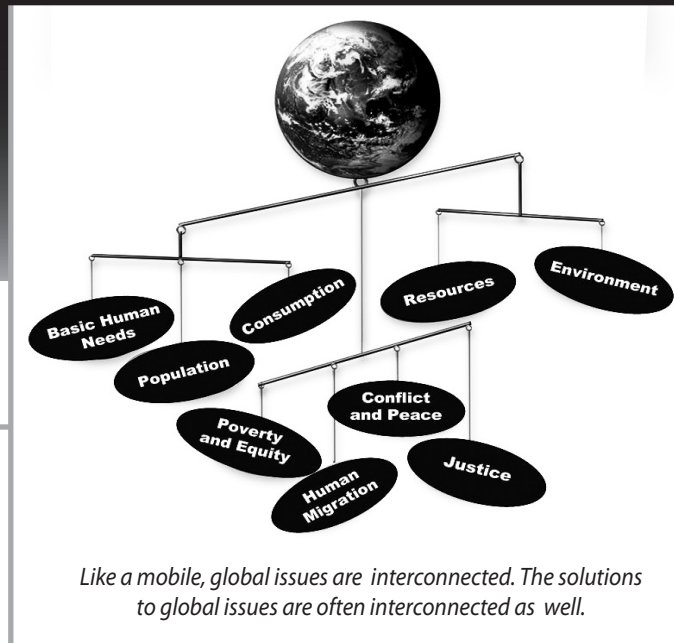


# Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.



“Well-fed people have many problems; hungry people have only one.”

— Chinese proverb

## Poverty in Numbers

Nobody chooses to be poor. Yet many people in our world live in poverty. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), two out of every five people on the planet (2.8 billion people) live on less than \$2 per day, and one of every five people (1.2 billion people) live on less than \$1 per day. Imagine what it is like to be Jyoti, a girl in India who lives in a mud house. Jyoti lives in poverty. Her village has no electricity, running water or doctor. She works all day instead of attending school.

While many poor people live in developing countries, poverty is also a problem in wealthy nations. Over 12 percent of people in the United States live in poverty, which is defined as an annual income of less than \$21,000 for a family of four.<sup>1</sup> Consider Joan, a woman in her 40s who is a hostess at a restaurant in Florida. She lives in a van and showers in a friend’s motel room. Joan cannot afford to miss a day of work or see a doctor when she is sick.

## The Haves and the Have-nots

Poverty relates to how wealth is distributed around the world. There is an extreme imbalance of wealth both in the U.S. and around the world. The wealth of the world’s 200 richest people is equal to the combined annual income of the world’s poorest 2.5 billion people.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. has the largest imbalance of wealth. In 2005, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans earned almost a quarter of all U.S. income.<sup>3</sup>

A community or region where poverty is present inevitably affects neighboring communities and countries. For example, those who “have not” tend to migrate in search of what they need to survive. Those who “have” often try to secure their land and

resources so they can continue to have access to food, education, health care and safe neighborhoods. This dynamic can cause fear, tension, hostility and conflict from both the “haves” and the “have-nots.”

## The Poverty Cycle

Because the effects of poverty are also the causes of poverty, people often say that poverty is cyclical. Most people living in poverty were born into poverty. This makes it difficult for the poor to break the cycle.

Many policies and systems in place at local, national and international levels can keep the cycle of poverty going. For example, in some U.S. areas where schools are funded by property taxes, schools in low-income districts receive less money while schools in high-income districts receive more money. This system can prohibit students in low-income areas from receiving the best possible education, which could help them break the poverty cycle.

Some people think other systems such as agricultural subsidies contribute to the cycle of poverty. Subsidies are money paid by the government to farmers so that people can buy food at low prices while farmers still earn sufficient income. Because they receive money from the government, farmers can sell food such as corn to countries outside the United States for less than it costs to grow the corn. How do you think this could affect U.S. farmers and those in other countries?

## Breaking the Cycle

Governments, organizations, companies and individuals all have important parts to play in combating an issue as complex and common as poverty. To address poverty, we must critically analyze and adjust the systems we have in place: our educational systems, international trade systems, economic models, political structures and health care systems. Simply giving money to those in need may address the tip of the iceberg but fails to tackle the problem at its roots.

One long-term solution to global poverty is to support fair trade, so that poor farmers receive fair rewards for their labor. Fair trade ensures that farmers are paid a decent wage for their product. For governments, this could mean adopting fair trade agreements with other nations. For individuals like you, it can mean buying from companies that practice fair trade.

Another solution is to provide basic tools for people who have nothing to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. Heifer International is one organization that does this. Heifer International provides poor people with farm animals and training, so that they can begin to make enough money to support their families.

An international effort to end poverty is the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2000, 189 leaders from around the world agreed to complete the MDGs by 2015. The MDGs include eight specific targets for improving the lives of the world’s poorest people, including eliminating extreme poverty and hunger.

The UN argues that we now have the money, resources and technology to end poverty once and for all. Tune in on Friday to learn more about how you can join the movement to end world poverty.

<sup>1</sup> DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor and Cheryl Hill Lee, U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> “Economics For Ever: Building Sustainability into Economic Policy,” PANOS Media Briefing No. 38, March 2000. <http://www.panos.org.uk/global/reportdownload.asp?type=report&cid=1000&reportid=1006>

<sup>3</sup> Greg Ip, “Income-Inequality Gap Widens,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 2007.

## Activity

Learn more about some of the organizations working to end global poverty by visiting these Web sites:

- Heifer International  
[www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)
- The Grameen Foundation  
[www.grameenfoundation.org](http://www.grameenfoundation.org)
- Oxfam America  
[www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)

After you research these three organizations, share what you learned by choosing your favorite organization and sending the link to one or more of your friends.

## Take Action!

Visit [www.facingthefuture.org](http://www.facingthefuture.org) and click on *Fast Facts & Quick Actions* under *Latest News from Facing the Future*. Click on *Poverty* and choose one quick action to help eliminate extreme poverty.