

## MYTHS AND LEGENDS FROM THE UNKNOWN WORLD

When early seafarers discovered new worlds and drew their journeys on maps, they used the Latin phrase **HIC SVNT LEONES** (Here are lions) to denote unknown territories. The legends that became attached to these locations featured all types of monsters, man-eating creatures and enormous treasures.

Today we live in the information society. Information and its exchange, communication and sharing have become truly important parts of not only economic and political debates, but of our very lives. The tools we use to obtain information – television, radio, computers and mobile phones – accompany us from an early age.

Nevertheless, this constant stream of new and up-to-date data does not automatically mean that we are well-informed people. The flow of

information has become a deluge, and news is slowly becoming a form of entertainment and propaganda. As a result, our awareness of the world, a tiny piece of which is our own country, moves to an ever increasing extent in the world of legend and myth instead of knowledge or practical experience.

By 'myth' I mean a given complex of information, stories and explanations whose goal is to illuminate the surrounding world, primarily on the level of simple and

reductive symbols. Myths are a figurative interpretation of the world, its events and conventions. Sometimes they are based on reality, while in other cases they ignore it completely. Myths are meant to create a certain ideological foundation allowing the specific human society to survive in the given context, to share the same convictions and to stand united in a common cause. Myth can take the very structured form of religious or socioeconomic theory. Simplified, it can take the form of urban legends describing, for example, the mysterious advantages of an otherwise marginalised and oppressed group.

Many myths are also connected with less developed and poor countries, which is partially the result of the fact that we know the least about these lands. Of course, the real causes are much deeper and primarily consist in the effort to explain why we are prosperous and why those who are less fortunate are not.

Even the media is partially responsible for the spread of myths, either intentionally with a certain goal (to garner attention, to tarnish someone or to serve the purposes of owners) or simply unwittingly. For example, in an

effort to provide information on interesting situations in countries about which little is known, reports are condensed and simplified due to size or time restrictions. This process feeds and supports myths, since the situation of the local population is not adequately explained. Mutual understanding is complicated by different value systems and the tendency to judge others through the lens of our own culture. We are unable to comprehend the behaviour of people in other countries and on other continents because we look at them only through our deep-rooted cultural and social models.

That is why we will take a look at some of these myths and try to make sense of them. Moving from myth to reality is not simple, since it breaks apart the fundamental impressions that connect us to the world. On the other hand, myths prevent effective understanding, since the myths and superstitions of one group are completely foreign to others.

Therefore, let's take a look at certain myths about developing countries that can be heard on the streets or even from politicians and the media.

## PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE POOR BECAUSE THEY ARE LAZY AND DON'T WORK MUCH.

First off, it is necessary to understand that the attitude toward work in western culture (the Occident) is truly exceptional. For the majority of our society – the poor and the middle class alike – work today is a form of identification and essentially the basic meaning of life. One of the first questions asked when people meet for the first time is 'what do you do?' In contrast, the first questions asked by the majority of people on Earth are related to family, travels and other similar matters.

The view of work over the course of history also differed considerably from attitudes prevalent today. In various periods of European history, work – with the exception of government, investment and the military – was regarded as something exclusively for the poor. Antique

democracy was reserved only for people who did not work for a living; labourers or small craftsmen could not participate in government. As late as the nineteenth century, working in England meant a loss of social standing.

International Labour Organization statistics and United Nations Development Programme reports indicate that the amount of work, be it paid or unpaid (household work, helping neighbours, growing crops for one's own purposes), differs widely from country to country. At the same time, the amount of work does not always correspond to the level of wealth of a country and a dignified life for its population.

In general, people in rich countries spend less time working, while those in poor countries spend more. Statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is made up of the 34 most economically advanced countries in the

world, reveal that the OECD country where people spend the most time working is Mexico. In Europe, Greeks spend the most time at work; whereas the Dutch, Germans and Norwegians spend the least amount of time at paid employment (see Table below).

