loss, etc.) threatens survival.

## Many more are living in **relative poverty**.

Relative poverty means that a household has an income below the national average.

Based on these definitions established by the World Bank, nearly 3 billion people—half of the world's populations—are considered poor. But poverty isn't simply a numbers game. It's about scores of men, women, and children enduring unimaginable obstacles that keep them from fulfilling their most basic human rights and achieving their individual potentials.



## Causes of Poverty

- State discrimination and corruption
- Abuse of public power
- Lack of social integration
- Crime
- Climate or environment
- Imperialism/colonialism
- Overpopulation
- War; civil war, genocide, etc.
- Lack of education/skills
- Culture/way of life
- Individual beliefs, actions, and choices
- Agricultural cycles
- Natural disasters
- Matthew Effect: When the middle class tends to be the main beneficiaries of social services, even if the services are primarily targeted at the poor

### More Poverty Fast Facts:

- A child dies every three seconds from AIDS and extreme poverty
- Africa has been hit harder by the HIV/AIDS virus than any other region of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to over 70% of the total world HIV-positive population
- Over one billion people do not have access to clean water
- One fifth of the world's population is hungry, yet there is enough food in the world to feed everyone.

Join in on the campaign to end extreme poverty. Log on to:  
ONE Campaign ([one.org](http://one.org)) | Oxfam International ([oxfam.org](http://oxfam.org)) | Bread for the World ([bread.org](http://bread.org))