### Top ten countries with respect to the amount of time spent at work\* and productivity\*\* – EU and Turkey

Most time at work	Most productive	Least amount of time at work	Least productive
1. Greece	Norway	The Netherlands	Turkey
2. Poland	Luxembourg	Germany	Hungary
3. Estonia	Ireland	Norway	Estonia
4. Hungary	The Netherlands	Denmark	Poland
5. Turkey	Belgium	France	<b>Czech Republic</b>
6. Slovakia	Germany	Luxembourg	Portugal
7. <b>Czech Republic</b>	France	Ireland	<b>Greece</b>
8. Italy	Denmark	Slovenia	Slovakia
9. Iceland	Austria	Belgium	Slovenia
10. Portugal	Sweden	Austria	Italy

Greece ranks third behind Mexico and South Korea among all OECD countries in the amount of time spent at work.

\* Average amount of time spent by employed people at work. \*\* GDP per hour of work.

Source: OECD, 2012 statistics

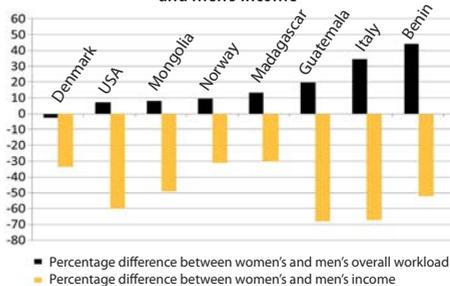
A look at developing countries shows that the overall amount of time spent working (paid and unpaid) is even greater. According to UNDP statistics for 2006-2008,<sup>1</sup> Mongolians are among those working the most hours on the planet. Nicaraguans work a similar amount of time as the Japanese, though the difference between the time worked by men and women is smaller in Nicaragua.

It is therefore clear that the amount of time worked by different populations is dictated by numerous circumstances. People living in worse economic and natural conditions work more (paid and unpaid). The number of hours worked has little impact on how well-off people are. Studies by international

<sup>1</sup> Human Development Report 2006 and 2007/2008; United Nations Development Programme; USA; 2006 and 2008.

### Women's share of work and their earnings:

Overall workload and the difference between women's and men's income



Source: Rania Antonopoulos, *The unpaid care work - paid work connection*

organisations have found that quality of life is influenced far more by the distribution of wealth (progressive tax systems, wage levels, universal health insurance, a continual pension system and similar matters).

Women work more than men, except in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. At the same time, their earnings are lower on average.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rania Antonopoulos; The unpaid care work - paid work connection; Working Paper No. 86; Policy Integration and Statistics Department International Labour Office, Geneva; 2009.

## CHILD LABOUR IS NOT A BAD THING; CHILDREN LEARN RESPONSIBILITY, AND IT'S BETTER WHEN AT LEAST SOMEONE WORKS.

In the Czech Republic, the naive impression that child labour involves taking out the trash or summer jobs still persists. Many people cling to the quaint image of young boys helping their fathers in the workshop and young girls circling their mothers in the kitchen. The reality of child labour is altogether different.

Let's look first at what the term 'child labour' actually means. The International Labour Organisation defines child labour in its conventions (especially No. 182 from 1999) as the economic activity of children that negatively impacts their health and emotional development or prevents systematic education. This concerns any type of work performed by children under the age of twelve, dangerous work between the ages of twelve and fourteen and the 'worst forms' of child labour regardless of their age. An estimated 168 million children between the ages of five and seventeen are affected by this phenomenon in the world today.<sup>3</sup> A total of 73 million children in the age group of 5-11 years are involved in the worst forms of child labour. The situation is worst in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 30% of all children (59 million) work in high-risk conditions, and

<sup>3</sup> All data is taken from: Marking progress against child labour, Global estimates and trends 2000-2012; Governance and Tripartism Department, International Labour Office; Geneva; 2013.

The purpose of work is to ensure that we and others can live a dignified life in the community of family and friends. And while work is not meant to entail spending endless hours of toil for miserably low pay, this is the reality for the majority of our planet.

in Asia and the Pacific, where the greatest number of children in absolute figures (78 million) perform child labour.

Although the children work in various sectors, the majority (58%) are involved in agriculture. Street children in cities work as runners, prostitutes or in factories. In some cases children are even forced to work in mined environments. As a result, they are deprived of a real childhood, an education and a better life.

Child labour is not prohibited in all countries, and it even continues to exist where the practice is proscribed by law. Child labour is difficult to eradicate, since relatives and even the children themselves depend on it for survival. And while its complete elimination is a long-term goal, the worst forms of child labour must be eliminated immediately. Approximately three-quarters are in fact employed in hazardous conditions, including work in mines, work with harmful chemicals (e.g. fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture) and work involving dangerous machinery.

The worst form is dangerous and forced labour, including slavery. A total of 5.5 million people live in such conditions; they are used for the worst jobs, in armed units or are subjected to sexual abuse (960,000).

Each year, 22,000 children die from work-related injuries. However, an ILO study has shown that the economic benefit of banning child labour would be about five times greater than the cost of such a measure.<sup>4</sup> Limiting child labour will have the effect of increasing the rate of employment among adults; their wages and living standard will increase, and thanks to the education gained by children, a new generation with better socioeconomic prospects will emerge.

<sup>4</sup> INVESTING IN EVERY CHILD, An Economic Study of the Costs and Benefits of Eliminating Child Labour; International Labour Office, Geneva, 2003.

## DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE GOVERNED BY CORRUPT OFFICIALS WHO MISUSE AID AND DO NOT KNOW HOW TO WORK WITH IT.

There is no doubt that the governments of many poor countries are corrupt; they steal at every opportunity and welcome money from donors as means for increasing their secret accounts.

Nevertheless, this is not a general rule for all countries. States with the most serious corruption problems are mostly those ruled by dictators of a wide range of political persuasions. Naturally, this is also the case in many poor countries where the state and local governments are in disarray due to a lack of finances.

Unfortunately, corporations and the political interests of rich countries also play a big role in corruption in developing countries. The most glaring example is the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mobutu Sese Seko, the bloody dictator of the country, retained power thanks to loans from Western countries (USA, Belgium, France) and international financial institutions. And even though their representatives warned that money earmarked for projects was being diverted into the accounts of Mobutu's family and friends, nothing happened. The goal of the aid was to keep the DRC in the western sphere and not allow it to fall to leftist powers. Thanks to this support, Mobutu and his family managed to amass a fortune of over five billion dollars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Götz Bechtolsheimer; Breakfast with Mobutu: Congo, the United States and the Cold War, 1964-1981; The London School of Economics and Political Science; 2012.

A classic example is the city of Sialkot, Pakistan, where the majority of footballs are made. Protests by the international community with the support of many athletes led to the signing of an agreement in 1997 between UNICEF and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce stipulating that children under the age of fifteen would not be employed. This agreement helped increase adult employment, improve working conditions and renew the interest of merchants who had stopped purchasing goods because they were manufactured by children.

The situation was much the same with Augusto Pinochet, the general whose bloody coup deposed the democratic government of Salvador Allende and set up a right-ring dictatorship in Chile that left thousands of people dead or missing. Pinochet's government was bankrolled by the USA, and the general was regarded by many as an exemplary figure in the fight against Communism (in the Czech Republic, for example, by politician Václav Benda). Pinochet, who built a personal fortune of 5-8 million dollars from state coffers, was in fact only one of many corrupt dictators.<sup>6</sup> According to internal information from Riggs Bank, which performed secret transactions for Pinochet, the dictator's asset could have amounted to as much as 100 million dollars.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this widespread corruption meant not only stolen money; another consequence was a high level of debt in the relevant country. Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos took control of a country with a state debt of around one billion dollars. Upon his ouster, Philippine public debt had grown to 28 billion dollars. One way Marcos made

<sup>6</sup> PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS; Senate Prints 109-25; 109th Congress; 1<sup>st</sup> Session; U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>7</sup> Hector Tobar and Eva Vergara; New Evidence Shatters Chileans' Image of a Frugal Pinochet, Los Angeles Times; 2 August 2004.

money and increased the Philippine debt was the Bataan nuclear power plant, which was built under the supervision of the Philippine and American atomic energy authorities at the base of a volcano, and hence will never be fuelled. Nevertheless, Philippine citizens had to pay for its construction, including interest payments to American, French and German banks. A bribe in the amount of 80 million dollars was taken from Westinghouse on the

behalf of Marcos by his aid Herminio Disini.<sup>8</sup> The bribing of high-ranking state and regional politicians and officials leads to direct economic losses and leaves countries in a debt trap. They must subsequently pay for things that they don't need, the only purpose of which was to allow rich banks and firms from developed countries to make even more money.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Hiatt Ed.; A GAME AS OLD AS EMPIRE: The Secret World of Economic Hit Men and the Web of Global Corruption; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.; 2008.

## **EVEN LOW-PAYING WORK HELPS THE POOR IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE WAVE OF CORPORATIONS FROM WEALTHY TO POOR COUNTRIES MEANS MORE WORK FOR THE POOR AND, HENCE, AN IMPROVED STANDARD OF LIVING.**

Many people, including prominent economists, believe that foreign investment helps improve the lives of people in poor countries. But this is true in only a handful of cases. For the most part, the arrival of foreign investors spells disaster for poor people in developing countries, which often have a lower level of social and environmental legislation.

The companies that move production to these countries can therefore ignore these aspects, thus reducing their costs and increasing profits.

Developing countries are presented the model of 'direct foreign investment' as a basic measure for economic expansion. However, experience shows that the support of direct foreign investment frequently means a deterioration of working conditions and a heavier environmental burden. Investors in Haiti and the Philippines demanded a reduction in the minimum wage for their employees, and industrial zones in China generate substantial amounts of pollution.

Unfortunately, even when foreign investors provide better working conditions and have greater respect for the environment, the

benefits are not clearly positive, mainly because these investments are linked to enormous perks provided to multinational corporations. Thanks to government guarantees, companies are provided loans, often from taxpayer money, from the rich countries in which they are headquartered. The corporations are then given tax breaks in the target countries, infrastructure is built for their purposes by the state, etc. The result is market deformation, and domestic manufacturers are disadvantaged because they are not provided the same benefits. Moreover, these advantages help new firms lure employees and orders. In the vast majority of cases domestic firms are forced to adapt and become suppliers to the large concerns and chains under extremely unfavourable conditions. Once the tax breaks end, the firms leave or mask their profits using accounting operations through tax havens, where the majority of income then vanishes, leaving the state without any revenue.

Large agricultural projects are yet another threat. Although they result in the enormous production of commodities, the vast majority are designated for export and not local consumption. The establishment of large

plantations also often means the devastation of indigenous ecosystems or 'land grabs'. Local residents, who have weak negotiating leverage and poorly secured rights to land ownership, must leave their property because of these investments as their own government stands by idly, in some cases even forcing them to go.

These displaced people have no other option than to take poorly paid work on the new plantations (and become another statistic showing a rise in the employment rate) or leave for the city. This process destroys communities and threatens food security.

The shift of production to less developed countries also has an impact on our lives. The notion of 'worthy victims' means that people in developed countries who lost work because of this trend are convinced that their jobs have been given to those who are much poorer, thus improving their lives. Of course, lower labour costs in developing countries means more than just a loss of jobs in developed countries; it also causes pressure on our own work load and productivity. Workers in developed countries are accused of being less industrious than people in developing countries, i.e. that they are not willing to work for two dollars a day, twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

## PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE MUCH MORE VIOLENT THAN PEOPLE IN THE WEST AND ARE CONTINUALLY AT WAR WITH ONE ANOTHER.

One prominent myth claims that poverty in the developing world is the result of the aggressive nature of the population and leaders with an incessant urge to fight, to conquer new lands and rule neighbouring countries.

The truth, of course, is somewhat different. A closer look at the majority of wars in poor countries reveals that the real players in the struggles are rich countries fighting over mineral rights or strategic positions.

Where violence is concerned, developing countries are no match for developed countries. The greatest genocide in history, an event that is generally not discussed, was the murder of the Congolese during forced work at the rubber plantations of Belgian King Leopold II in the Belgian Congo (today the Democratic Republic of Congo). More than ten million Congolese died at the plantations in 1885-1908.<sup>9</sup> The Belgians also introduced the practice of cutting off the hands of hostages (family member of the rubber collectors) for failing to meet quotas.

<sup>9</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, Histoire générale du Congo: De l'héritage ancien à la République Démocratique; Duculot; Paris; 1998.

Villages that resisted were annihilated. The Congolese have been the most persecuted nationality in the world for a century and a half, and not even independence has brought an end to the bloodshed. Belgians with help from the USA overthrew and later executed the first democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, installing in his place the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who was responsible for the murder of millions more. In exchange for supplies of cheap strategic raw materials, he gained support from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – money that ended up in the bank accounts of Mobutu's family members; as a result, the citizens of Congo were burdened by enormous debt for several generations. The civil war that has continued even after Mobutu was deposed has enabled multinational concerns to obtain cheap raw materials essential for manufacturing microelectronics – computers, mobile phones, etc.

Likewise noteworthy is the slaughter and displacement of the residents of Tasmania to make room for British colonists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the annihilation of the population on the Indonesian Banda Islands by the Dutch to secure a nutmeg monopoly (1621).

However, it is not necessary to go back to colonial times for examples; it's enough to look at the period following the Second World War, the bloodiest conflict run mainly by Europeans.

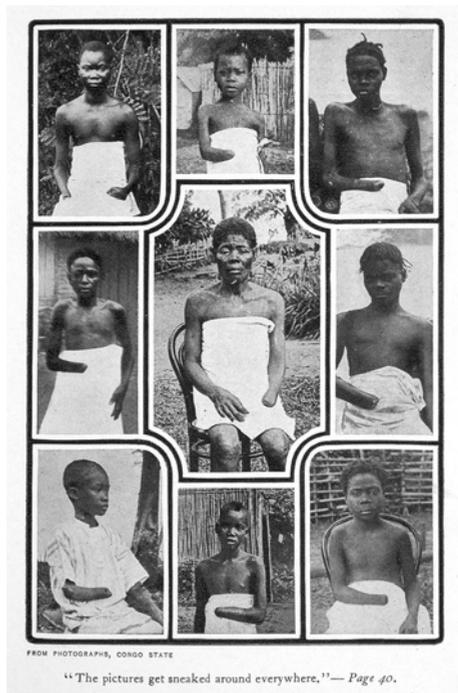
This period saw the flare up of the Cold War – a conflict between the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its satellites) and the West (the United States and its allies). The term 'Cold War' was meant to imply that the enemy camps were involved in only an ideological war, not one of actual military clashes. However, conflicts in Vietnam, Cambodia, Angola, Guatemala and other countries showed that the war only moved elsewhere while still being conducted by the super powers.

For example, the history of Vietnam following the Second World War is very instructive. Led by Ho Chi Minh, the League for the Independence of Vietnam succeeded in driving the Japanese occupants from the country in 1945. Ho Chi Minh asked the United States, which had supported him up until that time, for help in negotiating independence from France, which had colonised Vietnam in the second half of the nineteenth century. Instead, the USA supported France, which sent expeditionary forces to the area. The First Indochina War, which lasted until 1954, took the lives of a quarter of a million Vietnamese civilians, 170,000 Vietnamese troops and 100,000 soldiers from France and their African colonies. The Geneva Conference divided the country into North and South Vietnam. South Vietnam was ruled by a right-wing dictatorship controlled primarily by the French and the Americans, while a Communist dictatorship supported by the Soviet Union took control of North Vietnam. The Second Indochina War (the Vietnam War) that broke out soon afterward in 1955 left millions of civilians dead over the next twenty years.

The Americans feared that by allowing a Communist regime to take hold in Southeast Asia other countries would soon follow until communism reached the United States (the domino theory). This speculation was used to justify early intervention whenever necessary.

The end justified the means, and the Americans subsequently used the Gulf of Tonkin Incident as a pretext to become involved in the war in Vietnam. The destroyer USS Maddox reported that it had been attacked by Vietnamese torpedo boats, and the US Congress in its Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave President Johnson the authority to conduct military operations against North Vietnam. National Security Agency documents released in 2005 reveal that the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin never occurred and that the entire event was fabricated to support military intervention.

The bloody reign of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 served as an epilogue. Supported by both the Americans and the Chinese, the cruel reign of the Khmer Rouge left around



*For failing to meet their quotas, the colonists punished their slaves on the rubber plantations of the Belgian Congo by chopping off the hands of their children or parents.*

two million Cambodians dead. Pol Pot's regime was finally defeated by Vietnam and, following international intervention, a peace accord was negotiated.

The domino effect theory was also later applied in additional conflicts such as those in Benin, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau,

Madagascar, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan, Grenada and Nicaragua.

But the slaughter wasn't limited to populations outside of the West. The genocide of North American Indians in the USA and the killing of Jews and Roma in Europe remain cautionary tales of what 'civilised' people can do to one another.

## WE ONLY POUR ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF MONEY INTO POOR COUNTRIES AND HAVE NOTHING IN RETURN.

Many people believe that under the heading of development aid rich countries such as the Czech Republic send vast sums of money to the Third World, an activity they see as pointless and producing no benefits for the donor. But they are mistaken.

The aim of development aid from the very beginning has been the vision of securing joint and peaceful prosperity. For this vision to come to fruition, it is also necessary to support development in poorer countries. The absence of such efforts will only lead to tension between countries, economic destabilisation, large waves of migration and other detrimental effects. What's more, enormous supplies of strategic materials – from petroleum to rare technical metals – are sent to developed countries from the global South. Any threats to these shipments could spell disaster for our current economy.

Moreover, declared financial aid to developing countries (otherwise known as official development assistance – ODA) includes more than just financial gifts but also loans. By definition, this involves flows of official financing to support economic development and prosperity in developing countries, the subsidy portion of which amounts to at least 25 %. This means that the remaining 75 % can be provided as loans.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, more capital in fact flows from poor countries to the developed world. This is the

result of several factors. The first involves tax havens, where corporate profits disappear. Another example is revenue from customs duties, which were nullified as part of forced liberalisation. Debt payments are also an enormous problem. Due to changing interest rates, crises and other problems, many countries are still paying off debts that have in reality already been paid several times over.

Thanks to these hardships, the governments of rich countries are in a position to negotiate favourable conditions for their companies, providing them additional lucrative possibilities to mine important minerals or grow crops, thanks to which people in developed countries enjoy cheap electricity and meat.

This situation invariably (and justifiably) leads to dissatisfaction in the exploited countries, to unrest and even war on the local or international level. It would therefore be better for everyone if poor countries had sufficient opportunities to produce more things for their own consumption and to participate in the fair trade of goods on the world market in order to improve the standard of living of their own citizens.

This would not only improve conditions for the populations of less developed countries but also the residents of advanced countries, where workers are already under pressure to work and live like people in poor countries under the threat that their employers will move elsewhere and leave them without a way to make a living.

<sup>10</sup> External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users – Appendix III, Glossary; IMF; Washington DC; 2003.

## WE DO NOT NEED THE COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH.

There are certainly people in this country that could make such a claim – those who grow their own food, make their own clothes, make no telephone calls and do not use the computer.

The rest of us are dependent on international trade and on the prices of commodities and goods on international markets. We need ore from Africa for electronics, feedstuffs from Latin America for cattle, fabric and clothes from Asia. Crude oil from the Near East and Africa is needed for the production of motor fuels, plastic products, fertilisers and many other goods. And even tropical forests help clean our industrial emissions.

Some people would undoubtedly like to restrict the volume of exported and imported products, since this would reduce the ecological burden and give more local people work (both here and in developing countries). But then, neither coffee nor cotton can be grown in our country, and it would be difficult to build manufacturing facilities for complicated mechanical or electronic technologies in developing countries.

If our current standard of living is to be at least approximately retained, it will be necessary to preserve international trade and buy commodities and products even from the global South. Of course, it is also necessary for these products to be manufactured on a sustainable social and economic basis, i.e. to ensure that their production is beneficial and not detrimental to developing countries.

## PEOPLE FROM POOR COUNTRIES LACK SUFFICIENT SUPPLIES OF FOOD DUE TO OVERPOPULATION.

This is one of the most common myths. Many believe that there are too many people on the Earth and that there is no way they can all be fed. In reality, there is plenty of food in the world to feed everyone. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), 17% more calories per capita were produced in 2002 than thirty years ago!<sup>11</sup>

A look at the rankings of countries by settlement density reveals that the first thirty states with the highest density of residents per square kilometre are mostly those with medium to higher incomes. The number of people per square kilometre in the majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa is significantly lower than in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, of the thirty countries with the lowest settlement density, more than half are the poorest countries, despite the fact that they have excellent conditions for agriculture and food production, primarily on a sustainable basis.

Hence, the problem is not that people in poor countries don't have a realistic opportunity to provide for themselves. Instead, these countries are caught in a vicious circle of poverty. In much the same way as money makes money, poverty begets poverty. Impoverished people are poor because they lack finances and therefore the sources, technology and necessary infrastructure for effective production and the ability to provide for themselves for critical periods.

Another big problem is agricultural production intended for export, primarily to rich countries and often at the expense of food production for the needs of the local population. Many small farmers (a group of critical importance for food security) lose

<sup>11</sup> REDUCING POVERTY AND HUNGER: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF FINANCING FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT; Paper Prepared for the International Conference on Financing for Development Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002.FAO; Rome, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the CIA World Factbook.

their fields because of expanding plantations of export monocultures such as palm oil, which is a basic ingredient in our margarine, or the soy we use to feed our livestock. Moreover, a large part of imported raw materials go to waste. An FAO report from May 2011 reveals that total annual food production for the European and North American populations is around 900 kg per person, of which 280-300 kg is discarded, including 95-115 kg of food tossed directly by the consumers of these wealthy nations each year. Annual per capita food production for the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is 460 kg, of which consumers throw away 6-11 kg.

Overall, consumers in wealthy countries toss 222 million tons of edible food each year, an amount equal to the total production of all the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup> Not wasting food is therefore an important step in the fight against hunger throughout the world.

As these facts indicate, the problem is not a lack of food (and other resources) in the world or high population densities in poor countries

---

<sup>13</sup> Jenny Gustavsson, Christel Cederberg, Ulf Sonesson, Robert van Otterdijk, Alexandre Meybeck; Save Food; FAO, Italy; 2011.

but the unequal distribution of resources. In 2012, the 100 wealthiest people in the world amassed an additional 240 billion dollars, a mere quarter of which would be enough to eliminate extreme hunger in the world. According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, the extreme concentration of wealth undermines political processes because those that control wealth can better afford to influence political decisions, leading to a further increase in their assets and greater inequality in the world.<sup>14</sup> Discarded food also means an enormous waste of energy, water and labour representing an annual carbon footprint of 3.3 billion tons of carbon dioxide.<sup>15</sup>

According to Stiglitz, inequality is the result of attempts to get the biggest piece of the pie instead of actually trying to increase the size of the pie. The process is one of moving money from the bottom to the top, not one of creating wealth. And the people who do in fact produce this wealth are much worse off.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Oxfam: Should we (and everyone in Davos) worry about extreme wealth?; 21/1/2013.

<sup>15</sup> The Food Wastage Footprint; FAO; 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz; Separate and Unequal, The Price of Inequality; New York Times; 3/8/2012.

## Myths and Legends from the Unknown World

Published by: Glopolis, Prague 2013  
Author: Tomáš Tožička  
Publisher: Glopolis  
Soukenická 23  
110 00 Prague 1  
tel. / fax: +420 272 661 132  
www.glopolis.org



Glopolis is an independent analytical centre (think-tank) focused on global challenges and appropriate action by the Czech Republic and the EU. In cooperation with policy makers and the business community, and with an eye toward public opinion, our long-term goal is to improve the political culture and contribute to the transition to a smart economy and energy and food responsibility. For more information, visit our website at [www.glopolis.org](http://www.glopolis.org).



We Won't Accept Hunger! is a joint project between the Glopolis analytical centre, the Italian, Greek and Dutch branches of ActionAid, the French organisation Peoples Solidaires and the Slovenian Ekvilib Institute. Activities in our country are offered as part of the Czech Republic against Poverty campaign, which sponsors the educational projects of many other Czech non-profit organisations (ADRA, ARPOK, Friends of the Earth, NaZemi, etc.). The main goal is to raise public awareness of the problem of hunger and possible solutions by hosting educational events run by volunteers (project envoys) throughout the Czech Republic.



ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA  
POMÁHÁ

This work was published with financial support from the Czech Development Agency, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the European Union. The contents of the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the sponsors, who assume no liability for the views expressed in this material.

Likewise, the contents of the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher.