HOW POVERTY IS A FORTRESS WITHOUT DRAWBRIDGES
AND WHY WE MUST BUILD BRIDGES

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By

Otuba Mary-Shirley Asare, B.A.

Georgetown University
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The aim of this thesis is to show that poverty alleviation strategies need to be implemented more efficiently and urgently, despite the ongoing work of individual governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private foundations, and public-private partnerships, because the problem persists and is widespread and growing. These strategies include political, economic, and socio-cultural measures such as holding the leaders more accountable to the populace, creating better employment opportunities, and expanding access to educational and training facilities. The scope is the first decade of the twenty-first century and covers five countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. These countries have been selected because they represent a cross-section of poverty-stricken nations that can be helped by the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals to halve absolute poverty by 2015.

The thesis is organized in six parts. Chapter I: Introduction, entitled “Background Information on Poverty and on the Countries Selected,” begins with definitions of poverty, data on each country, and the role of religion in poverty alleviation. It also notes how poverty was handled in Europe and stresses that fighting poverty is not an impossible task. Chapter II, “Poverty in the 21st Century and in the Countries Studied,” discusses the location of poverty in the five countries, provides a list of the UN Millennium Development Goals,
and deals with how they apply to the poverty problem in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the
Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. Chapter III, “The Causes of Poverty,” examines the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural reasons behind poverty. Chapter IV, “The Adverse Effects of Poverty,” deals with the wide-spread repercussions from this problem while Chapter V, “The Political, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Imperatives for Reducing Poverty,” argues the main reasons why the fight against poverty must be waged. Chapter VI: Conclusion, “Recommendations for Poverty Alleviation,” first lists four solutions that can be applied effectively: expanding political participation; increasing educational opportunities; improving healthcare; promoting microcredit and partnerships with multi-national corporations. Then, this last chapter evaluates the effectiveness of these recommendations and notes that change for the better is possible.
This thesis is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr. Enoch Manukure Kwame Asare, a proud son of Mamfe, and a medical doctor whose kindness, generosity, integrity, and amazing intellect, imbued me with appreciation for the world and all people.
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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON POVERTY AND ON THE FIVE COUNTRIES SELECTED

The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for examining poverty in five countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. The scope of the chapter is a wide period from early times to the first decade of the 21st century. The organization is in three main parts. Part I, the Introduction, gives four definitions of poverty: general, absolute, structural, and conjunctural. It also examines the role of religion in early poverty alleviation and looks at how poverty was handled in Europe as all five countries of this thesis were former colonies. Part II deals with each of the five countries in turn, providing reasons why they have been selected and some information about them, such as a brief history, geographic challenges, demographic overview, and economic data. Part III, the Conclusion, looks at two of mankind’s most impressive historic feats as proof of the human capacity to overcome tremendous challenges, including poverty.

Part I: Definitions of Poverty

Since the thesis focuses on poverty, a definition of the term is in order. One general definition is that poverty is “The state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; condition of being poor; indigence.”¹ Absolute poverty is defined as “the lack of the basic elements needed for human survival: food, water, proper clothing, and

¹. Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, s.v. “Poverty.”
One example of absolute poverty is Somalia which manifests the need for all the elements required for human survival. In the case of structural poverty, “it is long-term in nature, due to personal and social circumstances.” Nigeria can be cited as an example of structural poverty because of political corruption and misappropriation of revenue from oil. On the other hand, conjunctural poverty “represents poverty into which ordinary people can be temporarily thrown in times of crisis and is usually caused by specific shocks such as climate or political insecurity.” An example of conjunctural poverty is Aceh, in Indonesia, after the December 2004 earthquake and the subsequent tsunami. Another example of conjunctural poverty is Fukushima in Japan, following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Regarding the role of religion in early poverty alleviation round the world, the early anti-poverty advocates were usually missionaries affiliated with religious orders. It was through the role of missionaries that the world first became aware of the plight of the poor, particularly in former colonies. Missionaries sought to ease the deprivations of poverty while preaching religion, hence their importance in this discussion. One such advocate was Albert Schweitzer, M.D., born January 14, 1875, in the Alsace region of Germany (now part of France), who subscribed to ‘The Fellowship of those who bear the Mark of Pain,’ a religious


4. Ibid.
order. He went to Lamberene in Gabon, Africa, as a medical missionary in 1913 under his religious order. He believed that those who were better off and had suffered pain owed a debt of duty without recompense to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Dr. Schweitzer spent most of his life in Lamberene, Africa, building a leprosarium with funds that he raised through his professional musical engagements and through royalties from his published books. In 1952 he won a Nobel Peace Prize for his humanitarian work in Africa. He died in Gabon in 1965. According to Steven Beaudoin in *A History of World Poverty*, one scholar stated that “Schweitzer was a vital bridge between traditional charity and modern secular relief.” This was because until the time of Dr. Schweitzer, poverty abatement was conditioned upon the poor agreeing to change their behavior as they were deemed to be lacking in moral fiber. An earlier medical missionary, who also deserves mention, is Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish doctor, who lived from 1813 to 1873. He was a Protestant missionary doctor, a Scottish Congregationalist, who first came to Southern Africa in 1841. He established a missionary post at Mabotswa in present day Botswana in 1844, where he practiced medicine as a general practitioner and denounced the inhumanity of the slave trade, paving the way for other medical missionaries like Dr. Schweitzer to go to Africa.

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6. Ibid.
Livingstone was greatly influenced by his future father-in-law, Robert Moffat, a renowned missionary and a member of the London Missionary Society. Moffat, who lived from 1795 to 1883, made frequent treks from South Africa, where he was stationed, to Matabeleland, in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

Another famous religious figure who helped to alleviate poverty was Mother Theresa, who was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910, in Shkup, Albania, now Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.\(^8\) At the age of eighteen she joined the Sisters of Loreto, a Catholic Order. In 1927, she moved to India after receiving initial training in Dublin, Ireland.\(^9\) From 1931 to 1948 she taught at St. Mary’s High School in Calcutta. In September 1946, during her annual spiritual retreat to Darjeeling, Mother Theresa received the call from God to leave the Sisters of Loreto in order to serve the poorest of the poor in Calcutta.\(^10\) After being granted an Intent of Exclaustration by the Pope, she left the Catholic Order on August 17, 1948. She then established in 1950, in India, the order of the Missionaries of Charity, and helped the poor in Calcutta from 1957 until her death in 2005. Due to her great humility, she was another powerful advocate for the poor. Her awards included the United Nations’ Albert Schweitzer Prize and the Nobel Peace Prize. Till today,

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Mother Theresa’s Missionaries of Charity have homes for the destitute on every continent, to serve freely the poorest of the poor. In fact, missionaries have a long tradition of helping the poor and the disadvantaged. Many missionaries who practiced in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of following in the true footsteps of Christ held no worldly possessions and even took vows of poverty. The Jesuits and certain missionary orders, including Mother Theresa’s, still adhere to the vow of poverty.

Not all religions insist on a vow of poverty. Islam holds that both the rich and the poor face tribulations in life, but particularly the desperately poor, because they would be distracted from worshipping and seeking further knowledge of Allah by having to beg in the streets for food. Islam thus disapproves of voluntary poverty since it means that an individual’s will is being asserted and not Allah’s will.\footnote{Beaudoin, \textit{Poverty in World History}, 27.} At the same time, Islam does have a tradition of helping the poor as alms-giving is one of the five pillars of the faith. As for other religions, unlike Islam, Buddhism seeks to avoid any state that will distract practitioners from meditation. As such, it strives for balance in having neither too much nor too little. Buddhism’s goal is to overcome the miseries of existence, \textit{dukkha}. According to Buddhism, social unrest and moral degeneration in a society are indications of growing poverty.\footnote{Professor P.D. Premasiri, “Religious Values and the Measurement of Poverty: A Buddhist Perspective,” The World Bank, \url{http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/WDR/johannesburg/buddhist.pdf} (accessed August 6, 2011).} Buddhism holds that “The elimination of poverty needs to be demonstrated by the establishment of a society free of crime, social tensions, wars and conflicts, where people can
live in harmony, friendship, and peace.” In the case of Hinduism, it ascribes poverty and wealth to the four stages of manhood, in which the first and last stages renounce worldly goods. During the second stage man devotes himself to *artha* – the acquisition of wealth - to support his family. In the third stage, man has to disentangle himself from worldly goods and pleasures. Hinduism offers two ways of dealing with poverty and social injustice, either accepting it as inevitable or serving the poor to the best of one’s ability. Hinduism practices the concepts of *dharma* and *karma* which involve dedication and detachment; accepting that although one might work hard, the results or effects of that hard work are beyond one’s control. Service to the poor, irrespective of the outcome, is, therefore, espoused under Hinduism.

In Africa, the African Traditional Religion (ATR) alleviates poverty in the following ways: reminding practitioners about the responsibility for looking after Mother Earth who will in turn bless the people with bountiful harvests; underscoring the shared communal nature of negative and positive outcomes; and emphasizing the importance of everyone contributing towards the common good. Ghanaian scholar, Elizabeth Amoah, contends that ATR’s role in poverty alleviation is a complex one and that the simultaneous co-existence of

13. Ibid., 6.


ATR and Christianity in African societies gives rise to new forms of religion. ATR practices veneration of ancestors, and the pouring of libation to the gods. ATR is the religion that existed and was practiced on the African continent before the introduction of any other foreign religion, such as Christianity or Islam. It is the indigenous religion of Sub-Saharan Africa and emphasizes thanking the gods for health and prosperity, appeasing the ancestors, and warding off evil spirits. Animism is integral to ATR, as followers believe that inanimate objects have a spirits residing within them. According to Professor John S. Mbiti, ATR “has dominated the thinking of African people to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities.”

This observation could provide deep insight to some of the intangible reasons for poverty in Zimbabwe and other African countries in that problems are often attributed to spiritual root causes and practical solutions may not be actively sought. Wealthy practitioners of ATR often engage a spiritualist or priest to perform rites that protect their wealth from witches, evil spirits or anyone intending to harm them. The wealthy support the spiritualist, and, by extension, other poor followers that work with the spiritualist.

One tradition shared by all these different religions is that their emphasis on charity work helps with poverty alleviation. The Jewish faith also shares this tradition. For example,

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the 12th century Jewish scholar and physician, Rabbi Moshe Ben, stated that the highest form of charity is to help sustain a person before he becomes impoverished by offering a substantial gift in a dignified manner, by extending a suitable loan, or by helping him to find suitable employment.18

As to how poverty was handled in Europe in the 20th century, it is important to point out that poverty there increased with the advent of capitalism and industrialization in the late nineteenth century. The manorial business relationship changed, so that a wealthy land owner once responsible for the people working on his land now adopted an industrial relationship, which led to the alienation of his workers. In the new arrangement, there was no provision for the worker since landowners made more money by subleasing smaller parcels of land to subsistence farmers. Former tenant farmers ended up in poverty because their land was now too small to cultivate enough food to sustain their families, let alone sell for profit. The economist, Deepak Lal, states that the numbers of vagrants in Europe in the early 20th century swelled because of conjunctural poverty linked to the “Industrial Revolution’s trade cycle and the unemployment that ensues in its downturns.”19 Once the link between poverty, crime and vice was perceived, its alleviation became critical to ensuring a stable society, e.g. in France, England, Italy, and Germany. Social surveys conducted in


England also established such a link, when they “mapped the presence of poverty inEngland’s major cities and added a statistical dimension to popular views that typically linkedpoverty to immorality and even criminality.” Consequently, these countries instituted socialinsurance programs, such as the compulsory contributory schemes in Germany and thecompulsory unemployment insurance plans in Britain. In the early twentieth century povertyspread to include not only the destitute, homeless, orphaned, old or infirm, but also theunemployed or underemployed able-bodied. Fear of societal and political instability acted as acatalyst for poverty reduction in Europe.

In the aftermath of colonialism, Western donors helping the new nations “accepted the responsibility to prevent starvation.” However, this aid was insufficient, resulting inimpoverished newly independent nations, particularly those under study in this thesis. This isbecause in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, the focus ofthe colonizers had been the extraction of natural resources, such as valuable metals andminerals, with the aim of building wealth in their own countries.

After WWII in 1945, the business of international aid and poverty relief was carried out by organizations such as the United Nations International Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF), the Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, and the International Red Cross. Furthermore, several countries like England, France, Germany, and the United States,

21. Ibid., 79.
22. Ibid., 26.
adopted social insurance and welfare measures to assist the poor. But these measures often
did not extend to minority groups. The same was true of social assistance programs in South
Africa. As a result, “While South Africans of European origins and a legally defined group of
‘Coloured’ people benefitted from a widening array of social services, impoverished and
vulnerable black South Africans received almost nothing from the government.” Instead,
informal types of aid and extended networks of families, neighbors, and communities were
the prevalent sources of assistance to fight poverty. The government did not play a
significant role in poverty redress and to date social insurance is not uniformly available in
Bolivia, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Haiti or Zimbabwe. In less developed
societies the informal extended family and community network provided assistance to the
old and infirm, and to those in financial distress. This exerted added pressure on poorer
communities as limited means were stretched even further. Informal aid from family and
community networks are still the norm today.

Part II. The Five Countries Chosen: Reasons for their Selection and Basic
Information on Them

The countries have been selected to display a cross-section of some of the poorest
countries in the world and to reflect the economic, social, political, and geographic
challenges that they face, such as being landlocked, in the case of Bolivia and Zimbabwe, and
being prone to hurricanes, as in the case of Bangladesh, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

23. Ibid., 89.

They have also been chosen because they are all impacted to varying degrees by the United Nations Millennium Goals. These goals, all to be achieved by 2015, are: 1) halve extreme poverty and hunger; 2) achieve universal primary education; 3) promote gender equality; 4) reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds; 5) reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters; 6) reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB; 7) ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) develop a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief.25

All the countries in this thesis transitioned from colonial rule to independence during the mid to late twentieth century, except Haiti, which gained its independence in 1804. During colonial rule most of the colonized masses were employed as laborers, in mines, on farms, or on plantations, at a pittance to enrich the colonial powers. Political and social instability due to poverty emerged later in post-colonial societies, around the mid-twentieth century. This can be partially ascribed to the fact that newly independent countries emerging from colonial rule believed that, by being in charge of their own fate, there would be prosperity for all. This notion underestimated the political violence that accompanies the building of new nation states.26 The actual political struggle to implement adequate governmental structure and leadership, while emerging from the shadows of colonialism,


rendered these hopes and aspirations largely unfeasible, at least initially.

A. Bangladesh – South Asia

![Political Map of Bangladesh](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bangladesh_map2.htm)

Bangladesh was chosen because it has consistently been one of the poorest countries in South Asia and the world, suffers acute chronic poverty, and all the Millennium Development Goals pertain to it. A nation of 162.2 million people, its capital is Dhaka, the most urban city. Bangladesh’s existence is historically tied to the creation of India and Pakistan after their respective splits from Britain in 1947. At first, East and West Pakistan were separated by Indian territory. However, in 1971, with India’s help, the Awami League
of East Pakistan defeated West Pakistan, and the independent state of Bangladesh was recognized as a new nation. Bangladesh is ethnically homogenous with 98% of the population being Bengali, and speaking Bangla. Biharis, originally from northern India, and the tribal groups Chakmas, Marmas, Tipperas, and Moorangs together make up the remaining 2% of the population. Approximately 88% of Bangladeshis are Sunni Muslim, 13% are Hindu, 1% Buddhist, and 1% Christian.

Located within the Himalayan mountains and the Gangetic Plain, Bangladesh’s southern border lies on the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers flow through the nation before emptying into the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh’s geography is challenging; the confluence of so many waterways and bodies of water conspire to create violent storms and extensive flooding with disastrous consequences. Bangladesh is largely an agrarian country and thus economically vulnerable to volatile weather which threatens crop harvests. The major crops are rice, wheat, sugar cane, vegetables, and peanuts. Cash crops include jute, cotton, tobacco, and tea. In the 21st century, Bangladesh has growing garment and services industries.

Under the leadership of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is


experiencing more political stability and enjoying economic growth and an increase in life expectancy. There are, however, political underpinnings afoot. An article in the August 7th 2011, edition of The Economist states that Dr. Muhammad Yunus’s ouster as Chairman of the Grameen Bank, which he founded, may have to do with Prime Minister Hasina’s displeasure at his high international profile. This well-known and respected Nobel Peace Laureate believes that his country can benefit as a neighbor of India, Myanmar, Bhutan, western China, and Nepal through trade partnerships with them and by constructing a commercial port at Cox’s Bazar. Regarding its economy, in 2010 Bangladesh’s GDP was $213.5 billion, while its average annual per capita income was $1,334. Inflation runs at 8.4%. It has foreign direct investments totaling $1.1 billion. Its quality of life is still low, although life expectancy has improved from 56 years in the early 1990s to 65.4 years in 2006.


32. Ibid., 107.
B. Bolivia – South America

Figure 1.2. “Political Map of Bolivia.”
http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bolivia_map2.htm

Bolivia, which takes its name from Simon Bolivar, the leader who helped to gain independence from Spain in 1825, was selected because it is one of two landlocked countries in South America, the other being Paraguay. Bolivia shares borders with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru. Historically plagued by poverty, it can be helped by all eight UN Millennium Goals. In January 2011 it was the poorest country in South America. Bolivia’s administrative capital city is La Paz, in the western part of the country. The high altitude of La Paz makes it the world’s highest capital city at 11,975 feet above sea level. Sucre, the

constitutional capital and seat of justice, is located in south central Bolivia. With a population of 9.8 million, the country has one of the lowest population densities in the world, given its landmass of 424,000 square miles.\textsuperscript{34} The average life expectancy is 67.33 years and per capita income is $4278.\textsuperscript{35}

During the War of the Pacific (1879 – 83), Bolivia lost the valuable pacific coastal province of Litoral to Chile. Brazil then annexed the Acre region in 1903. It has been said of Bolivia that, “The inaccessibility of its own land was Bolivia’s undoing.”\textsuperscript{36} While Chile and Brazil were able to defeat the Bolivian army, Bolivians with their sparse population, seemed incapable of maneuvering and adequately defending their territory. Bolivia’s vast terrain poses challenges because of areas of very high altitude, making some regions, particularly areas where the poor live, unusable for farming. In the Santa Cruz region, old forests have given way to increased soy bean cultivation. The temperate valleys of Tarija, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca are food production centers, particularly the Cochabamba region. The primary food crops are soybean, corn and rice.

The three main population groups are the following: the indigenous Indians, the Aymara and the Quechua; the Mestizos, who are a mix of Indian and European lineage; and the Europeans, most of whom hail from mainland Europe. The Aymara and Quechua


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Keith John Richards, \textit{Bolivia} (New York: Kuperard, 2009), 30.
Indians are very poor, while the Mestizo and Europeans are much better off. The current President, Evo Morales, who was elected in 2006, is an Aymara Indian and a former coca leaf farmer. Discrimination against the indigenous majority, the Aymara and Quechua Indians, by the non-indigenous minority whites, is still rampant. Around 95% of Bolivians are Roman Catholic, with the rest being Protestants and animists.37

C. The Dominican Republic – the Caribbean

The Dominican Republic was selected for this thesis because it has pockets of deep poverty and shares an island with Haiti. Corruption, brutality, and foreign occupation have played major roles in the Dominican Republic’s political history. Spain colonized the

Dominican Republic in 1492 because of its gold, bauxite, nickel and sugar cane, but recognized French rule in the western part of the island, Haiti, in 1697, under the Treaty of Ryswick. Santo Domingo, which was the name for the Dominican Republic at the time, was ruled by Haiti from 1821 until 1844, when it gained independence. However, the Dominican Republic chose to return to Spanish colonial rule in 1861, rather than risk being re-annexed by Haiti.\textsuperscript{38} Independence for the Dominican Republic was finally declared in 1865 after a war against Spain. In 1937 President Rafael Trujillo, who held power from 1930 to 1961, summarily ordered the massacre of up to 35,000 Haitians living on the Dominican side of the border because he resented the Haitian immigrants’ support of Dominican exiles planning to overthrow him. That is how Massacre River, near the border, got its name.\textsuperscript{39} The current President is Leonel Fernandez Reyna, who was first elected in 2004 and then reelected in 2008. He presided over relatively calm conditions and some economic growth till the nation was hit by the global recession in 2008.

The Dominican Republic, with Santo Domingo as its capital, occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola and is home to about 9.8 million people. The main population groups are 73\% mixed race, 16\% white, and 11\% black.\textsuperscript{40} There are a growing


number of Dominico-Haitians, people of Haitian origin born in the Dominican Republic, and animosity exists between them and native Dominicans. Almost 90% of Dominicans are Roman Catholic, while the remaining 10% are either Protestants or adherents of voodoo.  

The climate is tropical maritime with seasonal heavy rainfall. The country lies in the hurricane belt and is exposed to severe weather during the hurricane season from May to September. There are highlands, mountains, and fertile valleys. Food crops grown include sugarcane, coffee, cocoa, rice, bananas, potatoes and corn. Tobacco, which was initially cultivated by the Taino and Arawak Indians centuries ago, is grown for export in the north central Yaque Valley. The Dominican Republic is now one of the largest exporters of handmade premium cigars. In the 1990s, the country experienced an economic spike from tourism, telecommunications, and manufacturing. The proceeds of this spike, however, were not well distributed, causing high income inequality and areas of poverty. There is high income inequality with the richest 10% receiving almost 40% of GDP, while the poorest half of the population gets less than 20%. In 2010 unemployment remained at 15.5%, and life expectancy was 73.99 years.

41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
D. Haiti – the Caribbean

Figure 1.4. “Political Map of Haiti.” http://mapas.owje.com/maps/1296_haiti-political-map.html

Haiti was selected because, as noted by the World Bank, it is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.44 Haiti is also the first independent black-led nation that was established following a successful slave rebellion in 1804 against France, which colonized Haiti primarily for its sugar, coffee, gold, and cocoa. In addition, Haiti is directly affected by all of the UN Millennium Development Goals, particularly MDG1 which aims at halving absolute poverty by 2015. Haiti’s per capita income is $1177, with over two-thirds of the population out of work, and it has the lowest life expectancy in the Western hemisphere.45


45. Ibid.
Moreover, it presents a poignant contrast to the Dominican Republic on the other side of Hispaniola Island in that Haiti is a much poorer nation. Haiti occupies the western third of the island and must also grapple with several geographical challenges. One such challenge is that the country is almost completely deforested, which makes it extremely vulnerable to flooding. Another geographical challenge is that it is surrounded to the West and South by the Caribbean Sea and to the North by the North Atlantic Ocean, which increases its vulnerability to hurricanes and violent weather. Yet another challenge is that Haiti sits on a fault line, which has resulted in devastating earthquakes, most recently in January 2010.

Since Haiti encompassed the Dominican Republic in 1822, many Haitian leaders have tried, but failed, to re-annex the Dominican Republic, believing that the eastern part of Hispaniola is vital to achieving the true economic potential of Haiti.46 The capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince, sits on the Gulf of Gonaive, along Haiti’s western coast. Haiti’s climate is mostly tropical and humid, with a dry season from November to January and a wet season from February through May. Hurricane season lasts from June to October. Because of scant resources and lack of infrastructure, it is especially difficult for Haiti to rebound from the natural disasters that have plagued it. Much of the government’s public spending has been directed at recovery efforts from natural disasters, leaving very little for urgently needed public programs like healthcare and education. The country’s 9.7 million residents, who are just 0.2 million less than the population of the Dominican Republic, inhabit a third of the

space and are therefore much more densely situated. Haiti’s main population groups are black, 95%, and mulatto and white, together making up 5%. Around 80% of Haitians are Roman Catholic, and 16% are Protestant with the remaining population spread across Baptist, Pentecostal and Adventist. Many Haitians concurrently practice voodoo a religious derivative from African Traditional Religion that venerates the dead and seeks protection against witchcraft.

Until May 2011, the President was Rene Preval, who succeeded deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in May 2006. Regarding Aristide’s election in 1990, Michelle Wucker wrote that: “Balaguer was very weak. In Haiti, Aristide was just beginning to fight. Hispaniola had rarely supported two strongmen at once: each caudillo’s (a Latin American military strongman) power depended on his ability to preserve an aura that reminded people that he was the only Great Leader on the island.” Balaguer was the Dominican Republic’s leader when Aristide was elected in Haiti, and this remark provides insight into the power struggle for dominance over Hispaniola that exists between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. However, Aristide’s initial presidency was short-lived as he was deposed in a military coup in 1991. He was reinstated in 1994 following pressure from the US, but was ousted in 1995. He regained the presidency in 2001, serving till 2004 when he was once again


removed from office following a violent rebellion. That year, he was flown out of Haiti on a US military plane to the Central African Republic. 49 He returned to Haiti from South Africa, where he had been living, just before the elections in May 2011. Another former and notorious President, Baby “Doc” Duvalier, also returned to Haiti shortly before these elections. The newly appointed President is Michel Martelly, who assumed office on May 14, 2011, after a highly contested Presidential election.

E. Zimbabwe – Southern Africa

Figure 1.5. “Political Map of Zimbabwe.”  
http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/zimbabwe_map.htm

Zimbabwe, which means ‘stone houses’ in Shona, a Bantu language, was selected because it has become increasingly stricken by structural poverty in the last decade and because all the

MDGs are applicable to it. Moreover, it is prone to drought and is a landlocked country of 11.7 million people in southeastern Africa, which shares borders with Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia.\textsuperscript{50} Its capital is Harare, which is its most modern and populous city. Harare enjoys a moderate sub-tropical highland climate because of its high elevation.

The country was annexed from South Africa in 1923 by the British, who called it Southern Rhodesia, and colonized the country for over fifty years. Independence was granted at midnight on April 17, 1980, and presided over by Prince Charles, heir to the British throne.\textsuperscript{51} The country was then renamed Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe the new nation’s first Prime Minister. Mugabe later became President in 1987. About 98% percent of Zimbabweans are Africans, with 82% belonging to the Shona tribe and about 14% to the Ndebele group. The remaining 2% are evenly split between whites and Asians.\textsuperscript{52} Approximately 70% of the population is Christian, spread across Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Anglican, with Pentecostal churches on the rise. There is a small Muslim population, and some practitioners of African Traditional Religion (ATR). It has a relatively


high literacy rate of 90.7% among African countries. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS cannot be overlooked; it has decreased average life expectancy in the span of two decades from 61 to 41 years of age.

Once a country that used to feed itself, Zimbabwe must now import most of its food from Kenya, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa, despite having major crops such as corn, cotton, tobacco, wheat, coffee, sugarcane, and peanuts. President Mugabe’s measures to fight the black market and clean up Zimbabwe’s cities have resulted in millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), causing further hardship to the nation and its people. According to Paul Collier, “President Robert Mugabe must take responsibility for the economic collapse in Zimbabwe since 1998, culminating in inflation of over 1,000 percent a year.” Irrespective of Mugabe’s culpability, the people of Zimbabwe must find a way forward out of the political morass and interminable poverty that his protracted leadership seems only to prolong.

There are still mining industries, but agricultural output has plummeted in recent years following the expulsion of white farmers and the expropriation of their farms. The situation is compounded by severe drought. Many of these farms have now fallen into disrepair as much of the technical know-how left with the white owners. The case of Mike

53. Ibid.


Campbell, a white Zimbabwean farmer who fought President Mugabe’s expropriation of his farm in court, made international headlines. After court delays, an abduction and beating, the court in Windhoek, Namibia, ruled in favor of Mr. Campbell, citing the unconstitutionality of seizing his farm simply because he was a white Zimbabwean, as this type of discrimination violated his rights. Although Mr. Campbell won the case, his farm was burned down.\textsuperscript{58} He died soon after in 2011.

\textbf{Part III. Conclusion}

In conclusion, poverty is an extremely difficult problem to alleviate in the five nations examined but it can be done. There have been significant apocryphal moments throughout mankind’s history that demonstrate the ability to achieve feats that might have seemed impossible, and that show the human capacity to overcome substantial odds. Two examples of this, which necessitated major commitment and concerted team effort, are the successful moon mission of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in November 1969,\textsuperscript{59} and Chile’s wondrous engineering feat of rescuing 33 miners in October

\textsuperscript{56} Paul Collier, \textit{The Bottom Billion} (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2008), 64. 


\textsuperscript{59} NASA, “The Decision to go to the Moon,” National Aeronautics and Space Administration, \url{http://history.nasa.gov/moondec.html} (accessed August 22, 2010).
NASA was established in October 1958 as a result of President Eisenhower’s chagrin at Russia launching Sputnik 2, followed by the first man in orbit. In 1961, when President John F. Kennedy first challenged NASA to put a man on the moon, the primary responsibility for achieving this resided with NASA – its visionary scientists, engineers, leaders, mechanists. Arthur Clarke, former Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society wrote, “The process of reaching that destination involved the lonely labors of a handful of visionaries and the workaday exchange of information among a few hundred decidedly unglamorous scientists and technicians.” The moon mission inspired the collective imagination of Americans and people around the world who watched this breakthrough with excitement and bated breath. The challenge was taken up and on July 20, 1969, Mr. Neil Armstrong and the Apollo 11 crew landed on the moon, and an excited and gratified nation erupted into mind blown applause as the mission was accomplished. The United States had managed to send mankind some 238,857 miles into outer space to land on the surface of the moon! The example of NASA’s moon mission illustrates that with the right


62. Ibid., 370.

63. Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, s.v. “Moon.”
Commander-in-Chief, the right dedicated team and resources, and the support and collective political will of a nation, anything can be achieved, even the seemingly impossible. Neil Armstrong said, “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” The world needs a giant leap in poverty reduction.

In more recent times, a similarly stunning accomplishment which, in spite of all the engineering and technical expertise, has a hint of the miraculous about it, is the successful rescue of miners trapped some 600 meters beneath the earth in Chile. It took an indomitable human spirit not to be overcome by the seeming helplessness and hopelessness of the situation, especially when the mouth of the escape shaft was blocked by a rock two days after the initial blast that trapped the miners. The rock appeared to have put an end to that escape bid. It took 17 days for the world to learn that the miners had survived the initial blast and mine collapse. It took another 51 days to get them out. The rescue team was led by Chilean experts, along with American engineers who drilled the rescue shaft. It was a painstaking and long process requiring extreme mental resilience from the miners, dedication from the rescue team, and the support and love of family members to keep the miners’ spirits up while the whole team worked diligently to get them out. When they were hoisted to the surface, one-by-one, on October 12th just before midnight, the world’s collective attention was once again focused on an awe-inspiring feat that entailed commitment, patience, diligence, application of great technical expertise and skill. There was also a collective desire to achieve the goal at all costs: to rescue them, not recover their bodies.

64. Glennon, Our Times: the Illustrated History of the 20th Century, 500.
similar collective will is required to reduce poverty. Describing his decision on the rescue, Chilean President, Sebastian Pinera, said, “I decided we had to act immediately and, as a society, play for life.” So too, must the world now act for the millions of poverty-stricken people around the world, including those in the five countries covered in this thesis.

The historic accomplishments of NASA’s 1969 moon mission and the admirable 2010 rescue of Chilean miners exemplify the human capacity to achieve the seemingly impossible. Since mankind can face and conquer the hardest challenges, therefore he can reduce poverty. This task will take time and resources, and require a concerted effort from many people, but it is achievable. Slavery was wrong, as was apartheid and the Holocaust; it is also wrong that so many people are living in misery when there are tools available to remedy the situation. Some of these tools will be discussed in this thesis. In spite of the dire conditions in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, there is hope that the same human capacity and collaboration that placed a man on the moon and that persevered to save the Chilean miners, can be applied to reduce poverty. After having provided some background information on the five countries examined in this thesis, the next chapter will discuss poverty in the twenty-first century in these countries.

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CHAPTER II

POVERTY IN THE 21st CENTURY AND IN THE COUNTRIES STUDIED

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on poverty in the five countries examined for this thesis while its scope is the first decade of the 21st century. The chapter is organized in four parts. Part I presents a detailed look at where the poor reside in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, their living conditions, and their vulnerabilities. Part II shows a table of the UN Millennium Development Goals, and explains why these eight goals are pertinent to the countries under examination. It also gives background information on why and how the UN Millennium Development goals were established. Part III provides analysis from an economic chart compiled by the author, with data from the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook and the Heritage Organization, to show the various aspects of poverty in all five countries. Part IV, the Conclusion, gives a synopsis of poverty in the five countries, and compares and contrasts the state of poverty amongst them.

Part I. The Location, Living Conditions, and Vulnerabilities of the Poor within the Five Selected Countries

A. Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been in existence as an independent nation for forty years, and is divided into 64 administrative districts. The extent and depth of poverty in this country ranks third in the world, behind India and China.¹ The hardest hit areas of poverty are in the

north-west, the central north, the southern coastal areas, and the many sand bar islands near the Bay of Bengal. There is considerable poverty in the slum dwellings of cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. The poor are also located in fishing villages in the low-lying deltas, in the urban slum areas, and in rural agricultural villages.

About one-third of Bangladeshis live in urban settings in homes constructed of masonry. The homes of the poor are not well constructed, with most of the poor residing in bamboo or wooden shacks with mud floors, and covered by metal sheeting. Such homes are particularly vulnerable to violent storms. Only 19% of rural households have electricity and 47% of the population, both rural and urban, have inadequate sanitation facilities.\(^2\) Bangladesh’s average family size is 2.65 children, and life expectancy is 60.55 years.\(^3\) Between 37% to 40% of the population suffers from structural and conjunctural poverty, and the rural poverty rate stands at 90%.\(^4\) The occupations of Bangladesh’s poor fall into three main categories: subsistence farming, fishing, and garment production. Additionally, many women and children are employed in back-breaking labor like brick carrying while old men and young boys are employed as rickshaw drivers. The poor toil for long hours under difficult hot and humid conditions. With 45% of Bangladeshis employed in the agricultural sector,


\(^3\) Ibid.

there is a high risk of exposure to weather volatility and climate-related disasters, as the
country is prone to cyclones, flooding, monsoons, and tornadoes. All these weather
conditions have negative impacts on farming, housing, and livelihoods. For example,
Cyclone Sidr, which struck Bangladesh in November 2007, caused loss of life, displaced
hundreds of thousands of people, polluted water wells and ponds, and destroyed crops. The
consequences from such disasters are far-reaching as victims have to rebuild their lives.
Weather disasters also make staple foods, like rice, fish, and lentils, scarce. In 2010,
Bangladesh’s GDP was $213.5 billion, while its average annual per capita income was
$1,334.⁵

Bangladesh’s chief vulnerabilities are many. One is its geography which makes it
prone to cyclones and hurricanes because the country lies on the Bay of Bengal and the
Brahmaputra river runs through it, creating much moisture in the atmosphere. Another
vulnerability is that the country is negatively impacted by climate change caused primarily by
carbon emissions from developed countries, although its own carbon footprint is small. A
third vulnerability is its high population density as overcrowding increases the risk factors
associated with natural disasters and ensuing diseases. A fourth vulnerability is the lack of
diversified employment opportunities, which means that people are trapped in dangerous,

⁵. Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, “Cyclone Sidr in
(accessed August 12, 2011).

⁶. CIA, “South Asia: Bangladesh,” CIA World Factbook,
August 8, 2010).
low-paying jobs, with little opportunity for economic or social mobility. A fifth vulnerability is Bangladesh’s porous borders which cause problems by allowing the infiltration of human traffickers who prey on the poor.

B. Bolivia

Studies indicate that in Bolivia the rate of rural poverty and indigence is three times that of urban poverty. In 2002, eight out of every ten rural residents were extremely poor. This extreme poverty is concentrated in the Altiplano in the west, and in valley regions in the east, where about 1.6 million people live, most of them indigenous Indians. Other very poor areas include the town of El Alto in the western highlands, the San Miguel neighborhood of Oruro, and the town of Montero in the north. Bolivia has the highest proportion of indigenous people in South America and they suffer a disproportionately high poverty rate in comparison to non-indigenous people.

Bolivia’s population is relatively young with 42% of the people aged 15 and under. The average family size is 3.04 children and life expectancy is 66.5 years. The staple food of


the highlanders, those living in the Altiplano, is potatoes, eggs, vegetables, and chicken or beef. Most of the poor work in subsistence terrace farming, mining, and in cottage industries like making baskets. In Bolivia, even in urban settings, housing for the poor is lacking in sanitation, electricity, and running water, with homes constructed of inferior building materials. About 75% of the population do not have adequate sanitation.\(^\text{11}\) While overcrowding is not an issue, access to adequate housing is a major problem for poor Bolivians. In 2010, unemployment stood at 7.5% and inflation at 14.0%\(^\text{12}\). The Agrarian Reform Law of 1996 was intended to enable the government to redistribute land and to facilitate access to land for the indigenous majority, but it met with much resistance, not unexpected, from the landed gentry and from influential politically active Mestizos and whites.\(^\text{13}\) Nevertheless, the law was passed and land reforms are being implemented.

Regarding Bolivia’s vulnerabilities, three important ones lie in what Jeffrey Sachs terms its “geographical distress, the ideas of physical geography, and the issues of spatial distribution of economic activity.”\(^\text{14}\) The first refers to Bolivia’s general geographical challenges, while the second addresses the difficulties presented by the country’s high


\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Keith John Richards, \textit{Bolivia} (New York: Kuperard, 2009), 43.

mountains and deep valleys, and the third points to the challenges of transacting business in remote and hard to reach areas. Inflationary food prices and the government-mandated price controls to counter them, are sources of bitter contention between large commercial farmers in the east and the government. A fourth vulnerability, of great concern, is severe water shortage due to rapidly melting glaciers, which can affect all Bolivians, especially the poor. For instance, the Chacaltaya glacier, which was predicted to disappear in 2020, vanished in 2009 instead, causing serious water shortages for the whole country.\textsuperscript{15} A fifth vulnerability for Bolivians is weather volatility, as the country is prone to severe drought. This is a big problem for poor subsistence farmers as they lack irrigation systems.

C. The Dominican Republic

Around 42\% of Dominicans live under the poverty line, with some statistics placing 20\% of the population in extreme poverty.\textsuperscript{16} Half of all poor people live in rural areas. Poverty is most concentrated in the border areas between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, especially the mountain regions and the lower valleys where there are settlements called “bateys” inhabited by Dominicans of Haitian origin and poor Haitian immigrant workers. Guayayuco is one such village that is especially poor.

The housing of the poor is very rudimentary, consisting of mud and brick structures with tin roofs. The houses are mainly built near rivers for water access. There is no indoor

\textsuperscript{15. Dorte Verner, \textit{Reducing Poverty, Protecting Livelihoods, and Building Assets in a Changing Climate} (Washington: The World Bank, 2010), IX.}

sanitation in these homes and so there is pollution of the nearby rivers. Although in the 1990s the country experienced an economic spike from tourism, telecommunications, and manufacturing, the proceeds were not well distributed, causing high income inequality and areas of acute poverty. The richest 10% receive almost 40% of GDP, while the poorest half of the population gets less than 20%. In 2010 unemployment remained at 15.5%, and life expectancy was 73.99 years.

The Dominican Republic’s main vulnerabilities include narco-trafficking; weather-related problems like hurricanes, severe storms and flooding; a lack of access to education and training for its youth; few employment opportunities; environmental degradation; and a porous border with neighboring Haiti. All these problems adversely affect the poor in the Dominican Republic.

D. Haiti

The poorest areas of Haiti are in the North-East, the North-West, the Central parts of the country, and in its border region with the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, rural residents have a per capita income that is about one-third that of urban dwellers. According to Paul Collier, the rich live higher up the mountain right outside Port-au-Prince, the middle class live around the middle of the mountain, while the poor live at the foot of the


18. Ibid.
Just over half of Haiti’s population lives in the rural areas, where 88% of the people are poor. However, 67% of rural residents are extremely poor. The average family size is 3.07 children, and average life expectancy in Haiti is about 62 years. Most houses are built with inferior materials and cannot withstand earthquakes. The poor live in shacks made from a mixture of mud, brick and wood, with corrugated iron or tin roofs. Approximately 90% of Haiti’s rural population have no sanitation facilities. In late 2011, there are still about a million people living in tent cities in Port-au-Prince as a result of the 2010 earthquake. In 2004, the richest 1% of Haiti held over 50% of the country’s wealth. The primary sources of income for rural residents include craft-making and trade; small-scale farming; wage labor; sand, chalk and charcoal extraction; and fishing.

Haiti has several vulnerabilities that impact the poor adversely. Chief among these vulnerabilities is its geography, which makes it susceptible to volatile hurricanes, flooding, mudslides, and earthquakes. Another vulnerability is its high population density which facilitates the spread of diseases, especially among the poor.

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22. Ibid.

consists of rice, yams, fish, beans, vegetables, and fruit. Poor people consume a lot of carbohydrates whereas the rich can afford protein in the form of meats such as mutton and pork.\textsuperscript{24}

**E. Zimbabwe**

About 88\% of the poor live in rural areas, with the hardest hit residing in the provinces of Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Masvingo in the south, and Manicaland in the south-east. Approximately 70\% of residents of Matabeleland North are classified as poor or extremely poor. The average family size is 3.66 children. Zimbabwe’s GDP averaged flat from 2007 to 2010, in spite of strong growth in 2009, because of the negative growth of -17\% in 2007.\textsuperscript{25} Housing in poor rural areas consists of mud constructions interspersed with brick, having either thatched roofs or roofs made of wood or tin. These houses have no running water or electricity, and about 63\% of the rural population have inadequate sanitation facilities.\textsuperscript{26} On the other hand, urban dwellings are built of brick and generally have electricity, running water and modern sanitation. Recent positive signs in housing include an initiative by the Zimbabwe Homeless People’s Federation and Dialogue on Shelter to upgrade informal settlements in Harare. Regarding

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26. Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Zimbabwe’s geography, what the French author and historian, Fernand Braudel, wrote of Africa can apply to it as the country is landlocked. Braudel wrote: “We have seen that Black Africa has had few outlets to the rest of the world – a serious handicap, because all progress in civilization is made easier by mutual contact and influence.”

Likewise, the renowned economist, Adam Smith, observed in the *Wealth of Nations*, in 1776: “Africa had been poor from time immemorial because it lacked the navigable rivers and natural inlets that afford the benefits of low-cost, sea-based trade.” While this observation may also be applied to Zimbabwe, it is time to reverse it.

As to its vulnerabilities, first, as a landlocked country, Zimbabwe lacks direct access to sea ports. Secondly, it is prone to droughts, which have severe negative impacts on commercial agriculture and on subsistence farming as the crop harvests are reduced. Thirdly, it suffers significant deforestation and environmental degradation from poor mining practices. Fourthly, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS has created a labor shortage, increased healthcare costs, and significantly curtailed life expectancy to 44 years. A further vulnerability is the lack of good leadership, which plays a role in the endemic and widespread poverty through some controversial policies. Poor leadership has also led to crumbling infrastructure and to rising criminal activity. Yet another vulnerability is that Zimbabwe has become a smuggling point for human trafficking, especially with regards to internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are sometimes rounded up by soldiers. Some of the IDPs end


up as either cheap laborers, domestic servants, or prostitutes.

Part II. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals and How they Apply to Poverty Eradication in the Five Selected Countries

Table 2.1

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurable goals and targets are to be achieved by 2015:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1. Halve extreme poverty and hunger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 3. Promote gender equality</td>
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<td>Goal 4. Reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 5. Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 6. Reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: United Nations website 29

The eight United Nations Millennium Goals were introduced in 2000, with the consensus of the world’s eight largest economies, the Group of 8 (G8), following intense pressure from anti-globalization groups that staged world-wide protests at G8, World Bank and IMF meetings in the 1990s. The focus of their protests was debt reduction and development aid. The Millennium Development Goals were subsequently adopted in September 2000, following a summit in New York attended by 189 countries. What sets these goals apart from previous attempts at poverty eradication is that the Heads of State agreed to measurable outcomes and to specific target dates. World Bank economist, Katherine Marshall, has noted the importance of this meeting: “The historic definition by the world’s leaders and nations of concretely defined goals and targets for the development (of the MDGs) following the 2000 UN Millennium Summit provide a framework encouraging action, integrated action, and accountability for results.”

According to Bryant and Kappaz, there is a level of user friendliness associated with the MDGs on the local level, as “The MDGs lend themselves to community level benchmarking so that local communities can see their links to these international targets.”

Historic, timely, and inspiring though the MDGs are, they are not without some controversy. For instance, the world income poverty benchmark is defined as the number of people living on less than $1.00 per day. Some critics argue that a truer benchmark is $2.00


32. Ibid., 13.
a day as the number of poor increases exponentially at this level, and because the “less than a dollar a day” standard leaves out those people living in developed countries who may have less than $10 a day to live on. For example, in the US, $10 a day does not go very far and could result in homelessness, which is an indicator of poverty. Another area of concern is the time frame, which some believe is unrealistic for all eight goals to be met, as more time is needed. Yet others question the selection of these particular eight goals over other priorities, even though they all have merit. A third problem is the financing of these goals. There have been demands for an increase in official development assistance (ODA), but this has been slow to emerge. In fact, only a portion of the 0.7% of GDP that the world’s richest countries have pledged towards this program has actually been donated, approximately 0.3 to 0.2%. This anaemic trickle of funds raises questions as to whether the aim of achieving the MDGs by 2015 can be accomplished. A fourth problem is that the optimism that first accompanied the declaration of the UN Millennium Development Goals has abated somewhat, and along with it some of the energy and passion to see the goals through. This passion must be rekindled as a slowdown in momentum would threaten the success of the program. Ennui and inertia must not be allowed to settle in as they have been detrimental to poverty reduction in the past.

Regarding the goals, the first goal, MDG 1, aims at halving poverty by 2015, and is relevant to the poor populations in all five countries. For example, poverty affects 40% of the population in Bangladesh, which currently translates to 63.2 million people; 30.3% in

Bolivia or 3.03 million people; 42.2% in the Dominican Republic or 4.16 million people; 80% in Haiti or 7.76 million people; and 68% in Zimbabwe or 8.21 million people. If this first goal is achieved, then the numbers of the poor would be reduced, by approximately 31.5 million in Bangladesh, 1.5 million in Bolivia, 2.08 million in the Dominican Republic, 3.4 million in Haiti, and 4.1 million in Zimbabwe. This would result in a net gain of 42.58 million fewer poor people in these five countries.

MDG 2, to achieve universal primary education, is one measure that Bangladesh has partially applied as it constitutionally provides free primary education for children between 6 and 10 years of age. Additionally, several NGOs in Bangladesh already implement plans that educate children informally at the primary level. In the case of Bolivia, its primary education structure is such that rural literacy levels remain low due to children working to help support their families rather than going to school. Bolivia thus needs MDG 2 at the rural level as access to education is particularly hard for rural residents. Urban literacy levels, meanwhile, are on the rise. On the whole, Bolivia spends a higher portion of its GDP on education than do several other South American countries and so is steering in the right direction. However, since the attrition rate is high, this MDG will help to break the cycle of poverty by giving more educational opportunities to children. In the Dominican Republic, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is playing a large role in primary and


secondary education by training teachers and providing funding for books. Even so, MDG2 is particularly important in the Dominican Republic because it has been identified as a country with many at-risk youth who desperately need education and training, which are presently lacking. In 2006, primary school enrollment hovered at just under 80% in this country.\(^{37}\) In Haiti, primary school enrollment is extremely low at 60% and needs to be improved, particularly since the country has many economic stressors that require its people to be well-equipped for employment opportunities.\(^{38}\) Furthermore, low primary school enrollment rates lead to low secondary school participation and fewer adequately educated working adults. Haiti suffers from an overall low literacy rate of 52.9%, which impedes its economic growth and contributes to its endemic poverty.\(^{39}\) By contrast, Zimbabwe, which is much poorer than Haiti in terms of GDP, has a high literacy rate of 90.7%. With primary school enrollment at 90%, it is well on its way to accomplishing this MDG. In fact, it has the highest literacy rate of all the countries studied in this thesis.\(^{40}\)


\(^{39}\) Ibid.

MDG 3, to promote gender equality, is of great importance to all five thesis countries because their women mainly bear the brunt of poverty and its deprivations. For example, in Bangladesh, girls are at a disadvantage when it comes to access to education, healthcare and employment even though gender equality is mandated by law. Bangladeshi women are first forced to be dependent on their fathers and then on their husbands, with very little recourse to legal protection if they are widowed. Promoting gender equality and reinforcing the message that it is the law would empower women to take on more leadership roles, especially economic, within their families and in the community at large, and to be protected from discrimination when they do so. It would also give them rights of ownership which are presently limited. There is presently an imbalance in the ratio of men to women in Bangladesh, with males greatly outnumbering females. This could be linked to a preference for males, leading to sex-selection practices. In the case of Bolivia, its men and women have equal inheritance rights and the overall situation has improved for women but much remains to be done. This is because Bolivian culture and tradition often limit what women are permitted to do. Moreover, the women often suffer domestic abuse and violence. In the Dominican Republic, women enjoy equal inheritance rights, but remain disadvantaged with regard to employment opportunities and access to financial resources. There is also a high incidence of violence against women, especially rape. In Haiti, the women suffer gender inequality and are relegated to submissive roles, especially in rural areas. There are also incidences of domestic abuse and violence, including rape, and women do not fully enjoy equal protection under the law. Furthermore, access to financial resources is limited for
Haitian women. In Zimbabwe, women’s rights are very restricted and, in spite of high educational achievement, they are trapped by traditions, customs, and a family code that favors men. The women are made to depend on men, with marriage laws offering no protection to women. Instead, these laws give a Zimbabwean man complete rights over his spouse. Polygamy is accepted and practiced by about one in ten men, with the incidence being much higher in rural settings than in urban ones.

MDG 4 is aimed at reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds, a target closely tied to access to pre-natal healthcare. Infant mortality measures live births and infant deaths occurring up to one year of age. The average infant mortality rate in the leading developed countries is under 5 deaths per 1000 live births. Bangladesh’s infant mortality rate is extremely high - it stood at 50.73 per 1000 live births in 2009. A two-thirds reduction, if achieved, would result in 33.48 fewer deaths per 1000. Bolivia’s infant mortality rate is also very high at 42.16 per 1000 live births. A two-thirds reduction would result in 27.82 more births and reduce the mortality rate to 14.33 per 1000 live births. In the Dominican Republic, the infant mortality rate is lower, at 22.22 per 1000 live births. Reducing infant mortality, as laid out by MDG 4, would result in 14.66 more live births and a

41. United Nations, “Children under five mortality rate per 1,000 live births,” Millennium Development Indicators, http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srId=561 (accessed September 9, 2011). The forecasted reductions in the infant mortality rates, if MDG 4 is met in all five countries studied in this thesis, were calculated by the author with data from this website.

mortality rate of 7.55 per 1000 live births in this nation. Haiti’s infant mortality rate of 63.7 per 1000 live births is very high, and reducing it by two-thirds would result in 42 more live births per 1000, a significant increase.\(^43\) Zimbabwe’s infant mortality rate is 29.50 per 1000 live births, and a two-thirds reduction would result in 19.47 more infants and would reduce infant mortality to 10 per 1000 births.\(^44\)

MDG 5, to reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters, is again tied to better health care access for women, who bear the brunt of poverty and who are the primary caretakers for their families. Reducing maternal mortality will significantly increase the health and wellbeing of the family in all five nations under survey. Bangladesh’s maternal mortality rate is 380 per 100,000 live births and would be reduced to 95 if this MDG is achieved by 2015. Bolivia’s maternal mortality rate stands at 420 per 100,000 live births and would be reduced to just over 100 per 100,000 live births. The Dominican Republic’s maternal mortality rate is the best amongst the five countries in this thesis at 150 per 100,000 live births and a three-quarter reduction would result in fewer than 40 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. In Haiti, the figure is much higher at 680 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. A three-quarter reduction in deaths would result in 170 maternal deaths per 100,000. Zimbabwe


suffers by far the highest rate of maternal deaths among the five countries at 1100 deaths per
100,000 live births. A reduction would bring the number to 275 maternal deaths per
100,000 live births.45

MDG 6, to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, is a global health
contract, an affirmation of the fight against diseases that strike mainly at impoverished
tropical countries. This MDG also reflects a measure of improved access to healthcare. The
incidence of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh is low, with only 0.1% of adults having this disease
in 2009, while there is a high incidence of TB. The rate for malaria though is much higher in
Bangladesh, especially in areas where the mosquito is endemic. On the other hand, in
Bolivia, malaria is increasing, in spite of the high altitude. This problem is of concern
because it means that the mosquito vector has adapted to that environment. With regards to
HIV/AIDS prevalence in Bolivia, it is low at 0.2% of the population. TB also does not
appear to be prevalent in Bolivia. The Dominican Republic has an adult HIV/AIDS
prevalence rate of 0.9% and suffers from malaria. TB also presents a risk factor. Haiti has an
adult HIV/AIDS rate of 1.9% and suffers from malaria. There is a high prevalence of TB.
Zimbabwe's adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 14.3% and it has a high rate of malaria,
which is endemic. Fortunately, there are measures in place in Zimbabwe to provide nets to
curb the spread of malaria.

MDG 7, aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability, is of concern to all of the

45. United Nations, “Maternal mortality ratio (estimate),”
The forecasted reductions in the maternal mortality rates, if MDG 5 is met in all five
countries studied in this thesis, were calculated by the author with data from this website.
countries under study in this thesis. Bangladesh’s population density and its overdependence on agriculture exert enormous pressures on the environment. Coupled with erratic and violent storms, these pressures create big problems for environmental sustainability. Its mangrove forest, the Sunderbans, the largest of its kind in the world and declared a world heritage site by the UN, is heavily threatened by cyclones. In the case of Bolivia, it faces enormous problems in regard to environmental sustainability due to slash and burn farming methods which have resulted in soil erosion and deforestation. There is also water pollution, from run-off from old mines, which threatens biodiversity. The Dominican Republic suffers greatly from environmental concerns and stress, due not only to its being in a hurricane path but also because of its building methods and expanding tourism, which overtax the water system. Since the Dominican Republic lacks adequate sewage disposal facilities, its rivers have become polluted. Haiti experiences great environmental distress due to manmade and natural disasters. The country is now almost completely deforested, which causes dangerous mudslides in the wake of hurricanes. Because Haiti sits on a major fault line, it is also prone to earthquakes, and its overdependence on agriculture combined with its lack of improved farming methods exert pressure on the land. Zimbabwe has problems with environmental sustainability with regard to the clearing of the forests for logging and for mineral panning. Poor farming practices adopted in recent years have also resulted in infertile soil. Severe drought conditions compound these problems and endanger the environment as people try desperately to make a living from it.
MDG 8, aimed at developing a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief, sums up the road map to accomplish the previous seven targets. As Sachs has pointed out: “The first seven goals call for sharp reductions in poverty, disease, and environmental degradation. The eighth goal seeks global partnership and cooperation to fulfill the first seven goals.” In aggregate, all five countries examined in the thesis collaborate with various NGOs and international development agencies, including USAID, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), to alleviate poverty. The promised funding is critical to achieving these goals, and, to that end, the ODA pledges of 0.7% of GNP, must be kept.

Part III. Economic Data on the Five Selected Countries

The chart below provides a synopsis of economic data for each of the five countries studied in this thesis. It is a useful tool to gain a better understanding of how these countries compare to each other, and to Portugal, which was selected to provide a contrast.

Table 2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries Statistics</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
<th>Dominican Republic</th>
<th>Haiti</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Zimbabwe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>158.57m</td>
<td>10.120m</td>
<td>9.9m</td>
<td>9.7m</td>
<td>10.760m</td>
<td>12.08m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>60.55yrs</td>
<td>67.23yrs</td>
<td>77.31yrs</td>
<td>62.17yrs</td>
<td>78.54yrs</td>
<td>49.64yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Rate</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product ($)</td>
<td>258.6b 1,700</td>
<td>47.88b 4,800</td>
<td>87.25b 8,900</td>
<td>11.5b 1,200</td>
<td>247b 23,000</td>
<td>5.457b 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment ($)</td>
<td>1.1b</td>
<td>513m</td>
<td>2.9b</td>
<td>30m</td>
<td>2.9b</td>
<td>60m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled by the author with 2010 data from the CIA’s World Factbook and the Heritage Foundation’s Country Website
between poor developing nations and a middle-income developed country. The following metrics, Life expectancy, Literacy rate, and the Infant mortality rate, are also yardsticks that can be used to determine the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures the overall quality of life in a country based on the indicators mentioned. The economic table illustrates several points under the different metrics:

Starting with the population size, from a statistical point of view, three countries, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, all have similar population sizes, while Zimbabwe’s population is higher by approximately 2 million. Portugal’s population size is slightly bigger than Bolivia’s, while Bangladesh is by far the most populous country with 158.57 million people, which, given its landmass makes it densely populated, whereas Bolivia has a low population density.

With respect to life expectancy, this varies from country to country, from 77.31 years in the Dominican Republic to 49.64 years in Zimbabwe. Life expectancy in Zimbabwe used to be much higher, but it has since been significantly and tragically reduced because of HIV/AIDS. The difference in life expectancy in the Dominican Republic and Haiti is profound, with 77.31 years in the former and 62.17 years, in the latter, a fifteen-year difference. Since they share the same land mass, Hispaniola, one can ask if the higher life expectancy in the Dominican Republic is due to economic differences or to better healthcare, or a combination of both.

Regarding literacy rates, at 89.8%, Bolivia has a fairly good literacy rate.\textsuperscript{48} Zimbabwe, in spite of its poverty, has a relatively educated populace with a 90.7% literacy rate.\textsuperscript{49} When it comes to literacy, high rates are not a guarantee of high employment, especially during economic downturns, and this could help to explain the relatively high poverty rate for Portugal at 18%. Zimbabwe’s literacy rate is high, just a bit lower than that of Portugal, a middle-income developed country. In Bangladesh, less than half of the population is literate, while just over half of the population is literate in Haiti. Marked improvement is needed in both these countries. Although not separately captured in this table, the literacy rates in rural areas are typically low and need to be improved in all five countries under study.

With respect to the infant mortality, the rate in four out of the five countries is unacceptably high, with only the Dominican Republic having a relatively low rate. In fact, the Dominican Republic’s infant mortality rate of 2.9\% is statistically on par with Portugal’s rate of 3\%. Keeping infants alive and allowing them to grow into contributing citizens will raise the economic health of the country: improving the health of the youngest citizens can improve the health of all citizens.

In looking at the unemployment rates, there is a correlation between unemployment and poverty rates; usually, the higher the unemployment rate, the higher the poverty rate.


Conversely, one would expect that a low unemployment rate would result in higher per capita income. However, Bangladesh defies this reasoning. When compared with its modest per capita income of $1700, for example, Bangladesh’s moderate unemployment rate of 5.1% could be an indication that low-paying jobs may be the reason for its modest income figure. Zimbabwe’s unemployment rate is critically high at 95%, although the *CL Bright World Factbook* states that it is difficult to know the true measure of unemployment in Zimbabwe.50

In looking at the poverty rates, Bolivia has the lowest rate of poverty at 30.3%, and the second highest per capita income among the five countries after the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic’s poverty rate of 42.2%, coupled with its higher per capita income, could be an indication of a very unequal society where income is skewed and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. Zimbabwe’s poverty rate of 68% is the second highest, after Haiti’s, at 80%.51

The contrast between Portugal’s per capita income of $23,000 and the Dominican Republic’s, which at $8,217 is the next highest on the list, shows what a vast difference there is between a middle income non-G8 country and one of the world’s poorer countries. Zimbabwe’s per capita income of $500 per year is the lowest, less than Haiti’s, which is over twice that amount at $1200. Bolivia’s GDP is the second highest among the thesis countries, yet, given its deep and widespread poverty, this is an indication that GDP does not

50. Ibid.

adequately capture the distribution of income, and, therefore, the true GDP of the poor is not accurately represented. For instance, for people living on $1.25 to $2.00 a day, the true income level lies between $440 and $704 a year.

With regard to foreign direct investment (FDI), the figures show that this is not determined by population size or need, but by other factors, such as trade agreements, attractiveness to foreign investors, and political stability. Bangladesh receives the second largest amount of FDI, $1.1 billion, after the Dominican Republic, which gets $2.9 billion, the same amount as Portugal. In comparison, Haiti receives only $30 million, which is half of Zimbabwe’s $60 million.

The contrast between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is pronounced. Their population sizes differ only slightly and they share the same land mass, Hispaniola, but that is where the similarity ends. There is a fifteen-year gap in life expectancy in the Dominican Republic’s favor, while its literacy rate is almost 25% higher than that of Haiti’s. The biggest disparity is in the FDI, with the Dominican Republic receiving net flows of $2.9 billion in 2009, versus Haiti’s $30 million that same year. Haiti’s low employment correlates with its poverty: four out of five people are poor and just one in three is employed.


**Part IV. Conclusion**

These disparate countries share similarities in that they all suffer from the deleterious effects of structural, conjunctural, and absolute poverty. By all measures, Haiti is the worst afflicated of the countries studied. Paradoxically, the Dominican Republic is the least poor country, in terms of GDP and per capita income. In Haiti, entrenched poverty has been compounded by the catastrophic earthquake of January 2010. Nevertheless, the outpouring of help from the international community inspires hope that finally Haiti’s endemic poverty will be adequately addressed and that it will gradually be helped to attain self-sufficiency.

Regarding the location of poverty in the five countries studied in this thesis, poverty tends to be found in urban slums, as in the Dominican Republic and Haiti; in isolated, hard to reach rural areas such as in Bolivia; and in fishing villages and low-lying coastal regions, such as in Bangladesh. Another location marker for poverty is being a landlocked country, as in the case of Zimbabwe and Bolivia. Based solely on the number of poor people, Bangladesh has the largest number, with 68 million people living in poverty. However, as a percentage of total population, Haiti, with an 80% poverty rate, has 7.76 million people out of 9.7 million, living in poverty. This means that poor people outnumber non-poor people in Haiti by a ratio of 5 to 1.

As for the living conditions of the poor, their homes are built with cheap materials and are ill-suited to withstand bad storms or natural disasters. The majority of rural homes have no sanitation or running water. Adequate affordable housing for poor people is a problem in each of these five countries. The diets of the poor typically do not provide enough protein, and tend to be high in starches and vegetables. While poultry and fish are
sometimes available, meat is a luxury that the poor can seldom afford.

With regard to vulnerabilities, the most severe ones are presented by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, and hydro-meteorological events, like cyclones, hurricanes, and monsoons. Drought is another weather-related vulnerability. Haiti, Bangladesh, and the Dominican Republic suffer the most from a combination of natural disasters and weather-related devastation. Bolivia and Zimbabwe experience acute drought which has adverse implications for farming, which many of the poor depend on, either for subsistence purposes or to earn income. Vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters are compounded by inadequate housing structures.

With regard to the MDGs, the first goal applies to all five countries in this order: Haiti, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. The second goal is most relevant to Bolivia, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, while the third has most importance for Zimbabwe, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The fourth goal has most relevance for Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Haiti. The fifth goal is most significant for Zimbabwe, Haiti, and Bolivia, while the HIV/AIDS component of the sixth goal applies mostly to Zimbabwe, even as the malaria component impacts all five countries in the following order: Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia. The seventh goal affects all five countries. The order here is harder to determine as there are many pressing environmental issues directly linked to poverty at stake in each country. The eighth goal is the road map to achieving all the other goals as this undertaking cannot succeed without international partnerships and cooperation.
As for the economic chart, it shows that the countries that are most economically distressed are Haiti and Zimbabwe. Overall, Bangladesh’s poverty is structural, but unfavorable climate conditions add a conjunctural dimension. Bolivia’s poverty is largely structural, as is the Dominican Republic’s, while both structural and conjunctural poverty apply to Haiti, partly because of a crisis of leadership. Zimbabwe’s poverty is largely structural in nature due to poor policy choices by the government. However, the prolonged drought adds a conjunctural dimension to Zimbabwe’s poverty. This shows the interrelatedness of the different types of poverty. There is immense opportunity for progress in each of these countries with productive projects already under way. Having looked at where and how poverty is concentrated in the above five countries, the next chapter will examine some of the causes of poverty.
CHAPTER III
THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the various causes of poverty in the countries examined in this thesis and how they can be overcome, because understanding the root causes of poverty can lead to better solutions for its reduction. The scope will cover the years 2000 to 2010, while the organization is in six parts. Part I, the Introduction, stresses that poverty is rarely the result of a single factor, but rather of several factors in combination. Part II deals with the economic causes of poverty while Part III discusses the environmental factors that contribute to poverty. Part IV then traces the socio-cultural causes of poverty and Part V examines its political causes. Part VI, the Conclusion, ends by analyzing how these interrelated causes often combine to exacerbate poverty.

I. Introduction

Many factors combine to cause and entrench poverty in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Zimbabwe. In this chapter the causes of poverty will be confined to four main reasons – economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and political. Under each main reason, three specific causes will be discussed for each country. Regarding the economic causes of poverty, unemployment, lack of diversified industry, and food insecurity will be covered. Under the environmental causes of poverty, the following will be discussed: vulnerable location, exposure to extreme weather, and proneness to natural disasters. The socio-cultural reasons for poverty will focus on prejudice, gender bias, and lack of education. As for the political causes of poverty, the discussion will deal with three
specific problems: corruption, lack of political representation, and the lasting effects of colonialism.

II. The Economic Causes of Poverty

A. Bangladesh

Regarding unemployment, the absence of a steady income coupled with the lack of a social safety net, makes for precarious, even penurious, living. In 2010, Bangladesh’s unemployment rate was at 5.1%, which meant that approximately 8 million people were without jobs. Since Bangladesh’s economy is linked to the global economy, any shock to the global financial system, such as the 2008 Asian financial crisis, can have a direct negative effect on the country. This crisis adversely impacted the country by tightening credit and increasing the debt that Bangladesh owed on outstanding international loans due to higher interest rates. It also increased unemployment among both rural and urban residents, with Bangladesh’s poorer citizens hit particularly hard.

As for the lack of diversified industry, given that 73% of the poor live in rural areas with limited access to mainstream economic activities, it is very difficult for poor Bangladeshis to avail themselves of non-agricultural jobs, such as brick-laying, garment


manufacturing, rickshaw driving, and fishing. As previously mentioned in Chapter II, about 45% of Bangladeshis are employed in the agricultural sector. In Bangladesh it is the service industry sector that accounts for the larger share of GDP, at 54%. The causality between poverty and lack of access to higher paying work is clearly seen when it is realized that the majority of the poor live on less than $1.00 a day. The higher wages that would result from the availability of more non-agricultural jobs would augment net income for workers and help to reduce poverty.

In the case of food insecurity, this is a major concern in Bangladesh as the volatility of food prices and the unreliability of farming make poor Bangladeshi farmers just one step away from deeper poverty. Subsistence farmers depend on what they farm to feed their families. If there is insufficient crop yield, they are forced to buy food at high market prices. Food insecurity impacts poor rural populations much more than urban ones, as they have less resources to buy food at high price. Furthermore, as oil prices have risen over the last few years, the diversion of corn for bio-fuel is creating upward pressure on food prices, not only on the price of corn, but on other staple food crops as well. Repercussions are seen in higher prices in rice, legumes, and other foodstuffs. Food insecurity also leads to reduced intake of calories and to malnutrition which, in turn, decreases productivity and results in a


vicious cycle of less income and more poverty. Food insecurity is also a concern because Bangladesh experienced a famine in 1974. Famine is defined by *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, as “Extreme and general scarcity of food, especially within a large geographical area.” Bangladesh’s famine was associated with a decline in food production, a steep rise in the price of food, and unemployment caused by floods.

**B. Bolivia**

Unemployment in Bolivia stands at 8.3%, which is high and translates into 839,960 people out of work, out of a total population of 10.12 million people, as already noted in Chapter II. In a country with low population density, this population number is significant, as it means that there are deeply underserved areas needing more workers, including laborers, nurses, and teachers. In 2001, Bolivia slipped into a recession, partly due to the global economic slowdown which increased unemployment. Furthermore, although Bolivia adhered to the structural adjustment programs mandated by the IMF, and suffered the austerity that these reforms entailed, it did not enjoy the promised sustained growth that the IMF and the Bolivian government expected. In 2003, Bolivia acquiesced with the US request to reduce coca leaf farming even though income earned from coca production was much


higher than from other crops; it believed that the loss of income would be compensated by the US through its sugar imports from Bolivia. The United States, however, opted not to replace the income lost from coca farming by importing sugar from Bolivia, for reasons that are unclear.¹⁰ This production shift resulted in unemployment for some of Bolivia’s farmers, pushing them into poverty, and also fueled resentment towards the US government.

Besides unemployment, a main cause of poverty in Bolivia is the lack of diversified industry. So far, only mining and farming are the main industries. Factory work is needed as the jobs that are presently available to poor rural peasants are mining, subsistence farming, craft-making, and food vending. The state-run tin mine, Corporacion Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL) was de-nationalized in 1986 and converted to five private mining enterprises, as part of a larger program to re-organize the mining industry.¹¹ However, the government is still unable to collect sufficient mining taxes despite proposing policies to collect these taxes due to lack of proper enforcement. The government is now working on new tax policies, a step that would adversely affect the smaller mining cooperatives more than multinational firms. But such tax policies often result in violent protests, indicating just how dependent the poor Bolivians are on the mining industry jobs, which employ mostly men, but also women


and children. This underscores the need for employment diversification, so that there are more and better paying jobs for Bolivia’s poor.

With regard to food insecurity, the indigenous Indians, the Aymaras, Quechuas, and Guarani, continue to toil on small-scale terraced farms of 10 hectares or less and remain very poor. Since poor farmers use land to graze cattle rather than to produce food, this situation leads to food insecurity for subsistence farmers.12 On the other hand, the commercial farmers, most of whom are in Santa Cruz, own 80% of the farms, of which 45% are 5000 hectares.13 These large farmers produce soybean, sugarcane, sorghum, corn, rice and cotton, for both domestic consumption and export. Bolivia’s food insecurity problem is linked to the insufficient use of fertilizer by poor farmers because, although the country was once rich in nitrate deposits, it now has the lowest use of fertilizers in the western hemisphere. This means that poor farmers are limited in the quantity and quality of the crops that they harvest because they cannot afford to buy fertilizer, whereas the commercial farmers, who can afford fertilizer, reap huge harvests. Furthermore, poor farmers lack the irrigation systems that could otherwise help increase their farming output. Because farm work is physically demanding and requires nutrition and energy, any decline in food intake leads to physical weakness and decreased productivity.


13. Ibid.
C. The Dominican Republic

With an unemployment rate as high as 15%, as mentioned in Chapter II, the Dominican Republic’s poverty problem is compounded by this reality. The high unemployment rate causes poverty as more and more families find that they are unable to earn an income, either in the formal or in the informal economy. Those in the informal economy earn their living by doing the following work: running food stalls, selling goods, or serving as maids, gardeners or babysitters. The country’s current dismal unemployment situation was precipitated in part by the 2003 banking crisis that resulted in a 100% devaluation of the Dominican peso and increased the poverty rate by 15%, from 27% to its 2010 level of 42%.\textsuperscript{14} This led to the tightening of the credit market, causing further unemployment. The most affected by poverty in the Dominican Republic are the youth, nearly a third of whom are unemployed.\textsuperscript{15}

The lack of diversified industry is particularly dire for the youth because there are not enough programs for youth employment or training. There are also few opportunities for them in the present industries which revolve around tobacco, sugar and clothing exports, the mainstays of the country’s economy. There is a growing tourist industry, but it was badly


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
affected by the 2008 global economic downturn.\footnote{16} This means there are even fewer vacant positions available. More industries must be created and some must be expanded, such as the garment industry, while small electronics industries and food processing industries must be created.

Food insecurity is a threat all the time, but especially during the hurricane season, when there can be severe flooding, which not only destroys crops and homes, but also disrupts what little economic activity is available to the poor, including the old, infirm, the young, and mothers. Although the Dominican Republic has good trade ties with neighboring Caribbean countries and with the United States, that could come to its aid, there is no guarantee that relief would be swift or adequate. At the same time, if there were ever a dire food shortage in Haiti, the Dominican Republic would also be adversely affected as desperate Haitians have, in the past, sought food and survival in the Dominican Republic.

**D. Haiti**

Regarding unemployment, over 66% of Haitians are unemployed, as noted in Chapter II. The unemployed include over a million people living in tent cities in Haiti’s decimated capital Port-au-Prince, more than eighteen months after the catastrophic earthquake of January 2010. One reason for the high unemployment rate is the lack of social and political stability.

As for the lack of diversified industries, Haiti’s economy is highly undiversified, with few industries and with very little paid work available. The most important source of income

in Haiti is derived from self-employment, in such cottage industries as cleaning homes, selling food, and trading bric-a-brac. But these cottage industry jobs typically provide only subsistence level income. Only 20% of households have access to wage income; these households are headed by professionals such as teachers, nurses and doctors. Presently, most work in Haiti is carried out by NGOs and other international organizations, that are helping to rebuild the country after the recent earthquake, but many of these organizations bring in foreign staff mostly from Western countries. USAID, an agency which supports development, poverty eradication, education and health care, is one of the few organizations that does employ Haitians and it does this through its ‘Cash-for-Work ‘program. While helpful, this program is not sufficient to meet the employment needs of so many out of work Haitians. Doctors-Without-Borders is another international organization that employs local Haitians.

Food insecurity is a very high risk factor for Haiti because 80% of Haitians live below the poverty line and struggle to survive, especially the elderly and the very young. There are not many elderly poor people in the country given their frail health and the harsh living conditions for the poor. Haiti suffers from food insecurity as it imports about 50% of its food needs. About 2.5 to 3.3 million people, or a third of the population, are food insecure. Whenever there is a spike in the price of fuel, the poorest Haitians are affected

most as this is often followed by an increase in the price of food. As things stand, the poor
dispense a larger share of their income to buy food. The food situation was so dire after the
2010 earthquake that the World Food Program (WFP) provided meals to 4 million displaced
Haitians, because regular food supply sources had been disrupted, particularly since many
people were also homeless. 19 Haiti’s food insecurity is due in part to food production being
low as a result of flooding and poor agricultural practices.

E. Zimbabwe

Regarding unemployment, an Associated Press article in 2009 reported that,
“Zimbabwe’s unemployment rate has spiked to 94%, meaning that fewer than half a million
people in the country are formally employed.” 20 This unemployment rate rose to 95% in
2010 and it is still very high in 2011. This translates to very few adults earning a formal
income, with less than 1 in 10 Zimbabweans being employed. Zimbabwe’s poverty is
therefore directly linked to its extremely high unemployment rate. Men, women, and youth
are all affected by unemployment, including university graduates, as numerous businesses
have closed over the years, following the decline in tobacco exports, and the loss of revenue
from the mining and farming sectors. These businesses include farm equipment stores and
farm equipment repair shops. Many of the graduates are seeking employment, further
training, and educational opportunities, at home and abroad. According to an expert on

19. Ibid.

20. Google, “Zimbabwe Unemployment Soars to 94%,”
http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5imTkGEP84_3QTVcSGu_8W3YrP8wA (accessed October 16, 2011).
Africa, John Illiffe, between 2000 and 2004, Zimbabwe’s GDP declined by about 30%, its currency lost 99% of its value, and three-quarters of its population were thrown into poverty. Hyperinflation also plays a large part in the unemployment and poverty statistics because with prices so inflated people only buy absolute necessities and can no longer afford to engage in the formal economy. Therefore, the earnings of local businesses decline because there is less spending and the country’s overall GDP decreases further as there are fewer goods and services being produced.

The lack of diversified industries is due to economic conditions that make it difficult to obtain loans or credit. Additionally, the current political climate does not engender confidence from investors. The breakdown in commercial farming compounds poverty by not giving people sufficient alternatives to poor subsistence farming, to minimum wage labor, or to domestic work. To earn a living, some Zimbabweans sell items like electronics, hair extensions and beauty products. However, many more people must be engaged in better income earning activities in order for the country to even begin an economic turnaround.

The government’s implementation of land reforms and expropriation has backfired, and the lack of industry diversification has become the proverbial albatross around Zimbabwe’s neck over the last decade, since the economic decline resulted in the closure of many businesses. The absence of vocational opportunities also exacerbates matters.

Food insecurity is now a major risk factor for Zimbabwe. The high price of imported foods means that many Zimbabweans now go without adequate meals. Not surprisingly,

malnutrition is very high in Zimbabwean children up to five years of age, with one in three children suffering from chronic malnutrition. This nutritional deficiency leads to weakness, ill-health, and ultimately lost productivity, resulting in entrenched poverty. In 2005 about 29.4% of children suffered from malnutrition, while there were 1.4 million orphans.22 There were so many orphans then and now because of the high death rate of the parents from HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, those adults living with HIV/AIDS are too weak to work or grow their own food, and too poor to buy the anti-retroviral medicine that they need.23 In 2003, Zimbabweans were the hungriest people in the world and 7 million of the country’s 12 million people, or nearly 60 percent, were fed by international food agencies. This number was the highest food aid-dependent percentage of any country’s population.”24

III. The Environmental Factors

A. Bangladesh

Regarding Bangladesh’s vulnerable location, around 20% of the land is three feet or less above sea level. This means that rising sea levels caused by global warming, among other things, lead to floods. Bangladesh also lies in a region prone to monsoons and cyclones, and receives an average of 6.2 inches of rain each month with a mean relative humidity of


24. Ibid., 122.
Moreover, many Bangladeshis live close to water, which imperils them in times of adverse weather conditions.

With regard to exposure to extreme weather, Bangladesh’s geography and climate result in severe flooding, and thus to frequent harvest failures, making agriculture a very difficult and unreliable livelihood. Poverty is directly linked to agricultural shortfalls, severe storms, and flooding. As previously mentioned, Bangladesh’s famine of 1974 was caused by regional unemployment related to floods that caused reduced harvests. The country has suffered from multiple weather-related disasters such as cyclones and extensive flooding, which have strained its resources and endangered the lives and livelihoods of its poorest rural inhabitants, mainly those in the fishing and farming industries, causing them further poverty. Bangladesh’s overdependence on farming makes it particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of weather and climate change.

When it comes to Bangladesh’s proneness to natural disasters, it is prone in that global warming continues to exert such a negative impact on the country in the form of increased storms and flooding. The country is heavily affected by global warming precisely because it has so many bodies of water, both within it and around its long coastline, exposing its extensive plains and deltas.

B. Bolivia

When it comes to vulnerable locations, Bolivia is hampered by being landlocked.

This means it has no opportunity to trade directly with the outside world via sea routes but must access ports in Chile and Paraguay, which increases transportation costs and only makes it worthwhile to ship high value goods, of which Bolivia has few. Regarding its location, Bolivia also has high mountain ranges to the west, which make farming very difficult in that region. This is primarily where the poor live. At present, only 6% of its arable farmland is used for agriculture while 94% is used for pasture and cattle ranching, which are factors in Bolivia’s chronic poverty.”

This handicap is also related to its spatial remoteness and its topography which have created barriers to development and economic activity and thereby spurred poverty in some areas. To Harm De Blij, a geography expert, “A combination of spatial and psychological factors creates a power of place in which isolation is a pervasive element.” It is possible, therefore, that the reality of Bolivia’s geography also creates a mental poverty paradigm for some of its poor rural residents. If so, then Bolivia’s geography is a contributing factor to poverty because it can create a fatalistic acceptance of it.

Regarding exposure to extreme weather, Bolivia’s position between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn means that it has both warm tropical weather and cold temperate weather. Consequently, it suffers from drought, frost, and hail, which cause


further hardship to all Bolivians, but especially to poor farmers. The high demand for Bolivia’s tropical timber has also led to deforestation and soil erosion, which make the land vulnerable to landslides, mudslides, and flooding and contribute to poverty.

As regards Bolivia’s proneness to natural disasters, it is very prone to flooding. In 2001, following extensive flooding in La Paz, Beni, and Oruro, the government passed a bill that declared half of the country to be a natural disaster area.\textsuperscript{28} While such flooding could occur again, the country continues to suffer from less extensive but costly floods. Bolivia is also vulnerable to earthquakes, having suffered one that measured 8.2 on the Richter scale on June 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1994.\textsuperscript{29} More recently, on October 22, 2011, there was a magnitude 4.9 earthquake in Potosi, Bolivia.\textsuperscript{30} These natural disasters entrench poverty as it is very difficult for poor Bolivians to recover from the economic impacts of such disasters.

C. The Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic’s location is a vulnerable one, as it is situated in the Caribbean’s hurricane belt. Furthermore, it is located in an earthquake zone. For poor Dominicans living in houses covered by tin roofs and situated precariously, either on river banks or on mountainsides, this can cause even more poverty as a cycle of loss and


rebuilding ensues, from which it is hard to recover. It could be argued that the Dominican Republic’s border area with Haiti is also a vulnerable location, prone to poverty, as the poor from both countries tend to congregate there.

Regarding exposure to extreme weather, the Dominican Republic regularly experiences hurricanes, by dint of its geographical location. This is a huge burden for its poor citizens, particularly rural farmers who suffer great losses and have no other means of subsistence or income to feed their families. The result is that they fall deeper into poverty, especially without government aid or investments to shore up rural infrastructure and to help promote economic growth through new or alternative industries.

As regards proneness to natural disasters, the combination of its vulnerable location and its climate means that the Dominican Republic faces earthquakes, hurricanes, and disastrous flooding. It also faces risks from tsunamis. These phenomena contribute to poverty, especially since there is no robust disaster recovery plan that places the most vulnerable poorest citizens firmly at its center.

D. Haiti

With respect to its vulnerable location, Haiti appears to have suffered the perfect trifecta in terms of its geography, climate, and environmental factors. Haiti’s coastal topography exposes it to hurricanes, earthquakes, and to the risk of tsunamis should future earthquakes occur beneath the sea off its coast. These three factors result in dangerous conditions which contribute to Haiti’s poverty.

In terms of exposure to extreme weather, this is something that Haiti is heavily impacted by. Already the poorest country in the western hemisphere and in the Americas,
Haiti is also the country least likely to be able to withstand catastrophes, and yet it is seasonally exposed to powerful hurricanes and severe periodic flooding. Such an environment is unsuitable for sustained agricultural output and threatens crop yield. This is a critical factor in Haiti’s poverty, as there is an absence of other robust economic sectors and activities. Since Haiti is over 90% deforested, its tremendous loss of tree coverage increases the risks of mudslides and landslides, leading to loss of property, injury, even fatalities. The deforestation also causes soil erosion, while the topsoil that is washed away damages coastal ecosystems and infrastructure, such as roads, dams, and irrigation systems. Haiti’s extreme deforestation stems from an unreduced demand for charcoal, following the devastation of trees by Hurricane Hazel in 1954.\(^{31}\)

With regard to natural disasters, Haiti is prone to earthquakes as it sits on the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden strike-slip fault line. This presents a great risk to life, as has recently been seen.\(^ {32}\) Haiti is unable to recover quickly from a powerful earthquake, and any subsequent disasters are likely to impoverish it further. It has experienced earthquakes, for example, in 1618, 1673, 1684, 1751, 1761, 1770, and 1860.\(^ {33}\)


E. Zimbabwe

In terms of vulnerable location, Zimbabwe is landlocked, and this has prevented it from growing into a bigger industrial force in spite of its natural resources, such as diamonds, bauxite, and copper. Although the country has in the past realized gains from its mining activities, the present high cost of transporting minerals and goods through Mozambique and South Africa to reach the coast for export is prohibitive, and a factor in Zimbabwe’s high poverty rate and low GDP.

Regarding exposure to extreme weather, drought has been one of Zimbabwe’s biggest climate challenges in the last decade. In 2003, the country could no longer feed itself, but had to import food, due to a combination of drought and farms producing significantly less or being idle. That same year, “Four thousand peasant farmers, a full 70 percent of the local population, had made the trek to the school field for the handouts.”34 The World Food Program and World Vision, another aid group, organized these food handouts in Zimbabwe in 2003. This landlocked country must now import food, which is costly, further straining the economy and pushing more of its citizens, who cannot afford the high prices, into poverty. Additionally, the drought makes it expensive to irrigate Zimbabwe’s national safari parks, which are its principal tourist attractions.

With regard to disasters, this is manifested in two ways: natural, as in the occurrence of severe drought, and man-made, as seen in the problem of pollution. Other environmental

problems in Zimbabwe include toxic waste resulting from poor mining practices, and air and water pollution. The country also experiences acid rain which is another side effect of man-made pollution that adversely affects farming by making the soil acidic. This causes further poverty and hunger because the acidic soil is no longer arable.

IV. The Socio-Cultural Causes

A. Bangladesh

Regarding prejudice, minority populations in Bangladesh face a high degree of this problem that prevents their full participation in mainstream society and its social, economic and political programs. For instance, there are more Hindus in Gowainghat than Muslims, but, as Hindus are a minority in the country, they are discriminated against even in areas where they are in the majority. These Hindus face discrimination in flood relief and development initiatives, thereby effectively trapping them in poverty. As most Bangladeshis are Muslim, the Christian and Hindu minorities are regularly discriminated against, which curtails their access to jobs, land, and resources. A further social dimension of this discrimination is the lack of recourse for amelioration or the protection of their rights. Many are effectively shut out of the formal economy with no avenues for redress.

As for gender bias, this is commonly practiced in Bangladesh, with most families preferring to raise boys rather than girls. There are cultural factors that contribute to this,


including the payment of a bride price or dowry. A father can become landless by giving a dowry for his daughter. The dowry payments have at times led to violent disputes. These conflicts result in acid attacks against the women. This makes raising daughters more expensive than raising sons. Moreover, a daughter, once married, goes to live with her husband. This means that a son and his family gain a daughter-in-law who can also be a caretaker for the son’s parents when needed. The same benefit does not accrue to the daughter’s family, and most wives have to seek permission from their husbands to go and look after their own parents. This bias means that women are disadvantaged economically, are seen to be a burden to their parents, and are often married off while they are still young. This gender bias is also evident in the incidence of domestic violence, with 50% of cases being against women, and in the lack of female representation in the upper echelons of politics, education, and business in Bangladeshi society. The country’s leadership is trying to address this problem and the MDG goals that pertain to women and young girls should help promote these initiatives.

With regard to the lack of education, children in Bangladesh are often obliged to work and help their families rather than stay in school. With an education rate of 41% for females versus 54% for males, there is a clear cultural preference to educate males. This

37. Ibid., 276.
reinforces the discussion regarding gender bias seen in the previous paragraph. However, studies have shown that when girls are educated they contribute to the welfare of not only their own families but of the whole community. In poor households, children and women bear the brunt of the poverty more than men do because they eat after the men and are given disproportionately less food, even after allowing for their smaller size.40 Women also bear the entire responsibility of house work and childrearing. Bangladesh’s reluctance to educate girls may be contributing to its rural poverty rate, which is 90%.41 Although Bangladesh offers free primary education, poor families prefer to let their children work in order that they can contribute income to the family. This decision often leads to intergenerational poverty.

B. Bolivia

In the case of prejudice in Bolivia, this is directed at the indigenous Indians - the Aymara, Quechua, and Guarani. In terms of numbers, the Aymara and Quechua are the most discriminated indigenous populations, because they represent the largest Indian groups. However, all three groups of indigenous Bolivians have suffered ethnic discrimination and prejudice at the hands of whites and mestizos, and this discrimination is sometimes vocally expressed. For example, when the winner of the 2008 Miss Bolivia contest was a Quechua


41. Ibid.
Indian from Cochabamba, her selection led to riots by whites from Media Luna, in the eastern part of the country.\textsuperscript{42} Although whites only make up 10\% - 15\% of the population, there is a deep racial divide in the country. Also in 2008, the Media Luna all white region threatened to secede and form an independent nation.\textsuperscript{43} Although they did not do so, this threat simmers beneath the surface. The ethnic minorities are kept out of the mainstream politically, economically, and even, as seen here, culturally. The given example indicates that discrimination is practiced with impunity.

When it comes to gender bias in Bolivia, since the country is patriarchal there are traditional roles that women are expected to adhere to, such as being the primary child minders, cooks and cleaners. There is also violence and domestic abuse against women, and even though women and men are constitutionally equal, Bolivian society still discriminates against women in the areas of education, employment and entrepreneurship. A woman is often not permitted to make decisions that affect her own family, and is expected to leave these decisions to the men in the household - her father and brothers before marriage, and her husband after marriage.

The lack of education is a key factor in poverty and, when the cycle continues from one generation to the next, it leads to entrenched poverty. Many Bolivian children must


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
work in mines or on farms to contribute to their family’s meager income, but this leads to intergenerational poverty. International non-profit organizations often try to help children to attend school, but children are not always able to do so because of the obligation to help their families. While poor parents may understand the benefits of education, they are often simply too poor to be able to forfeit the earnings that their children contribute to the household income.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regard to prejudice in the Dominican Republic, it affects mainly the black minority of African descent, who are denied equal access to better paying jobs and services. There is a marked color line in this country which is directed mainly at the Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Prejudice is often shown towards the Haitians’ darker hues, as 95% of Haitians are black while 76% of Dominicans are mixed, 16% are white, and 11% are black. The government of the Dominican Republic has been accused of animosity and racialized discrimination towards residents who are of Haitian descent.

In the Dominican Republic there is evidence of gender bias, which is expressed through the fact that cases of domestic violence against women are hard to prosecute.


Women have brought cases to court against men, but often these cases do not result in convictions. In theory, men and women’s legal rights have parity, but, in practice, these rights differ. This disparity also exists in areas such as higher education, employment and political participation.

With regard to the lack of education, the Dominican Republic has pockets of illiteracy, particularly among its young people. According to a World Bank study, 33% of the population is lacking basic education, while 62%, aged 20 to 29 years old, have no secondary schooling. A lack of education correlates with poverty and 42.4% of Dominicans live below the poverty line. There is also a cause and effect question at hand: is the unemployment rate so high among the youth because of the lack of education or is the lack of education the reason for the high youth unemployment rate? The truth probably lies somewhere in between: the youth unemployment rate is so high because, in addition to insufficient education, youth training programs and job fairs, there is also a general lack of jobs targeted to help the youth, such as internships, work-study programs, and apprenticeships. This is presently being addressed with the help of USAID and other aid organizations.


47. Ibid.
D. Haiti

Prejudice is *de rigueur* in Haiti, and a very disturbing aspect of the country’s culture is its skin color codification. As a recent article, “The Haitian State: Something Alien,” perceptively notes, “the first dysfunction of the newly independent Haitian government was the institutionalization of skin color as a determination of status.” 48 This stratification by skin color continues and is evidenced by the fact that most businesses are managed by non-blacks, like Arabs, and owned by whites, even though whites and people of Arab descent are in the minority in Haiti. There is even a modern-day Rural Code which maintains discrimination. 49 Consequently, blacks in Haiti are poorer than any of the other racial groups, white, mixed, Asian and Arab. Racial discrimination is, therefore, a cause of poverty in Haiti.

As for the lack of education in Haiti, the problem is severe at all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. There is also a lack of vocational training. Since education is the key to economic progress, and to building a solid society, the lack of education is highly detrimental. At 53%, Haiti’s literacy rate is very low and is a direct cause of its poverty. 50 This year, in May 2011, both presidential candidates, Mirlande Manigat and Michel Martelly, ran on a platform that promised free primary education for all Haitian children, if elected. The winner, Martelly, however, has not yet followed through on this promise, but is working on


49. Ibid.


84
this. Because of the dire poverty, education is very much at the forefront of Haitian’s minds.\textsuperscript{51} With nearly 80\% of Haiti’s schools being private, only half of Haiti’s children get any education at all. The recent earthquake made the situation worse, as it destroyed 4,000 schools and killed 1,300 teachers.\textsuperscript{52} Having an educated citizenry and workforce is critical to economic growth and to reversing poverty. Haiti’s children deserve an education. At present, the government is drawing up plans to expand education, as part of its recovery efforts.

E. Zimbabwe

When it comes to prejudice in Zimbabwe, women and girls are the most negatively impacted, since the cultural norms are for women to be dependent on men, especially on their husbands. As a result, most of the family power resides with the men. There is also some reverse discrimination against whites in Zimbabwe, as a backlash to their long-term ownership of land and of large-scale commercial farms under colonial rule. This reverse discrimination has been encouraged by President Mugabe as part of his land redistribution reforms. But it has resulted in poverty among whites, who were former farm supervisors and farm managers.\textsuperscript{53} In earlier years, there also used to be widespread discrimination against

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
sufferers of HIV/AIDS, but this is occurring less frequently, given that 15.5% of the population are victims of this disease.\footnote{CIA, “Africa: Zimbabwe,” \textit{CIA World Factbook}, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/countrytemplate_zi.html (accessed October 8, 2010).}

Regarding gender bias, Zimbabwe is a mostly patriarchal society, with clear evidence of gender bias against women. For example, upon a husband’s death, his family can claim a right to any property he might have had and it can take years for the wife to fight against such claims brought on by his family. Moreover, it is costly to do so. One consequence of this is that when a woman is widowed or divorced she finds herself impoverished as her economic well-being was hitherto tied to her husband, with no assets in her own name. For women, therefore, poverty is sometimes caused by societal norms and customs that prevent them from being truly independent and that curtail their ability to seek employment outside the home.

As for the lack of education in Zimbabwe, for many years this was not a problem given its 90.7% literacy rate, which is very high for Sub-Saharan Africa. Now, however, even though the workforce is educated, there is the danger that education will decline due to the deteriorating economic conditions. Hence, the country needs to ensure that its young people continue to get at least a basic education, including secondary school education. A decline in educational achievement would worsen the country’s economy and sink more people into poverty. It is important for the country to maintain high secondary school and tertiary
attendance. The country's universities were once very highly regarded, but have run into
dysfunction, with many of them being closed. Some students have resorted to prostitution in
their dorms to earn money to pay their tuition.\textsuperscript{55}

V. The Political Causes of Poverty

A. Bangladesh

Regarding corruption in Bangladesh, this is pervasive yet there is not much outcry
from the public. Examples of corruption in Bangladesh include paying ghoosh or bribes,
subtle forms of persuasion known as tadbir, “in underhand deals involving vast sums of
money at the national and international level, to petty, everyday baksheesh, which the
doorman at a bureaucrat’s office extracts in order to perform his normal duties.”\textsuperscript{56}

Bangladesh’s politicians are engaged in wrangling amongst themselves in order to
consolidate their power, and this has led to its tumultuous history: its first two Presidents–
Sheikh Mujibur, the founding President, and General Zia ur-Rahman – were assassinated.\textsuperscript{57}

Rather than working to stamp out corruption, Bangladesh’s current political leadership is still
c caught in a power struggle and vendetta that goes back to the nation’s first two leaders as the
wife of the assassinated first President and the son of the assassinated General are current

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] “Thousands of Teachers Abandon Zimbabwe,” \textit{The Telegraph}


\item[57] “Bangladesh - Politics of Hate,” \textit{The Economist}, November 20\textsuperscript{th} – 26\textsuperscript{th}, 2010, 48 - 49.
\end{footnotes}
political adversaries.

As for the lack of political representation for poor rural and urban populations, it is due primarily to a lack of means which disenfranchises the poor politically: “In a system of governance that equates power and access with wealth, the poor feel that they will always lose out.”

Political underrepresentation is particularly high among women. Although Bangladesh’s government mandates that 30 seats out of 330 are filled by women, this still does not address the immense underrepresentation of women in political matters. Other reasons for lack of political representation among the poor include distance from the seat of government, difficulties with transportation, literacy, and insufficient funds. This means that power is concentrated in the hands of Bangladesh’s political elite, whose priorities differ vastly from those of the urban and rural poor. Consequently, there is a lack of transparency accompanying most dealings.

Furthermore, the vestiges of colonialism include the cronyism found among the political elites, and dates back to the days of British rule and the British social network known as the ‘Old Boys’ Club.’ Another remnant of colonialism lies in the use of country’s golf and country clubs, which were built primarily for use by British citizens during the colonial era. These clubs are currently used by the Bangladeshi elite, underscoring the


economic divide and perpetuating the class system.

B. Bolivia

With regard to corruption in Bolivia, this revolves around how public monies are being dispersed, bribery from big business concerns, and how domestic politics are being influenced by foreign leaders. For example, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, “pays tens of millions of dollars each year to the senior leaders of Bolivia’s military.”60 Until the election of President Evo Morales in 2006, poor subsistence farmers were disenfranchised, and a large economic underclass had been created. Although former President Goni Sanchez de Lozada realized that his country needed help in the form of debt cancellation there were still protests.61 Bolivia would have continued to be strangled by its debt because the structural adjustment programs had failed, if the debt had not been cancelled.62 However, dissatisfied by the status quo and corruption, indigenous Bolivians staged violent protests which forced Sanchez de Lozada to relinquish the presidency.

Regarding lack of political representation of the poor, as the first indigenous Indian


to be elected President, Mr. Morales has committed to rectifying some of the ills suffered by poor Indians, particularly their lack of access to social services, education, and employment. But, some of his policies and reforms have created tension between rich and poor people. His own Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party has staged protests and questioned his leadership and their underrepresentation in his government. The political participation of indigenous Bolivians such as the Ponchos Rojos group is often linked to violence in the form of demonstrations and this trend is disturbing and does not correct the underlying lack of indigenous representation in government entities. Non-indigenous Bolivians have enjoyed better access to the production and manufacturing capital to acquire and expand their factories or commercial farms. Such opportunities are still unavailable to the indigenous Indian population and are a factor in their poverty.

With regard to the effects of colonialism, in Bolivia this plays out in the way indigenous Indians are treated to this day. The racial legacy of colonialism is evident in the fact that approximately 60 to 70% of Bolivians are Indians and yet politics has almost exclusively been in the hands of the minority mestizos and whites until President Morales was elected. Before this, Victor Cardenas, who was Vice President, was the only Indian Cabinet member. This means that wealth accumulation and income distribution has also been concentrated in the hands of non-indigenous Bolivians. There is a lingering distrust among Bolivia’s Indians of any policies that grant economic benefits to foreign companies, particularly in mining, in which many poor people are employed. The reaction to such agreements is often hostile, resulting in protests. This is because there is suspicion among...
the poor that they are once again being marginalized.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regard to corruption in the Dominican Republic, this is a cause of poverty because there is no accountability about the use of public funds, and any money that might be earmarked for development initiatives is easily diverted to programs that the government deems more pressing or that it can use to pay back political favors. Additionally, there is a lack of transparency, which facilitates corruption.

As for the lack of political representation, President Leonel Fernando Reyna is both the head of state and of the government, which allows for almost total control by him, permitting cronyism and the repaying of political favors with key cabinet appointments. Since the Dominican Republic’s leaders have always sought to ensure that Haiti’s leadership was *simpatico* to them, there is a pervasive lack of transparency in government dealings. This has resulted in Transparency International and other organizations rating the Dominican Republic very poorly on its international transparency scale. Such inefficient leadership perpetuates the causes of poverty.

The lingering legacy of colonial rule in the Dominican Republic is most evident in the prejudice and discrimination displayed towards poor dark-skinned people, who are often trapped in a cycle of poverty. They are also less likely to gain better paying jobs. It is disturbing and sad that this remnant from colonial days lingers on among people with the same nationality, who assume the disdainful attitude held by colonial rulers, and who keep

the poor people from achieving upward economic mobility. Poor Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic are treated in the same way and are discriminated against.

**D. Haiti**

With regard to corruption, Haiti has been beset by political turmoil and upheaval for almost all of its 200-year existence since independence, and there has been political corruption throughout its history. Hence, the country has been unable to erect the necessary institutions to facilitate broad-based commerce and create a robust economic environment. Historically, Haiti’s weak rulers allowed unscrupulous Dominican politicians to exploit their poorer neighbors as cheap labor on sugarcane plantations in the Dominican Republic, which stifled economic mobility and entrenched the laborers in poverty. Due in large part to a leadership void, Haiti suffers from systemic corruption, with a high incidence of violence, organized crime, and difficulty with law enforcement.64 A medical doctor and the founder of “Partners in Health,” Dr. Paul Farmer puts it very succinctly when he says of Haiti, “And let there be no doubt: in Haiti, the social dysfunction stems from government failure.”65

Although Haiti’s leadership has been fractured, there have been allegations of corruption due to the high inequality and deep poverty that affects all but 20% of the population. This abysmal political situation compounds chronic poverty; there has not yet been a strong leader who has managed, or been allowed, to put policies and infrastructure in


place that will facilitate building the country's economy comprehensively from the ground up. Haiti’s economy is still suffering the effects from the ransacking of government coffers by Baby “Doc” Duvalier in 1986. Its high hopes for change following the election of the priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide were not realized. Haitians elected a new President, Michel Martelly, in May of 2011.

As regards the vestiges of colonialism, in Haiti there are three. One vestige is the enormous burden of paying France an indemnity of 150 million gold francs for its freedom over a period of 122 years. This burden is still felt today and plays a role in Haiti’s grinding poverty. A second vestige of colonialism is the oppressive state of Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic where they have fled for economic reasons. Ill-treated though they are, they continue to labor on Dominican sugar plantations, under conditions reminiscent of slavery. In spite of the humiliation and deprivations faced when seeking employment in the Dominican Republic, the Haitian workers still feel that “Misery in Dominikani is better than starvation in Haiti.”66 This willingness to be subjected to such unjust treatment is also a lingering effect from colonial times. The third, most nefarious vestige of colonialism, is the color coding of citizens that ensnare Haiti’s poor black citizens in poverty to this day. Darker-skinned blacks are less likely to hold well-paying jobs, higher positions in government or business, or influential leadership positions than blacks whose skin is lighter


in color. Elitism and classicism are further colonial traits still at work in Haiti today, oppressing the poor and causing a marginalized existence.

E. Zimbabwe

Regarding corruption in Zimbabwe, President Mugabe’s longstanding monopoly of power enabled him to build a network of close political allies through bribery, coercion, and intimidation, which translates to corrupt leadership. Even his efforts to rectify a colonial wrong, to redistribute land more equitably to include blacks, was fraught with corruption, as many of the recipients of the land were his cronies, his family members, and the family members of high-ranking government officials. This led to a fall in agricultural output and a rise in hunger and poverty. While President Mugabe’s drive to rectify the wrongs of colonial land acquisition is understandable, his method of amelioration was severely flawed. Perhaps the correct path is the one suggested by Paul Collier, that it may have been more advisable to “nationalize the land and lease it back.”

With regard to political representation, it is very lacking in Zimbabwe in spite of the dire need for citizens to effect a change in the country’s political leadership. There is a climate of intimidation and political rivals have been attacked in the past, as was the case with Mr. Tsvangirai before he became Prime Minister. This has discouraged challengers from stepping forward, and it has been posited that along with intimidation tactics, foreign aid receipts might be the key to President Mugabe’s long political survival. But the foreign


aid has not resulted in any marked improvements in infrastructure or poverty alleviation, and without more poor people becoming politically engaged and demanding change, poverty cannot be reduced. Women are particularly underrepresented in politics in Zimbabwe, due largely to the patriarchal structure of the society which places obstacles to women gaining access to political positions.

As to the lingering effects of colonialism, these include racism whites to blacks, and the concentration of land and assets in the hands of the minority white population. However, President Mugabe’s is trying to reverse this by changing the ownership of commercial farms from whites to blacks, but this has backfired, with many of these of farms now either idle or simply unable to produce at former levels. Drought is partly to blame for this. To economist Jeffrey Sachs, the main reason is poor leadership for he states that, “Zimbabwe is a case where the traditional explanation of miserable rule is sufficient explanation for a country’s ills.”

VI. Conclusion

The overarching economic cause of poverty that seems most deleterious is unemployment. In all five countries, unemployment compounds poverty and worsens it by denying the means with which to procure the most basic needed items such as food, shelter,


and medicine. The economic cause of poverty with the most devastating impact in all five countries is unemployment, followed by the lack of diversified industries the food insecurity. Zimbabwe is country most impacted by unemployment, followed by Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, and Bangladesh. The lack of diversified industries impact particularly harshly on Zimbabwe and Haiti. Food insecurity plagues Zimbabwe, Haiti, and Bangladesh the most, followed by Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic.

With regard to the environmental causes, the most devastating impacts are the unpredictable and unpreventable natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, and the increasing incidence of weather-related events like cyclones, hurricanes, and drought. While all five countries suffer from natural disasters, the hardest hit country is Haiti, where both earthquakes and weather-related disasters occur. The next hardest hit country, with regard to weather-related disasters, which it experiences frequently, is Bangladesh. The toll on human life and economic infrastructure in both countries is devastating and is a factor in their high poverty rates.

Among the socio-cultural causes of poverty, two are almost equally devastating: discrimination and the lack of education. The extent of racial prejudice that exists in Bolivia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Zimbabwe, is disturbing, counterproductive, and immoral. There is, furthermore, a disturbing and supreme hubris attached to such discrimination. With respect to education, for any child to receive no more than 4 years of
education in total for a lifetime, is just shy of criminal, and in some countries like
Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Haiti, that is how much education some rural children receive. This
leads to continued cycles of intergenerational poverty that are hard to overcome.

As for political causes, corruption is the most damaging cause of poverty, followed
by the lack of political representation, and lastly, the vestiges of colonialism. With respect to
corruption, all five countries grapple with this to varying degrees but it is especially pervasive
in Bangladesh, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. For example, Haiti and Zimbabwe are the countries
where political instability plays a large role in poverty. Haiti desperately needs good and
steady leadership. So does Zimbabwe, but not in the same way, as it could use a change in
leadership. Sometimes, even leaders with the best intentions encounter the beast called
“politics” which undermines their intentions and initiatives. This may be the case with
President Morales in Bolivia, in that as the country’s first indigenous leader, he feels honor
bound to correct the ills of poverty, oppression, and coercion that have plagued indigenous
Bolivians. However, reaching political accord requires reaching out to opposing political
parties and achieving a compromise, while gradually chipping away at old entrenched
oppressive systems, and molding new ones that are more politically comprehensive for all
Bolivians. Morales will need to find a way to work with the opposition to move the country
forward, as he cannot do so unilaterally without repercussions. The main causes of poverty
in all five countries examined in this thesis appear to be linked to political leadership or the
lack thereof; countries with good leaders are seldom impoverished.

There are other complex causes of poverty, including the lingering legacy of colonial
rule that served to lay the foundation for structural poverty in some developing countries,
particularly those left vulnerable because of the exploitation of natural resources.

Industrialization created demand in developed countries for raw materials and minerals like gold, silver, bauxite, diamonds, nickel, copper, and iron ore, found in developing countries like Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Zimbabwe. This led the colonial powers to exploit their colonial territories for these raw materials. In Bangladesh, the British exploited the timber. In the case of Bolivia in the 20th Century, Spain extracted its silver. Spain also exploited the Dominican Republic’s gold, silver, nickel and sugar, while Spain and France plundered Haiti’s gold and minerals, and the British took Zimbabwe’s gold, nickel, and bauxite. By the time the Western powers were fully industrialized and their economies were robust, their colonial territories had been plundered of their natural resources and were largely impoverished. Besides economic exploitation, another insidious legacy from colonialism is racism. Racism and discrimination are not confined to different races and ethnic groups, but also exist between people of the same race. The prejudice that racism spawns serves to oppress people, deny them equal opportunities, rights, and access to the means of commerce. From colonial to modern racism, the effects are the same: impoverishment of a sub-class of the population by means of the denial of equal rights.

Although the causes of poverty are myriad, they are not insurmountable if the right solutions are applied. While this chapter has discussed the causes of poverty, the next one, Chapter IV, will examine the adverse effects of poverty in the countries studied in this thesis.

72. Keith John Richards, Bolivia (New York: Kuperard, 2009), 23
CHAPTER IV

THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF POVERTY

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the misery and suffering caused by poverty in five chosen countries under four main areas: health problems; sub-standard housing; lack of educational facilities; and political marginalization. The scope covers poverty in the first decade of the twenty-first century in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. The chapter is organized into six parts. Part I, the Introduction, provides an overview of the adverse effects of poverty. Part II deals with the health problems of poverty in these countries while Part III examines sub-standard housing. Part IV then looks at the lack of educational facilities and Part V discusses political marginalization. Part VI, the Conclusion, sums up why these adverse impacts are collectively harmful to the poor in the five countries.

Part I. Introduction: An Overview of the Adverse Effects of Poverty

Regarding health problems, the discussion will be confined to three topics: diseases, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare. The main diseases dealt with are lymphatic filariasis, malaria, cholera and leptospirosis. As for malnutrition, this covers its effects on vulnerable population groups, particularly infants, mothers, the sick, and the elderly. With regard to inadequate healthcare, the three issues to be dealt with are insufficient medical staff such as doctors and nurses; the lack of necessary infrastructure like hospitals and clinics; and continued use of traditional healing practices in the form of herbal remedies and over-reliance on faith healers. As for sub-standard housing, the topics discussed will be poor construction materials, unsafe locations, and unsanitary conditions. With regard to the lack
of educational facilities, the topics will deal with insufficient, ill-trained, and poorly paid teachers in government schools; and marginal school facilities, such as dilapidated buildings and badly ventilated classrooms, inadequate bathroom facilities; and the lack of classroom equipment like laboratory equipment and modern technological innovations. In the case of political marginalization, this discusses racism, and limited citizenship. To curb poverty all these adverse effects must be understood, addressed and resolved.

Part II. Health Problems

A. Bangladesh

Regarding the prevalence of diseases in Bangladesh, the lack of potable water in rural communities exposes residents to waterborne diseases such as leptospirosis and this is a health risk.\(^1\) Having an urbanization rate of only 27% means that 73% of Bangladeshis could be at risk from infectious waterborne diseases since these diseases affect mainly rural inhabitants. Lymphatic filariasis is also endemic in 33 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, and clinically disables 3.5 million people.\(^2\) This is a disfiguring disease that leads to a loss of productivity and income, as those afflicted are often unable to work. Chronic illnesses and diseases are significant factors in poverty. Because it is surrounded by so much water, Bangladesh has a high incidence too of malaria: a total of 14.7 million Bangladeshis are at

\(^1\) Leptospirosis is a rare disease and severe bacterial infection caused by exposure to certain types of leptospira bacteria found in fresh water that has been contaminated by animal urine. It is found in warmer climates. For more information see http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002352 (accessed February 6, 2011).

\(^2\) Lymphatic Filariasis is a mosquito borne parasitic disease that causes swelling of the limbs, urogenital organs, breasts, and other parts of the body. For more information see http://www.who.int/communicable_dis_filaria.html (accessed February 15, 2011).
high-risk of endemic malaria.³

As for malnutrition, this is a problem that affects primarily women, children, and female adolescents. It is important to reduce malnutrition because it leads to stunting, the diminished capacity of children to learn, and to compromised immunity, which affects children into adulthood, and makes them prone to illness. Other effects of malnutrition include low birth weight, and chronic energy and micronutrient deficiency.⁴ Although child stunting rates have fallen from 65.5% to 48.8% between 1990 and 2000, this is still too high.⁵ The prevalence of malnutrition in Bangladesh can be attributed in large part to the weak nutritional status of adolescent girls and women.⁶ Malnutrition can pass from one generation to the next because malnourished mothers give birth to malnourished babies. If these babies are girls, then they may also give birth to malnourished babies. If there are no remedies to help avert this. In Bangladesh, newborn fatalities constitute 57% of under-five deaths, and they make up 71% of infant mortality, which covers birth to age one.⁷


⁶. Ibid.

In general, Bangladesh’s healthcare system is in need of much improvement. Rural residents are especially hard pressed to find adequate care where they live; consequently they sometimes seek out traditional healers, faith healers, and tribal magicians. Residents of the shifting river islands, called “chars,” are the most underserved patient populations. Big hospitals cater to healthcare needs in the cities while clinics deliver healthcare to *upazilas*, which comprise a few districts. There are also single-doctor practices in rural areas that cater to certain villages. However, there are not enough doctors for Bangladesh’s large population, and so a large portion of healthcare delivery in Bangladesh is carried out by NGOs in partnership with aid agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**B. Bolivia**

With regard to diseases in Bolivia, due to the dearth of clean running water in poor rural areas, water-borne diseases including Leptospirosis, are becoming increasingly prevalent in 2010 when 50 cases were confirmed in seven of Bolivia’s states.\(^8\) Another water borne disease frequently found in Bolivia is diarrhea, particularly in El Alto and other areas lacking sewage treatment systems, as vegetable plants are irrigated with contaminated water.\(^9\) Additionally, the water shortages in Bolivia are having a negative health impact as clean, potable water becomes increasingly scarce. In this connection, Lake Titicaca, with a name...
that means ‘Rock of the Jaguar’ in the Aymara language, has become highly polluted as a result of all the effluent and solid waste dumped into it by people and by those engaged in illegal mining activities. This pollution has adverse health implications for those who use the water supply from Lake Titicaca. Another disease commonly found in Bolivia is malaria. Whereas malaria used to be confined to lower altitudes, the Anopheles mosquito has succeeded in migrating to higher altitudes, bringing malaria to the altiplano, which had previously had no incidence of the disease. This indicates that the mosquitoes have adapted to the colder climate of the highlands.

In respect to malnutrition, it has been found that “geographical and cultural variables are significant determinants of nutrition statistics in Bolivia.” Bolivia’s sparse population density and the remoteness of some of its villages hamper access to markets which offer more nutritional choices for families with young children. Quechua children present the worst malnutrition statistics among the various Bolivian groups. Some studies on malnutrition in Bolivia show a link between high altitude, hypoxia, and genetics. This,


13. Ibid.
coupled with the lack of money, may account for the high malnutrition among Quechua children.

With regards to the delivery of healthcare in Bolivia, the country is a special case because of the innate distrust that indigenous Bolivians feel towards Western medicine. Besides the paucity of doctors, with one doctor for every 7,000 rural inhabitants, there is also deep mistrust of Western medicine among rural residents. There are sharp differences in belief and “Aymara ethnomedical therapy relies on keeping the body sealed and on healing through ritual. Biomedical practices, on the other hand, often pierce, cut and open the body through injections, transfusions, blood tests and surgery, leaving the Aymara feeling especially vulnerable.”  

14 There is an Aymara folk belief in kharisiri, which means a non-Aymara medical worker, an outsider, who takes someone else’s kidney fat to produce soap to sell to tourists. This belief illustrates the level of fear and distrust felt towards modern Western medicine.  

15 Most Bolivian healthcare providers also do not speak the indigenous languages, and so the Aymara and Quechua face a communication gap that makes it difficult for them to interact with medical professionals. In any case, USAID and other NGOs are helping to provide healthcare to rural Bolivians and have stepped up vaccination campaigns.


since 2007. About one million poor Bolivians use USAID-funded health services every year.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{C. The Dominican Republic}

With respect to diseases in the Dominican Republic, malaria is prevalent and endemic everywhere in the country, except in Santo Domingo and Santiago. This disease is caused by heavy rains and by flooding from hurricanes and by poor residents having to store water due to the scarcity of tap water. Punta Cana and the Bavaro Zone, on the east coast, suffered a high incidence of malaria following Hurricane Jeanne in 2004. At present, Hispaniola is the only place in the Caribbean where malaria still exists.\textsuperscript{17} Other diseases include leptospirosis and diarrhea, especially among children, because the water that is available in rural areas and in coastal basins is often contaminated, due to ad hoc settlements lacking proper sanitation along rivers.\textsuperscript{18} These conditions can lead to leptospirosis and to severe diarrhea, especially among children. There are also smoking-related diseases like lung cancer, emphysema, and upper respiratory ailments due to high tobacco use. These illnesses plague poor rural residents and illiterate groups, especially males aged 45 and older in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Repeating Islands, “Increase of Malaria Cases in the Dominican Republic,” http://www.repeatingislands.com/2010/09/05/increase-of-malaria-cases (accessed February 2, 2011).
\end{itemize}
tobacco-growing areas.\textsuperscript{19} A study by the University of Rochester Medical Center concludes that 2,254 lives could be saved with preventive measures against smoking and that the number of cases has likely been underreported. The ensuing medical costs from smoking, and the lost productivity and wages are heavy burdens for poor communities.

As regards malnutrition in the Dominican Republic, current estimates put malnutrition at 7.2\% for children in 2010 and about 27\% of the general population suffers from hunger.\textsuperscript{20} The children are the worst affected because their learning abilities are negatively affected by the lack of nutrition. Some experts blame the malnutrition problem on the 2003 banking crisis as it shrunk the economy and plunged 1.5 million Dominicans into poverty.\textsuperscript{21}

With regard to inadequate healthcare, the Dominican Republic has impoverished citizens living in sugar cane plantation communities called \textit{bateys}, in shanty towns, in urban areas, and in the underserved border areas. In particular, attention must be paid to mothers and infants. As things stand, there is a big variance in the vaccination rates in urban and rural areas, with 90\% for the former and 45\% for the latter.\textsuperscript{22} More healthcare should also be

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{21}]{Ibid.}
\item[\textsuperscript{22}]{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}}
provided to the elderly and to poor Haitian immigrants because of the risk of the spread of diseases if they are left untreated.

D. Haiti

With respect to diseases that are commonly found in Haiti, malaria is endemic to the country, causing work interruptions and loss of income. Because the principal mosquito vector in Haiti is Anopheles albimanus, which bites outdoors, the Haitians living in tent camps are very vulnerable to malaria. Haiti’s weakened infrastructure following the January 12, 2010, earthquake has made the island’s poor inhabitants even more vulnerable to health menaces as scores of internally displaced people (IDPs) reside in densely crowded tent cities. Due to the shortage of potable water, these tent cities are easy breeding grounds for infectious diseases such as malaria and cholera. According to government reports 200,000 people died, and 500,000 were made homeless as a result of the 2010 earthquake. The October 2010 outbreak of cholera was a bitter epitaph to a cruel year. Before this outbreak, there had not been a documented incidence of cholera in Haiti since 1960. Within a month of the October 2010 outbreak over 280 people died of cholera in Port-au-Prince. Without medical help, adults can die from cholera in twenty-four hours and children within twelve


24. Ibid.

hours. Cholera is easily preventable, either by boiling untreated water before drinking it or by treating the water with chlorine tablets. Another disease that needs to be prevented is anemia, which is especially high in Haitian women due to their poor diets. Anemia can lead to tragic consequences for them during childbirth and for their infants in their first year of life.

With regard to inadequate healthcare in Haiti, the infrastructure, though provided by NGOs and by the International Red Cross, is not sufficiently developed to meet the population’s needs. For instance, there are not enough doctors, hospitals and medical supplies. Haiti has suffered from a brain drain, with many doctors leaving the country to work abroad. The 2010 earthquake made matters much worse and overtaxed a system that was never designed to handle that many critically injured patients all at once. Medical care is expensive when it is available, and many people still rely on voudou practitioners for their healthcare needs.

E. Zimbabwe

With regards to diseases in Zimbabwe, cholera is a big problem and some have blamed the polluted water supply for the 2008 cholera epidemic that struck the country. This underscores the need for a well-functioning water supply management system, as the present system has lapsed into disrepair from mismanagement and neglect. According to the United Nations Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF), 60% of the people in rural areas have no

access to clean running water and this has led to unsanitary conditions, in terms of drinking water, water for cooking, and also the disposal of sewage. Another disease that plagues Zimbabwe is HIV/AIDS. The disease, with an adult prevalence rate of 15.3% in 2007, has reduced life expectancy from 61 years to 33 years over the course of the last two decades. The impact of HIV/AIDS on this impoverished country cannot be overstated: the dearth in healthy robust workers has not only reduced productivity but the survivors of HIV/AIDS are too weak to work. There is thus an adverse economic impact on the family when a parent has HIV/AIDS, and cannot earn money to look after his or her family. As for malaria, it is endemic in 75% of the country. Malaria is also the biggest killer of children under five in Zimbabwe, and the leading cause of work absences and, by extension, responsible for the country’s suspended economic growth. Malaria also affects HIV/AIDS patients, making it harder for them to survive, as their immune systems are further compromised.

Regarding malnutrition, this is common amongst infants aged between six to eighteen months, who then suffer from stunted growth. Zimbabwe’s high infant mortality rate of 5.8% is largely due to malnutrition. Malnutrition also affects elderly, ill, and poor Zimbabweans, especially poor mothers. Malnutrition is also increasingly affecting pupils who are going to school hungry because there is no food at home.

As for inadequate healthcare, this is often inadequate due to the lack of qualified

medical personnel. Another reason is that Zimbabwe’s health system is extremely rudimentary, especially for the poor. There is no provision for free health care. Hospitals require payment and lack adequate medical staff, free preventive healthcare, and easy access to medications. According to a December 2010, *New York Times* article, patients are so poor that they are allowed to barter instead of paying for their treatments with money.\(^\text{28}\) Because there is no free healthcare, poor patients are forced to barter at a hospital. This has happened in Chidamoyo, a hospital town in Zimbabwe.\(^\text{29}\) Some poor patients also seek out faith healers, whose treatment costs are cheaper when compared with those of doctors. Unfortunately, the cheaper treatments often fail, resulting in death.

**Part III. Sub-standard Housing**

**A. Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the houses of the poor are often built of wood and covered with tin roofs. Some houses are also built on wooden stilts directly above water; these houses are very rudimentary and cannot withstand strong storms. Since replacing a home after a storm or evacuating an area is expensive and disruptive, especially for people who can ill afford it, many victims of storms are temporarily displaced while they try to rebuild, and must rely on NGOs and international aid organizations to assist them, as was the case with cyclone Sidr. In the urban slums, homes consist of one room, so overcrowding is very


\(^{29}\) Ibid.
common, making for poor living conditions. These are usually rented. In Dhaka, there are over 4,000 informal settlements, housing nearly 30% of its population. Life in slums is characterized by insecurity and by the constant risk of eviction.

With regard to dangerous locations, many of Bangladesh’s poor live in urban slums around the capital city, Dhaka, such as the Bastuhara Slum, the Chittagong Slum District, and the Battala Slum. These high population density areas are dangerous due to the risk of fire and the lack of security. Other poor people also live in rural areas, near low-lying coastal deltas and along river banks. Each of these locations exposes poor residents to danger from severe weather conditions. The dangerous location exacerbates the lack of access to medical, social, and educational services.

With respect to unsanitary conditions, the houses of the poor in Bangladesh have inadequate sanitation facilities and lack a running water supply. Even urban areas have problems with poor sanitation facilities, as it has been noted that, “there is a scarcity of latrines in rural as well as urban areas.” The lack of latrines is compounded by having no piped water, resulting in poor hygiene and the spread of diseases.

B. Bolivia

Regarding housing for the poor in Bolivia, the materials reflect the adverse impact of poverty. Because there has been little investment in affordable housing for the poor, many

of them live in structures that are haphazardly built and are made of simple materials such as plain cement, a mixture of mud and brick, and wood. These humble dwellings usually have roofs made of tin roof, wood, or cement roof.

Another problem associated with sub-standard housing is the location of domiciles for the poor. Very often they are found in dangerous, unsuitable, remote areas, like mountainsides that are prone to mudslides, camp settlements near illegal mines, and crowded urban encampments on the outskirts of town. Although Bolivia has a low population density overall, there is overcrowding in these settlements and so there is a risk of crime. Overcrowding also presents a fire hazard.

With respect to unsanitary conditions, Bolivia’s poor lack proper waste and sewage disposal, causing one woman to report that at “Barrio Las Pascuas in Bolivia, the water in the streets brings infections and it is because of a lack of a sewage system.”33 The sewage ends up in the streets, and is washed into rivers when it rains, creating unhygienic conditions for people who then use the water from the river. The regular shortage of water also creates very unsanitary conditions in that there is no running water to wash hands or to bathe. This means that water must be collected.

C. The Dominican Republic

Regarding housing conditions for the poor in the Dominican Republic, these are very basic with homes built of any materials that can be obtained, including wood, aluminum


32. Ibid.
sheets, and plastic tarp. These dwelling usually have dirt floors. These conditions are dusty and present a health hazard as they bring rodents and insects into the home. Many of the houses are also built of *tejamanil*, which is a soil and animal manure mixture, while some are made from empty tin oil drums.34 In many instances, two families share one house. In the house several family members share one bed.

With regard to unsafe locations in the Dominican Republic, most poor people are not able to afford safe housing in good locations. Instead, they must live where they can which often ends up being on steep mountainsides, in ravines, and close to river banks. All of these are risky locations exposing them to danger from mudslides, particularly for those living in valleys, and to flooding. Sometimes there is loss of life, but typically there is disruption and displacement while people wait for the flood waters to recede, so that they can return to their homes or rebuild, if necessary.

As for unsanitary conditions in the Dominican Republic, according to UNICEF, the rural rate for improved sanitation facilities stands at 74%, while it is 87% for urban areas, following the distribution of composting toilets and pit latrines with covers.35 Although some progress has been made since 2000, when Habitat for Humanity estimated that most

33. Ibid.


rural areas had very few sanitation facilities, there is still a need for more latrines. This means that there has been success in distributing latrines such as, and thereby promoting better hygiene. Issues of potable water and hot water are still problematic. Additionally, there is no garbage disposal or waste management system, creating overall unhealthy living conditions.

D. Haiti

As for poor construction materials for housing in Haiti, this was very evident when most houses could not withstand the category 7 earthquake that struck the country in 2010. Most poor rural Haitians live in homes made of wood with tin roofs and floors that are either of mud or cement. The houses are very basic and are prone to destruction and flooding during severe storms, particularly in rural areas and in shanty towns. Many are also unsafe because they are easy to break into, with insufficient locks and doors. These houses are also very small and congested, making overcrowding a problem.

With regard to dangerous locations, poor Haitians often live along river banks, and on mountainsides, which are prone to landslides, mudslides and flooding. Some also live in makeshift settlements and shanty towns which are dangerous due to crime, lack of security and insufficient law enforcement. At present, about a million people are still residing in overcrowded tent cities in Port-au-Prince that lack safety and security.

With respect to unsanitary conditions, most houses in rural areas lack running water and modern sanitation. Sanitation facilities consist for the most part of open and covered pit latrines which can spread diseases. For instance, Haiti’s cholera outbreak is attributable to lack of clean potable water and to crowded, unsanitary living conditions.
E. Zimbabwe

With respect to poor construction materials, Zimbabwe’s urban poor are subjected to sub-standard housing, and consequently most housing for them is made out of wood, metal and plastic sheets, and with mud or cement floors. These homes are referred to as slum shacks, whereas the homes of comfortably off urban residents are typically made of brick. President Mugabe’s Operation Murambatsvina – his drive to clean up urban slum settlements, resulted in about 700,000 homeless people who now reside in the ruins of their erstwhile homes.36 There is not enough affordable housing for the urban poor at present. In the rural areas, traditional round mud huts are the norm. However, the mud huts with thatched roofs pose a fire hazard because the roofs can easily catch fire.

As for residing in dangerous locations, for the poor in Zimbabwe this includes homes located close to or in mining towns. The danger with such a location lies in the proximity to mine run-off and to effluents polluting the water supply. This can have adverse health impacts on the poor who are dependent on the water source and use it for drinking, cooking, and washing. For those who live near wildlife parks, there is also the danger of being trampled upon, maimed, or even killed, by wild animals.

When it comes to the question of unsanitary conditions in Zimbabwe, this is very much a problem in the rural areas because more latrines are needed. So far, in 2011, the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society have provided 1,200 latrines, along

with training for 44 volunteers in latrine construction. This will help to reduce the transmission of disease through flies.\(^{37}\) Tap water is not available in most rural homes, with the water for bathing and washing stored either in a cistern or fetched from a well or borehole. This water needs to be treated in order to kill the germs and to be potable. Water pollution is also a problem in that people often wash their clothing in polluted rivers. Storing water outside is also a problem in that it can lead to a high malaria rate as mosquitoes gravitate towards standing water.

IV. The Lack of Educational Facilities

A. Bangladesh

Regarding the lack of teachers in Bangladesh, there is a severe shortage in the government-funded primary and secondary schools, linked partly to the inadequate qualifications of the teachers.\(^{38}\) The average teacher’s salary is $90 a month, which is far below the average yearly income of $2,200.\(^{39}\) The problem of unqualified teachers dates far back. In June 2004 a project was launched to improve the quality of secondary education in Bangladesh by offering better teacher training. The funding for this project was provided by

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the Asian Development Bank, in the amount of $68.91 million.\textsuperscript{40} These funds will provide continuing professional development for eligible teachers of grades 6 through 10, in private and in government schools.\textsuperscript{41}

With respect to school facilities, they vary from urban to rural settings, with schools in rural areas having more basic building structures that lack air conditioning and modern sanitation amenities. As such, they do not provide a conducive environment for learning, although students manage. More needs to be done to improve the physical infrastructure of the schools.

With regard to books, computers and technology that can enhance teaching, Bangladesh’s public schools receive aid from NGOs. Although most schools in urban areas get some of these supplies, they are still not enough and more needs to be done to expand access to and availability of supplies, such as computers, science equipment, and even basic texts and notebooks. In fact, there is an overdependence on NGOs to provide education to the underserved. In rural areas, where school structures and school equipment are much more rudimentary and schools are underfunded, there is a dearth of educational facilities and of teaching aids and equipment.

\textbf{B. Bolivia}

With regard to the lack of teachers in Bolivia, this is a serious problem, particularly in


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
the rural areas. While some gains are being made in the quality of teacher training, the distribution of teachers, especially in the poorer regions, is uneven. In 2002, Bolivia spent 6.8% of its GDP on education in order to enhance teacher training and the quality of education. In spite of this, the teaching force is still largely inadequately trained and ill-equipped.

As regards the school facilities in Bolivia, some of these are very basic, particularly in the rural areas, often consisting of a few buildings and sometimes just a few rooms. These structures have neither heat nor air conditioning and make learning a challenge. Moreover, many of the buildings are rundown and in need of renovation.

With respect to classroom and school equipment such as computers and audio-visual aids, these are not readily available across the country and typically only available in private schools or well-funded religious schools. Schools run by non-profit organizations have some good equipment and provide an adequate learning environment for children and the same is true of private schools. However, public schools do not fare so well and experience challenges with sub-standard equipment and periodic teacher strikes which are related to under-funding.


43. Ibid.

C. The Dominican Republic

Regarding the lack of teachers in the Dominican Republic, it is acute and may be due to the fact that the country spends less on education than other Latin American and Caribbean countries, with only 1.9% of its GDP invested in public education. This directly affects teacher salaries and is a disincentive for teachers to become better trained. This, in turn, leads to poor educational attainment among the young.

The school facilities of public schools in the Dominican Republic vary by location, but in the poorer areas they are very basic. Sometimes, these structures do not have walls, and are open to the elements, making learning difficult. Sanitation amenities are also inadequate and can present a health risk.

With regard to school equipment, public schools rely on donations and help from NGOs and other international organizations like Save the Children, the World Bank, and UNICEF. This means that the government must do more to increase the availability of equipment for poor children attending these schools as they are otherwise severely disadvantaged in their learning.

D. Haiti

There is a severe shortage of teachers in Haiti, due in part to the overall difficult situation in the country. While teacher training facilities rely on donations from non-governmental, religious, and private organizations, the general state of education is dismal due to a lack of funds and a severe shortage of teachers. Poor salaries have contributed to

Regarding school facilities for the poor in Haiti, they are very basic. Sometimes, a school amounts to little more than a one-room shack built of aluminum sheets and wood. The opening where a window should be located is covered by a wooden slab or aluminum sheet which functions as a makeshift window shutter.\textsuperscript{46} Schools are often overcrowded, hot and stuffy, making it difficult for the children to learn. With a literacy rate just above 50%, it is critical that children have a good environment for learning as this will help to reduce poverty. In the aftermath of the earthquake, aid organizations put up some temporary schools. While this is helpful, the underlying problem of insufficient schools needs to be addressed.

When it comes to classroom and school equipment, such as books and technology, Haiti is severely disadvantaged. The government has long lacked the funds needed to provide essential computers and laboratory equipment to schools. Following the earthquake the situation worsened. Many public and private donations are helping to support and shore up education efforts in Haiti with books, computer equipment, and donations for school uniforms. However, a long term plan from the government is needed.

E. Zimbabwe

Regarding the lack of well-trained teachers, the situation is dire due to the country’s decimated economy. Government teachers are opting to leave the profession because they are not regularly paid. Even when they are paid, hyperinflation has depressed their

purchasing power. For example, in 2007, teachers’ salaries were just enough to buy four
loaves of bread.\textsuperscript{47} The exodus of Zimbabwe’s teachers has resulted in unqualified
replacements who are lowering the standard of education. Underpaid teachers have left to
seek work in neighboring Botswana and Mozambique or have turned to other trades as
hyperinflation has left them unable to support their families with their paychecks. Another
consequence of the economic downturn is that many pupils have had to drop out of school
because their parents can no longer afford the school fees.

When it comes to the educational facilities in Zimbabwe, many of the schools are
run down and in need of maintenance. Sometimes classes take place in dusty mud huts
swarming with insects, in which the children sit on red bricks on the floor instead of on
chairs.\textsuperscript{48} Sanitation facilities are inadequate and so there is a risk of spreading diseases. These
circumstances are not conducive to learning.

With regard to classroom and school supplies, the economic downturn has made it
extremely difficult for the government to outfit schools with the necessary equipment such
as computers and science supplies. In some instances, teachers have been asked to provide
school supplies for their students out of their own pockets. Most teachers are unable to do
so, which means that the children go without the necessary school supplies. Here too,
NGOs and other aid organizations help to fill the need, as there is simply insufficient money

\textsuperscript{47} “Thousands of Teachers abandon Zimbabwe,” \textit{The Telegraph},
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1569754/Thousands-of-teachers-abandon-
Zimbabwe.html \textit{(accessed October 30, 2011)}.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
in the government’s education budget.

V. Political Marginalization

A. Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, one political impact of poverty is discrimination against poor people based on income and class. Although it is a populous country, most of the political power is tightly held and wielded by a small number of powerful elites who systematically discriminate against the poor. The population groups affected by discrimination include poor urban slum dwellers, poor rural residents, religious minorities, and women. The discrimination affects these groups by denying them access to social services, to proper housing, to employment services, to basic information regarding their own rights, and to better paying jobs. This leads to poor people being exploited and remaining in poverty unless there are interventions.

With respect to exercising their citizenship rights, it is difficult for the marginalized and discriminated population groups to do so, due not only to a lack of information, but in some cases, the lack of proper identity documentation, particularly in rural areas. Although urban slum dwellers do vote, they often find that the campaign promises made by the candidates are not kept, making them feel exploited for their vote.49

B. Bolivia

The problem of discrimination in Bolivia affects the indigenous Indians, women, and the poor. The immediate effects of this include being shut off from social services, housing,

healthcare, adequate education, and access to credit or loans from retail banks. Until the election of President Morales, Bolivia was notorious for the consolidation of power exclusively in the hands of white or mestizo Bolivians. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) on Bolivia lists discrimination against indigenous Indians as one of the structural causes of their poverty. The discrimination is evident in the fact that even President Morales, who is an Aymara Indian, to date has only two indigenous Indians in his cabinet. Discrimination is also practiced against indigenous Indians in the labor market, particularly in regards to a debt bondage work arrangement that they are singled out for.

With regard to exercising citizenship and voting rights in Bolivia, although this is mandatory, not everyone has the required national identity card or birth certificate. The age of suffrage is 21 for single people and 18 for married people. Obstacles to voting include the fact that people must often cover great distances to get to the nearest voting station as no transportation is allowed on voting day. Although expanded indigenous rights were voted into law in 2009, this has not yet translated to a marked improvement in the quality of life of poor indigenous Bolivians or in a reduction of their poverty.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regard to political marginalization in the Dominican Republic, the poor minority black population are the main victims of this. This means that they have less access to jobs, public services and educational or training opportunities. This discrimination is

mainly aimed against dark-skinned and poor Dominicans, Haitians, and Haitian-Dominicans. Well-to-do blacks, who are deemed to be politically and socially acceptable by the lighter skinned Dominicans, are usually exempted from discrimination because of their wealth.

With regard to the political representation of poor Dominicans, the country is trying to promote the participation of women in political matters. Thanks in large part to an NGO called Participacion Ciudadana (PC), the last two elections in 2004 and 2008 were seen to be fair although these reports are often questionable given that the Senate in control of evaluating election outcomes is nominated by the incumbent President. Poor rural Dominicans are especially underrepresented politically due to lack of information, access and means.

Regarding the exercise of citizenship, this is harder for poor Dominicans and especially for Haitian-Dominicans. The latter population group often finds voting rights denied to them. Furthermore, “electoral fraud and voter manipulation are a hereditary burden of the Dominican Republic’s political system.” This makes it harder for the poor to have full access to all the benefits of citizenship, in spite of their constitutional rights. However, many of the constraints arise from their poverty and lack of education, knowledge, and means.

D. Haiti

With respect to discrimination in Haiti, it is directed at poor people who are mostly

employed in labor-intensive work, and low-paying jobs, such as small-scale farming, fruit selling, and domestic work. Some darker-skinned Haitians also face discrimination both from lighter-skinned Haitians and from Dominicans. Regarding discrimination in Haiti, the author, Randall Robinson, states, “In Haiti today, color remains as insuperable a barrier to social progress as ever.” Social strata in Haiti includes the classification of “Peasant” on the birth certificates of rural blacks, a mandate that former President Aristide tried to fight. Women also suffer disproportionately when it comes to discrimination, with a high incidence of rapes reported by young women, in particular.

With regard to political representation, this is very low for poor Haitians and for women. In 2005, women represented just 25% of government employees at the ministerial level. Poor rural Haitians are the least represented group politically, and the least likely to vote. Political power and influence is consolidated in the hands of the rich. When it comes to the exercise of citizenship and voting rights in Haiti, they are universal in spite of the entrenched racism. However, this means that poor Haitians are not represented politically and do not have the resources to pursue political careers themselves. More importantly, it means that unless they are granted political access, they will remain unable to help steer the debate on what is needed to alleviate their poverty, including, the issue of better policies and improving the country’s economic infrastructure. Without being able to exercise their

53. Ibid., 38.
citizenship fully, they are unable to effect a change in the political system that helps entrench them in poverty. So far, their hopes for good political leadership and expanded political representation have not been fulfilled.

E. Zimbabwe

With regard to discrimination in Zimbabwe, this affects the very poor, the former farmer managers who are now impoverished, and women. Gender discrimination is pervasive in Zimbabwe and culturally accepted. This impacts female-led households adversely, since as primary breadwinners the family relies on them. Therefore, if their employment opportunities are further diminished, their families suffer more. There is also reverse discrimination towards whites from some blacks. Poor people suffering from disabilities are regularly discriminated against with regard to access to goods, transportation and public services.

With respect to the issue of political representation in Zimbabwe, it has been a contentious one, particularly when it comes to the poor and to women. The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEP) is working in concert with the Southern African Development Corporation to encourage increased political participation by women and to challenge party leaders and the Ministry for Justice, Legal and Parliamentarian Affairs to “increase intra-party democracy processes and to challenge patriarchal value systems.” So far, progress has been slow. In spite of the power sharing agreement with Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, President Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union –Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party, firmly hold the reins of power.

When it comes to citizenship, the current political climate makes it very hard to vote as there has been manipulation of votes. It is very difficult for rural poor people to exercise their right to vote, due to distance from voting areas and lack of means. The power-sharing leadership arrangement currently in place, was intended to offer a balance to the single party monopoly of the ZANU-PF Party, the President’s party.

VI. Conclusion

Poor tropical countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, face endemic health challenges such as malaria, lymphatic filariasis, malnutrition, and cholera. These countries all require health reforms such as expanded access to preventive healthcare, and better health delivery systems especially for the hard to reach remote rural residents. The country with the most pressing health challenges is Zimbabwe, as its health infrastructure is currently so damaged and ineffectual. The next country requiring a desperate health system overhaul is Haiti. Maintaining good health and preventing serious illness is vital to fighting poverty, as it has been seen that poor vulnerable population groups suffer even adversely when struck by ill health.

With regard to domiciles, the country with the most challenging overall housing conditions is Bangladesh, even when allowing for the tent cities in Haiti. This is because while both have poorly constructed homes in makeshift settlements and urban slums, the Bangladesh’s high population density creates extreme overcrowding, making for very poor
living conditions. Poor people in both Bangladesh and Haiti are vulnerable to severe weather conditions and in Haiti’s case, natural hazards such as earthquakes. Zimbabwe’s urban poor in Harare are vulnerable when it comes to housing due to Operation Murambatsvina, which drove them out their informal urban shanty settlement. The issue of sanitation is problematic for the poor in all five thesis countries, with inadequate facilities imperiling health. As has been seen with outbreaks of cholera in Haiti and Zimbabwe, this is a serious public health issue.

The country with least overall housing problems is the Dominican Republic, although its rural and urban poor face poor living conditions in sub-standard housing as well. To compound this misery further, the poor have little access to running water and adequate sanitation facilities, both for sewage and waste matter in general. This presents a health risk and imperils their tenuous existence even more.

With regard to education, all societies are adversely impacted when so many of the youth and rural residents are undereducated; it has implications for overall progress, the future workforce skill set and training, public health, social insurance, and pension plans. It is unrealistic, naïve, and even harmful to believe that the stewardship of these five thesis countries, and their natural resources can remain the exclusive purview of the rich, the political elite, or the generous NGOs, and not to do anything about the current state of affairs.

The systematic political disenfranchisement of the poor is common to all five thesis countries and it requires good political leadership to change this state of affairs. Bolivia is the
country that has made the most strides in this respect, following the election of President Morales, but more needs to be done. The poor must be encouraged, despite their limited means, to engage as much politically as they can, and to vote. Otherwise they will remain poor as their economic and development interests will not be represented unless they get involved by attending local municipal meetings and by voting.

So far, there are some encouraging examples of international collaboration to alleviate adverse health effects in some countries. For instance, the Roll Back Malaria program, which is supported by a consortium of agencies like WHO, UNICEF, and the EU, was successfully launched in Zimbabwe in 2008. This program provides funding for insecticide-treated mosquito nets, thereby reducing the deaths of children from malaria under the age of five. With the help of the Carter Center, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are cooperating to eradicate malaria in their respective countries. GlaxoSmithKline and Merck are examples of two US-headquartered global companies that donate medications to eliminate filariasis in Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. Having examined the cruel effects of poverty, the next chapter, Chapter V, will argue that it is imperative to reduce poverty and to liberate the poor, especially as there are some solutions to the problem.
CHAPTER V

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPERATIVES FOR REDUCING POVERTY

This chapter’s purpose is to show that there are critical political, economic, and socio-cultural reasons for combating poverty in the countries examined in this thesis. The scope covers the five countries and a wide time frame. The organization of this chapter is in five parts. Part I, the Introduction, gives an overview of the main political, economic, and socio-cultural arguments for fighting poverty. Part II details political imperatives for poverty reduction while Part III deals with the economic imperatives. Part IV then argues the socio-cultural imperatives for combating poverty. Part V, the Conclusion, sums up the most critical political, economic, and socio-cultural imperatives for poverty eradication.

Part I. Introduction

In discussing imperatives for reducing poverty in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, this chapter will show that it is necessary to fight poverty for political stability, economic growth, and socio-cultural reasons. Regarding the political imperatives, these will cover good political leadership, the protection of human rights, and the safeguarding of national security. Under economic imperatives, the topics to be discussed will include inclusive economic growth, transportation infrastructure, and environmental conservation. The social-cultural imperatives will revolve around social inequality, human development, and structural violence, where structural violence refers to a “form of violence based on the systemic ways in which a given social structure or social
institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.”¹ The socio-cultural imperatives will also include moral reasons for reducing poverty.

**Part II. The Political Imperatives for Reducing Poverty**

**A. Bangladesh**

With regard to good political leadership, Bangladesh has suffered from a dearth of this, in part due to its tumultuous political history starting with the war that led to its inception as a new country in 1971. The turmoil continues to this day and detracts from comprehensively fighting poverty. It is critical that Bangladesh’s leaders practice effective, transparent and accountable governance. With a population of over 150 million, sound leadership is critical to enacting laws and policies that include poorer citizens and uphold their wellbeing. At present, the country has many aid organizations and NGOs at work, but it is only with honest leaders that money earmarked for development meets its target. Too few poor Bangladeshis are politically engaged, due to the obstacles previously discussed: lack of transport, means, and information. Sound leadership can counteract these deficits, thereby permitting the poor to become more engaged politically.

With respect to human rights, Bangladesh’s political structure and history do not yet fully facilitate these rights. The current leader, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has first-hand experience of human rights violations, following the assassination of her father, mother, three brothers and a sister in 1971 by disgruntled Bangladeshi army officers. During presidential elections in 2008, the military and security personnel were also responsible for

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human rights violations in the killing of 127 people. Further violations occurred when prisoners died while in custody, often as a result of torture. These extrajudicial killings disproportionately impact poorer Bangladeshis, as they are most likely to be held in custody, even without insufficient evidence, and rounded up from urban slum settlements during random raids.

When it comes to national security, Bangladesh’s geo-political location and its extreme poverty make it particularly vulnerable to infiltration by foreign armies, mercenaries and even terrorists. Given its porous borders, there is a real danger of unwelcome extremists crossing into the country and destabilizing it or taking advantage of any perceived instability within the country. Therefore, there is a pressing need to secure Bangladesh’s borders against any illegitimate forces from other nations and to ensure that splinter factions from Bangladesh do not migrate to cause political upheaval in other countries in the region. Any destabilization affects the poor more, as it is typically accompanied by a shortage of goods and higher prices. Because Bangladesh is a throughway for illegal narcotics bound for Southeast Asia, as well as a source country for human-trafficking for indentured labor in the Middle East, forced prostitution in Western countries, and child labor, this calls for tighter national security to prevent poor people being exploited in these ways.


3. Ibid.
B. Bolivia

When it comes to good political leadership, Bolivia has not fared well overall, enduring military dictatorships and rough transitions between presidents. Thus, there is an opportunity and an obligation for the current president, Evo Morales, to be a unifying and an effective leader. He needs to resolve the many tensions in Bolivia at present: between the impoverished indigenous majority and the whites and mestizos; between the western part of the country and the Media Luna regions in the east; between the different political parties; and between the large-scale commercial farmers and the organized labor unions.

With regard to human rights in Bolivia, the situation is a difficult one for the poor as they are often ensnared in long-term indentured servitude on farms, or, in the case of women and girls, as household servants for wealthy Argentinians. It is vitally important that Bolivia’s leadership protect the poor from indentured servitude, both in Bolivia and abroad. The country’s leaders must also prevent the infiltration of citizens from bordering countries for clandestine drug operations which violate human rights. At present some of the human rights violations involve wealthy landowners and poor indigenous Indians. This is a cause for concern and greater government and law enforcement intervention is needed to protect the human rights of poor Indians.

Closely tied to the issue of national security is trafficking in persons and drugs. Traffickers have set up shop in Bolivia, taking advantage of the widespread poverty and luring people to Europe with the promise of well-paying work and a better future.4

Regarding drugs, as the current president of the Coca Growers’ Association, as well as the leader of the nation, President Evo Morales has not dissuaded coca farmers from continuing to grow coca, defending this by claiming that the coca grown is for ceremonial purposes. However, the coca grown in the lower regions is of inferior quality and is used in the manufacture of cocaine. The better quality coca leaf is grown in the higher altitude locations of the Altiplano, and this is used for ceremonial purposes.5 There is controversy surrounding the growing of coca because of the thriving drug trade in cocaine. Bolivia borders five countries, and this makes it an ideal source for drugs in spite of its under-developed transportation infrastructure. It is therefore imperative, that its borders are secured and protections implemented to prevent exploitation and smuggling of poor Bolivians.

As for Bolivia’s national security, this is increasingly linked to President Morales’ alliance with President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, and with President M Ahmadinejad, of Iran. This raises concerns about left-leaning politics, but also of a weak foreign policy, which could have a negative impact on Bolivia’s relations with Western governments, on whom it still depends for trade and aid.

C. The Dominican Republic

When it comes to the need for good political leadership, the country has not tackled the issue of corruption and lack of government transparency under President Leonel Fernandez. And while the nation enjoyed economic growth in the early part of this decade, it

failed to distribute the gains equitably throughout Dominican society, causing great pockets of rural and urban poverty. The country will require good leadership to address its inequities and to place education at the forefront of any economic recovery programs.

As for human rights, the Dominican Republic’s record on this is weak, particularly regarding the rights of poor and abused women and poor female and male sex industry workers. These people are ill-treated and often arrested without due process and without access to judicial representation. Poor Haitians also face this treatment and abuse by being locked up and sometimes held on trumped-up immigration charges. In truth, many Haitians cross the border into the Dominican Republic illegally, but this is not true for all, but police and law enforcement treat all Haitians harshly, irrespective of whether or not they have proper documentation. This is primarily aimed at poor Haitians, as they are most likely to immigrate to the Dominican Republic.

With respect to national security, the Dominican Republic has been infiltrated by international gangs and drug smugglers, and it is a transit point for drugs being sent to the United States and Canada. The lack of law enforcement exacerbates poverty, particularly when the young are untrained and unprepared for jobs in the formal economy. This makes it imperative for authorities to secure the borders and prevent conditions that facilitate illegal activities, such as drug and human trafficking. Because any civil disturbance or political destabilization would make the Dominican Republic a less attractive tourist destination and
potentially harm its economy and lower its GDP, the government must act swiftly to address
the economic concerns of the nation’s poor in order to maintain political stability. It is also
important that the authorities secure the borders and focus on a collaborative border alliance
with Haiti in the interests of securing both countries’ borders and building a better
relationship with Haiti.

D. Haiti

Good political leadership is sorely needed to turn Haiti’s poverty around, especially
since poverty affects 80% of the population. To effect such a change will require leaders
who are honest and have integrity. Good leaders are needed at every level of political
leadership, from President Martelly to the most junior cabinet member. In the absence of
good leadership, millions of aid dollars and donations will not reach their intended targets,
and there will widespread corruption and fraud, which has been the case in Haiti. President
Martelly must work to stamp out corruption and engage the poor so that they can become
more politically engaged and have a hand in determining their own futures. He must be
aware of the myriad international aid agencies, NGOs and foreign governments that are
helping in Haiti and appoint the right people to better coordinate development and poverty
alleviation efforts by all these groups.

As for human rights violations, these affect primarily poor women, who suffer
domestic abuse, and poor people who coerced into servitude and into the sex trade. Their
extreme poverty
makes these groups particularly vulnerable to exploitation, and is one reason that closer attention must be paid to curbing such abuses. The overcrowding in tent cities has led to an increase in violence which affects mostly young women: there have been several reports of gang rapes against women. Even the security forces must be called to order and disciplined as they have been accused of using excessive force on civilians during the distribution of aid relief. The rule of law must be enforced and the violators must be prosecuted.

Another reason for better national security initiatives in Haiti, concerns the potential adoption of Haitian orphans by foreigners. Shortly after the earthquake in 2010, some Americans were accused of trying to smuggle Haitian children out of the country for adoption by Western parents. This is problematic on several fronts: first, it indicates that border and immigration controls are lax; secondly, these actions, though perhaps well-intentioned, may constitute kidnapping and a violation of the rights of the children involved and of the parents who may not have known where their children were in the chaos following the earthquake; lastly, it points to a lack of law enforcement and security infrastructure, as it was much too easy for this to occur, and this clearly demonstrates the need for tighter national security measures. It is true that Haiti’s political instability coupled with high rates of poverty and extreme income inequality, make it a tinderbox on the brink of social disturbance and civil disorder, and the country’s situation is reminiscent of the following quote by W.B. Yeats in the book *Things Fall Apart*, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre the falcon cannot bear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

However, Haiti cannot afford anarchy continuing to be “loosed” upon the country, and the lack of functioning government agencies renders it vulnerable to more corruption and destabilization. This argues for firm democratic leadership to finally take root in Haiti. Another reason to shore up its borders, is that Haiti has also become a thoroughfare for drug and human smuggling. Lastly, there is the issue of Haiti’s porous border with the Dominican Republic, which presents a risk of unwelcome forces entering Haiti. The country is highly vulnerable to any nefarious forces and unfriendly infiltrators who may enter under the guise of aid. Although the UN’s security peace keepers, (MINUSTAH), are stationed in Haiti, the Haitian military must be outfitted and ready for the task of protecting Haiti’s land, air and sea points of entry, as any further destabilization could cost the country dearly in the fulfillment of aid pledges. Taken in aggregate, all these arguments lead to the conclusion that national security is a critical imperative that must be addressed.

**E. Zimbabwe**

With respect to good political leadership in Zimbabwe, this is critical and is the single most important factor in reducing poverty and reversing the economic decline that the country has suffered over the past decade. To achieve this, however, it will most likely necessitate a change in leadership and the ceding of power by the Zimbabwe African National Unity – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party. It is conceivable that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party could effect a positive
leadership change. Zimbabwe’s dire economic situation can only be effectively reversed and its poverty reduced by leaders with integrity who have the best interests of the nation in mind. These leaders need to restore the nation’s public institutions, which are now in tatters.

Regarding human rights violations, there is pervasive gender inequality against females. This is manifested by denying women land ownership and inheritance rights, particularly upon the death of a husband. Furthermore, it is very difficult for women to file rape charges against men and to have these charges recognized and pursued by the court system. Zimbabwean law does not recognize the rape of a woman by her husband. Political violence perpetrated towards adversaries and foes of the ZANU PF party also constitute human rights violations, particularly since these often include incidences of unjustifiable incarceration, prisoner abuse and torture. Here too, it is often poor people without means or recourse to legal assistance who are most severely impacted. Consequently, respect for human rights must be part of the government’s comprehensive economic reform for poverty reduction.

As concerns national security, Zimbabwe is threatened by near civil war due to a power struggle between President Mugabe’s Zanu PF Party and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Party. This opens the door for insurgent forces to form in disgruntled parts of the country. It is, therefore, imperative that the leaders patch up their differences as Zimbabwe cannot afford a civil war or any conflict stoked by insurgents since this would impoverish the country further and stagnate poverty alleviation. In this part of Africa, a little stress goes a long way due to the scarcity of
resources. While there is not yet any sign of overt conflict with Mozambique, Zambia, or Botswana, there are tensions as the levels of refugees and IDPs rise. It is important to ensure that the host countries receive enough aid to provide for the refugees. A political threat is more likely to arise from within party ranks as people reach the end of their patience with the leaders and government. Currently, desperate Zimbabweans are falling prey to human smugglers promising them better futures in Europe or America, and North Africa.

**Part III. The Economic Imperatives for Reducing Poverty**

**A. Bangladesh**

In the case of Bangladesh, inclusive economic growth is vital since foreign aid is insufficient to effect wholesale change and can become a long-term crutch rather than a sustained mechanism for improved economic development and self-sufficiency. Bangladesh has one of the highest concentrations of NGOs and its economic growth has averaged 5% to 6% a year since 1996. This growth rate is still not enough to reduce poverty, and does not extend to all sectors of the economy. Indeed, the paradox of Bangladesh’s growth rate and its chronic poverty suggests that the proceeds from said growth have been unevenly distributed and so this stresses the imperative for inclusive economic growth that extends to the poorest sectors of the population. Remittances from expats are a vital part of people’s income but are not a long-term solution for reducing poverty. Growth must inclusive so that

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poor Bangladeshis may benefit from it and thereby reduce their poverty. Many Bangladeshis depend on remittances from expatriates in order to survive, as they sent almost $9.7 billion or 25% of GDP, in 2009.\(^9\) This also underscores the imperative for inclusive economic growth in Bangladesh as any change in the circumstances of these expatriates could lead to lower remittances and make matters very dire for the poor who rely on this money to live. Many Bangladeshis depend on these remittances for daily survival. If most Bangladeshis are poor in spite of a reasonable rate of economic growth, then even more people will fall into poverty and suffer if the economy falters, increasing the current 36.6% poverty rate.

Another economic imperative is maintaining and improving infrastructure, which, once damaged, is especially hard to rebuild in very poor economies. This infrastructure must include safer housing, better roads and bridges, and improved transportation networks. Preserving infrastructure is important for a number of reasons including the fact that it is a critical component of economic activity. For example, the roads and railways are used to transport people and goods to the market. At present only 10% of Bangladesh’s roads are paved.\(^10\) Other vital transportation infrastructure include waterways, railways, and seaports.

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Bangladesh is also looking to bolster its aviation industry and acknowledges that its electricity grids need to be modernized to reduce the frequent occurrence of blackouts, which tend to be a deterrent to foreign investors. Transportation infrastructure development is vital for economic activity and growth and can help lift poor people out of poverty in various ways, such as providing them with better access to new markets and to alternative employment opportunities.

The economic imperative for reducing poverty is to protect the environment and to prevent environmental degradation. Since Bangladesh has many low-lying coastal areas and is prone to flooding in the wake of violent storms, this means that there is coastal erosion, which further imperils lives by removing protective coastal barriers. However, it is not only lives and habitats that are negatively impacted, but also fishing operations. The resulting loss of livelihood reduces economic growth further. Hence, it is imperative that there be sufficient economic growth to address and shore up environmental concerns and to better protect the populace, wildlife, and coastal deltas. Relying on foreign aid to resolve environmental problems is not enough. There is, however, an argument to be made for reimbursing environmentally at-risk countries with low carbon footprints, those whose risk factors are incrementally increased by other countries’ larger carbon foot prints. In the case of Bangladesh, it is affected by higher sea levels as a result of global warming from increased fossil fuel emissions and pays a disproportionately high price caused by other nations’ high fossil fuel emissions. For example, it suffers although the United States is home to 4.5% of
the world’s population and produces 25% of total greenhouse gas emissions.\textsuperscript{11}

Bangladesh is particularly susceptible to the effects of global warming, as it is surrounded by water and has low-lying coastal flood plains. Therefore, another critical imperative for inclusive economic growth is to provide self-sufficiency for poor subsistence farmers and fishermen so that they are better able to overcome deprivations from violent weather resulting from climate change. A further aspect of this is finding ways for sustainable development so that as the economy grows and the country becomes more industrialized, the ensuing carbon footprint does not exponentially harm the environment.

**B. Bolivia**

Bolivia needs inclusive economic growth as there has been little economic innovation in Bolivia in the last three decades in spite of the nationalization of the gas and mining industries. This means that the poorest sectors of the population resort to either working in dangerous tin or silver mines or surviving as subsistence farmers, or peddlers of indigenous handicrafts. Sadly, even children work in the mines to support their families instead of getting a basic education in school. At the Americas Conference in Coral Cables in September 2010, the Argentine Senate leader Gerardo Morales pointed out that although some South American countries had shown eight consecutive years of GDP growth, they still had poverty rates averaging 30%. Their average rate of growth was 6%. He stated that more needed to be done so that poorer South Americans could benefit from economic growth. In the case of Bolivia in 2010, its poverty rate was 30.3% while its GDP growth rate

\textsuperscript{11} Muhammad Yunus, *Creating a World without Poverty* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 206.
was 4%. The rate was revised upwards by the IMF from 3.5%, underscoring the point that the benefits of economic growth have not reached Bolivia’s poor.\textsuperscript{12} Inclusive economic growth is critical because it will mitigate poverty at the lowest level. Another argument that makes inclusive economic growth an imperative in Bolivia is that it is unacceptable to post consistently good economic growth numbers and yet have two-thirds of its population living in poverty. The lack of diversified economic activity entrenches poverty further and places a heavy burden on poor rural Bolivians. Although Bolivia is the third largest grower of coca, which is routinely used in ceremonial rituals and for medicinal purposes, coca fields have burgeoned into a growing cocaine business in the absence of alternative industries which could provide legitimate employment and income. The cocaine business can only be curtailed if more poor people currently engaged in this trade are presented with alternative means of income. Hence, inclusive economic growth that includes poor and disenfranchised Bolivians and dissuades them from producing drugs is the only way to combat the drug trade. Cocaine and the drug trade have a worldwide reach and fighting drugs by offering alternate sources of income is a strong argument for poverty abatement. The benefits of this would extend beyond Bolivia’s borders, helping to put a dent, no matter how small, in the international drug trade.

Bolivia’s transportation infrastructure is a vital commercial lifeline in a country with such vast distances and mixed terrain. From a poverty abatement perspective, improved

infrastructure can contribute to reducing poverty by permitting poor farmers and artisans alike to reach newer markets. At present, about 1,242 miles out of 26,720 miles, which equals about 7%, of the country’s highways are paved, and its railway network, which is nationalized, needs to be modernized.13 As of 2010, President Morales has announced plans to nationalize the country’s railway system, through a new company, Empresa Boliviana de Ferrocarriles, which will link the western and eastern parts of Bolivia formerly known as the inter-oceanic corridor, as well as connect the country to Brazil and Chile. An earlier plan to do so in the mid-nineties was abandoned due to cost. The country’s major airline is Boliviana de Aviacion (BoA), which took over from the now defunct Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) in 2006. The airline has been fondly dubbed the “Peoples’ Airline” because of its low cost flights and its aim to democratize air travel so that poorer citizens can afford it. The majority of people still use inter-city buses, known as “Flotas,” to travel from town to town.

The importance of having good infrastructure to help the process of poverty alleviation cannot be overstated, as it allows access by more people, including poor people. This is significant, given that spatial remoteness is a big factor in Bolivia’s poverty. Enhancing Bolivia’s infrastructure is vital to its economic growth, and by extension, to the wellbeing of its poor, as they can benefit from increased economic activity and revenue. Improved infrastructure would also decrease the time it takes to transport goods from the western highlands to the eastern region or even to the Paraguayan or Brazilian

border towns. As the benefits of getting goods to market faster become evident, new markets can be sourced. This, in turn, can help to increase demand for more goods and spur further economic growth. At the same time, it is important to note that President Morales’ transportation nationalization plans have been met with some criticism, and he has been accused by private carriers of unfair competition because of the government subsidies that underwrite the airline and rail networks.

Regarding environmental degradation, this must be curbed and conservation efforts must be stepped up as is evidenced by the serious mudslides that frequently occur and cause homelessness to residents on the outskirts of La Paz.\textsuperscript{14} Since the terrain is prone to mudslides during torrential rain due to excessive deforestation, conservation efforts must focus on planting trees to reverse the deforestation trend. The mudslides point to a housing problem, and following angry demands made by members of the \textit{Ponchos Rojos} (Red Ponchos) militant Aymara group, there is currently a $90 million project underway to build Social and Solidarity Housing, known as the PVSS program, in El Alto to address the problem.\textsuperscript{15} By providing better housing in safer areas, there will be less displacement, disruption, and improved environmental health because of a reduction in the solid fuels used


for cooking. Due to climate change, Bolivia is threatened by a lack of fresh water because of its melting glaciers. Water and indoor air pollution impact particularly heavily on the poor. The imperative is to foster conservation through education and to continue to tackle the issue of affordable housing for the poor, as there is a large deficit. The deforestation that has occurred in the wake of land reform is also of grave concern since the well-being of Bolivia’s poor is closely tied to the environment, and their livelihoods depend on it. All these issues taken in aggregate reinforce the fact that poverty must be reduced in order to protect that poverty must be reduced in order to protect that poverty must be reduced in order to protect enable long-term sustainable development, and help the poor. Global climate change affects Bolivia, and tools such as emissions control, use of fuel-efficient vehicles, and less reliance on fossil fuels, should be deployed to combat climate change and reduce its impact.

C. The Dominican Republic

Economic growth in the Dominican Republic has averaged about 5% per year from 2007 to 2010, with a low of 2.5% in 2009. Although this is high for Caribbean economies,


whose growth rates usually average 3%, and the country has successfully transitioned from agriculture to manufacturing, services, and to tourism. However, unequal distribution of income has left many poor pockets in Dominican society and 42% of Dominicans live below the poverty line, with half of them in extreme poverty. The World Bank calls this situation poverty-constrained growth. In other words, the Dominican Republic must find a way to combat poverty or its economy will stall, causing deeper poverty. Hence, the need for inclusive economic growth that will benefit the poor and reduce their poverty. This is vital because the country cannot continue on this path of above average economic gains without more of its citizens sharing in it. There have to be opportunities for poorer Dominicans to become involved in the mainstream economy and to increase their earnings.

Regarding transportation infrastructure, the Dominican Republic has a relatively well developed system compared to the other countries studied in this thesis, due almost entirely to its established tourism industry. Nonetheless, according to the World Bank, government projects in infrastructure have tended to be under-funded. But this trend is being counter-balanced by infrastructure investments that will bolster tourism and make the Dominican Republic a more attractive tourist destination. Most of the investment funds are provided by U.S. and European investors for improvements to the highway system, facilitating access to


Punta Cana, a prime resort area, and for rail upgrades. What is critical is that there are linkages to the general economy, which, so far, has not happened with Dominican tourism, where tourists tend to remain within the resorts areas.

With respect to environmental conservation needs, the Dominican Republic is not immune to the effects of natural hazards and disasters and global warming, as it lies in the hurricane belt of the Caribbean. The growing tourism industry also spells trouble for the environment as additional rooms are built on any available plot of land irrespective of water availability. Although the Dominican Republic does not suffer the extensive deforestation of Haiti, it is nevertheless affected by it because desperate Haitians have resorted to felling trees in the Dominican Republic for their cooking charcoal. This presents a problem: as does slash-and-burn farming, which is still practiced, though to a lesser degree. Another environmental hazard is overfishing, which depletes fish stocks faster than they can be replenished, with implications for the livelihoods of fishermen, and by extension the larger economy. Managing the environment and steering it towards sustainability is paramount for the long-term future of the Dominican Republic and an intrinsic component in poverty reduction plans. Funding provided by the USAID and the United Nations Development Program sponsor outreach programs that promote environmental conservation and sustainability.

**D. Haiti**

Haiti desperately needs inclusive economic growth, as 80% of its population lives below the poverty line. This poverty rate and the ensuing suffering in Haiti are deplorably
high and point to its lack of a proper formal economy. From 2005 to 2009, its annual GDP growth rate averaged only 2.3%, and by 2010 it was down to -5.1%.21 Furthermore, its previously discussed 40.6% unemployment rate for 2010 means that almost half the population has been unemployed, which increases economic distress. This indicates that a formal economy will need to be built from the ground up. So far, remittances from expatriate Haitians total about $1.2 billion a year, almost 20% of GDP, and play a vital role in keeping the country afloat.22 However, with so much of Haiti’s population suffering from poverty and with many still living in tent cities in the capital, inclusive economic growth is a paramount necessity for helping to ease the suffering of the poor. While economic growth measures the annual rate of increase in a nation’s gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP), it does not address the distribution of income and in extremely poor and unequal countries, an uneven distribution of income creates even more poverty. Hence, any economic efforts must include redistributive and progressive tax policies that will permit the poor to carry a proportionately lower tax.

Haiti’s transportation infrastructure requires modernization. So far, the present infrastructure hinders economic growth because it lacks the necessary capacity for business and commercial growth or even for relief efforts. For example, a logistical bottleneck resulted when the first relief supplies arrived following the January 2010 earthquake, making


22. Ibid.
it extremely difficult to get items to a distribution center. Mismanagement may have played a role in the delay of the infrastructure improvements promised through the loan. Roads, highways, sea ports and airports are vital economic links in their own right, but if their absence or dilapidated state prevents swift humanitarian assistance when needed, as in the case of Haiti, then rehabilitating this infrastructure becomes an order of the highest magnitude, since it is also essential for poverty mitigation. In fact, it was hard to get the supplies into Haiti to begin with, as there was runway and sea port congestion, which meant that planes had to circle and ships had to wait at sea until there was space for them at the port. These conditions existed despite a $50 million loan from the International Development Bank (IDB) for improvements and repairs to the highways, seaports, airports, and the roads in Port-au-Prince.23

As for Haiti’s environmental conservation, a BBC news report identified Haiti as one of the countries most likely to be affected by coral reef degradation, based on its low ability to adapt and the high dependence on the reef for livelihood by a large section of its population.24 Haiti’s coral reef is part of the world’s ecosystem and, therefore, important to the overall global balance of the environment. These reefs should not be allowed to deteriorate any further as this causes fish stocks to deplete. This adversely affects poor

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fishermen, impoverishing them further. Additionally, Haiti is almost entirely deforested and this creates crippling soil erosion during the many hurricanes that it experiences. For example, in 2004 Hurricane Jean devastated the country, lashing it with driving rain and causing mudslides in the Artibonite region and in the coastal city of Gonaives. Three thousand Haitians died in that hurricane, most of them poor. Poor subsistence farmers also face livelihood threats because the vast deforestation has reduced available arable land. Furthermore, coastal waters are often polluted by storm runoff and sewage, increasing environmental deterioration. Hence, environmental conservation is vital to prevent degradation and to preserve the few livelihood opportunities that do exist.

E. Zimbabwe

Because 68% of Zimbabweans live below the poverty line, inclusive economic growth is very important for change. The people need to contribute to the economy, not to be shut out of mainstream economic activities. Since Zimbabwe’s unemployment rate is extremely high at 95%, it is crucial that jobs be created, to lift the people out of poverty. It is shocking and unacceptable that as many as 11.12 million people out of 11.7 million are out of work and unable to contribute adequately to their own households or feed their families, let alone to the country’s GDP. It is critical to create inclusive economic growth opportunities to generate the mass mobilization of millions of people out of poverty. The

drop in commercial farming revenue over the last decade has left its mark on the economy and is reflected in the GDP figures of the last decade. One effort to help the poor is an indigenization and economic empowerment law, passed in 2010 that requires foreign-owned businesses to sell 51\% of their companies to local black Zimbabweans.\textsuperscript{21} However, this measure is being met with stiff resistance by the CEOs and management teams of foreign-owned companies. But to stave off further economic decline and even higher unemployment, such a law is needed to help generate more inclusive economic growth.

As to the transportation infrastructure, the overall condition of this in Zimbabwe is in need of repair and maintenance upgrades. For example, according to the \textit{CIA World Factbook}, Zimbabwe has 216 airports, of which only 19 have paved runways.\textsuperscript{26} Since transportation is vital to economic activity, it is essential to maintain these networks and prevent any further deterioration, not only because it could lead to loss of revenue through reduced wildlife tourism and curtailed economic activity, but also because it would cost so much more to repair if conditions are allowed to worsen amidst an economic crisis.

Environmental degradation in Zimbabwe is a growing problem and is primarily caused by veld burning, mineral panning, sand extraction and the clearing land for cultivation. The adverse effects of these activities are mercury pollution in the water, the destruction of wetlands and mountain areas, and the loss of land for agriculture and for urban and recreational purposes.

Zimbabwe is home to one of the most remarkable rock formations in the world, the great dyke in southern Zimbabwe's craton, one of earth’s oldest continental regions. There is also the problem of environmental conservation as poaching in wildlife parks undermines conservation efforts, reduces tourism, and contributes to environmental distress. There is a new indigenization law, but it is being met with resistance by some foreign-owned wildlife conservation organizations that categorically refuse to give up 51% of their company to Zimbabweans, as required by that law. As a result, compromise is needed as any ensuing conflict could imperil wildlife conservation efforts with potentially disastrous consequences, not only for Zimbabwe but also for the world, as wildlife such as black rhinoceroses, whose populations have already been significantly reduced by poaching, become further endangered. A decimation of this species is a loss for the world and is often irreversible. This problem should not be treated lightly and amplifies the urgent need for economic growth to help maintain these natural treasures for future generations to enjoy.

**Part IV. The Socio-Cultural Imperatives for Reducing Poverty**

**A. Bangladesh**

With respect to social inequality and its effects, “Worldwide discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, language and religion persists, compounding the isolation of whole communities of poor people.”27 A common complaint regarding social inequality in Bangladesh is that it is easier for criminals to be reintegrated into society after they have served their sentence, than it is for poor people to be fully accepted in society.

The Human Development Index (HDI) looks at three markers to measure overall wellbeing: life expectancy; educational attainment, as captured by the literacy rate; and a decent standard of living as measured by purchasing power parity (PPP). Poor people in Bangladesh value education as a means for their children to have a better future and avoid the poverty trap. The literacy rate, however, is 64.2%, while life expectancy is 60.55%, and PPP is $1500. Bangladesh’s HDI ranks 129 out of 169 countries, and its HDI is below the average for South Asian countries and for the world. Therefore, poverty has become a life sentence from which there is no parole or redemption, unless something is done to help improve the situation by increasing literacy rates and life expectancy. Hence, the need to build economic bridges to these excluded communities.

Poor Bangladeshi slum dwellers suffer from structural violence, live on the fringes of society, and are often shunned by politicians until it is time to vote. They are even looked down upon by doctors because of their low social status and poor clothing. Bangladesh is 89.5% Muslim, and consequently the minority 9.6% Hindu population is systematically discriminated against when it comes to access to law enforcement protection. Darker-skinned Bengalis are regularly discriminated against, as are Muslim Biharis whose origins lie in India. They have no means of fighting back when abused, insulted or mistreated by the


Muslim majority. For poor Bangladeshis the violations and deprivations extend to everyday matters such as having access to clean water and adequate nutrition or the right to demand accountability from the slum dwelling overseer without fear of abuse or retribution. Poor slum dwellers in Dhaka, for example, are vulnerable when it comes to having their civil rights violated as they are easy targets for police for minor infractions and cannot afford to pay the necessary bribes to gain their freedom. They are also routinely rounded up from their slums whenever there is a political event in the area as a precautionary measure to minimize any violence, disturbances or protests. Such harassment also violates their social and civil rights. The institutionally condoned discriminatory treatment of minority communities in Bangladesh, relegates them to an existence of structural violence. Hyper surveillance is one manifestation of structural violence in a society and occurs when one group of people is regularly singled out over others. In Bangladesh this frequently happens to Bihari Muslims and residents of the Chittagong Hills. Slum dwellers in Dhaka also complain of police harassment and of abuse by the Maastan, the slum overseer, who is supposed to help slum dwellers, but who often bullies them instead.30

B. Bolivia

Social inequality affects the indigenous Indians of Bolivia more than any of the other population groups in that country, even though they are the largest group. The Aymara and Quechua Indians with their darker skin hues have suffered an overwhelming burden of the

poverty that exists in the country. In 1952, the provision of universal suffrage finally eliminated literacy and property requirements and permitted women and Indians to vote. But many subsistence farmers from the Indian groups are denied access to services because of their ethnicity, and when services are provided, it is often in a language that they do not understand, thereby emphasizing their social exclusion. When they are attacked and forced to flee from the redistributed land that was given to them, they do not receive the same protections from the authorities as the wealthy landowners, who often instigate and bankroll these attacks. Here, social inequality means being denied equal access to law enforcement assistance and it translates to social injustice. This condoned lack of access to law enforcement protection is a form of institutionalized social exclusion and should be unacceptable in any society where equal rights for all citizens is the law, and in any country that is a party to the International Convention on Human Rights.

Interestingly Bolivia’s HDI trends above the world average for 2010, but below the regional average, ranking 95 out of 169 countries. The HDI gives a snapshot of general wellbeing that is a good tool for measuring and comparing inter-regional and global standings. Many of the deficits in Bolivia’s HDI, may be primarily due to the educational differences between the ethnic groups. As previously seen, poor Bolivians lag far behind in education, and this also impacts negatively on the overall HDI. In order for Bolivia to improve its HDI ranking, it will need to focus on improving not only the literacy rate of its poor citizens, but also on providing them greater access to better quality healthcare.

When it comes to structural violence for Bolivia’s poor, this manifests itself through
a lack of access to mainstream public and social services. Structural violence is also embedded in racism and social strata, and both of these plague poor Bolivians on a daily basis. It is imperative to eradicate such politically condoned mistreatment of the poor. Poverty reduction efforts cannot be fully effective unless the environment within which they are implemented fully accepts and engages the poor that are meant to benefit from it, rather than treat them with disdain and disrespect.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regards to social inequality in the Dominican Republic, the economic gains of the 1990s were not widely shared and exposed a social chasm in the country’s structure, whereby a large section of the society, 30%, ended up below the poverty line and formed an underclass. The problem of social inequality is compounded by pressure from poor Haitian immigrants, who affect this population of Dominicans the most as they are more likely to compete for the same jobs as the Dominicans. Social inequality also affects rural residents, particularly children, as they lag behind the rest of the country in educational attainment. The white descendants of Spanish colonialists are the 139 richest and own most of the land; the poorest are the people of African descent; and the mixed race citizens are the backbone of the business community. Here, social inequality affects those with darker skin hues.

With respect to human development, the Dominican Republic’s HDI ranks 88 out of 169 and trends below the regional average, which is higher than the world average. This indicates that over the last decade the region has outpaced other regions in the world when it comes to the combination of life expectancy, education and income. However, it is possible
that the HDI is being skewed by well-to-do, healthy Dominicans, whose positive gains are pulling up the HDI rate and obscuring the lower health and education rankings of poor Dominicans.

Structural violence is faced daily by construction laborers, landscapers, and farm workers of Haitian descent. There is no recourse to this entrenched attitude of prejudice and racism that is enacted towards these populations groups in the Dominican Republic. Structural violence is a combination of poverty and discriminatory experiences that result from being extremely poor. In addition to causing misery and feelings of alienation, it is an affront to human dignity.

**D. Haiti**

The 2010 earthquake revealed deep class and economic fissures in Haitian society, and showed the social inequality faced by the majority of the population. The country is 95% black and only 5% white and mulatto, yet the vast majority of wealth is held by whites. Social inequality in Haiti affects the Creole-speaking blacks, and patients affected by HIV/AIDS, who are effectively cut off from accessing public services and mainstream amenities that are readily available to middle class and rich Haitians. The French-speaking white minority owns almost half the country’s wealth, and there is downward oppression exerted on the majority black populace by the minority white and black elite populace, and social exclusion is practiced with impunity. This is social injustice and a contravention of human rights when so many are rigidly trapped in institutionalized poverty.

Haiti’s HDI ranks 145 out of 169 countries. It has trended flat in Haiti and even
declined slightly, although there has been a steady increase in HDI in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. It increased incrementally between 2005 and 2010, though it dipped in 2007, but rebounded in 2008 and 2009. HDI decreased in 2010, due to the catastrophic earthquake and its consequences. In order for Haiti to improve its HDI and reduce poverty, the government will need to comprehensively increase access to education and improve overall healthcare. Both of these should result in higher life expectancy and a higher quality of life. At present, Haiti has one of the world’s lowest rates of elderly or senior citizens living in the country.

Structural violence in Haiti is a daily fact of life, grinding down impoverished, malnourished, and long-suffering Haitians. Political power is concentrated in the hands of the elite and Haiti’s haphazard political structure has largely prevented any judicial reform which could benefit the poor. In such an environment structural violence further limits the possibilities of the poor to avail themselves of opportunities for economic or social mobility. The harassment experienced at the hands of the police and authorities by poor Haitians living in the border regions is also structural violence. Hence, there is a strong socio-cultural and moral imperative to prevent structural violence by implementing policies and laws that make it illegal to exercise structural violence.

E. Zimbabwe

Here social inequality affects mostly females, especially very poor widows. There is large-scale discrimination against females at every turn: in the workplace, marriage and subservience to one’s husband, and when it comes to inheritance. Others experiencing social
inequality are the former commercial farm supervisors and professional managers, who are now impoverished following the white flight from Zimbabwe. It has not been easy for them to find new jobs, and many are too poor to emigrate to Europe or other Western countries. This is a big hindrance to development and economic progress and must be addressed in the overall plan for poverty reduction.

Zimbabwe’s HDI ranks 169 out of 169 countries. While the Sub-Saharan Africa region as a whole has experienced an increase in HDI parallel to the overall world trend, Zimbabwe’s significant decline is largely due to a lack of income, which is one of the components of HDI. For 2010, Zimbabwe’s HDI was 0.140, for Sub-Saharan Africa it was 0.389, and for the world it was 0.624. In addition to the lack of income, the decline in life expectancy due to HIV/AIDS has impacted HDI negatively as well. In spite of the economic decline, its literacy rate has held up well so far but that is just one out of three components - life expectancy, income, and education – and it is in danger of declining due to the severe economic deprivations that Zimbabweans are experiencing. This makes it imperative that the power-sharing government finds a way to find the necessary funds to improve education and to provide better healthcare at affordable prices to poor Zimbabweans.

With regard to structural violence, women and poor people in Zimbabwe experience this to a high degree, especially poor widows, and unmarried women. Given the extent of poverty in Zimbabwe, many other people now experience structural violence in their daily lives. When structural violence is present, poor people are prevented from meeting their
basic needs and this reduces their quality of life. Racism and elitism are examples of structural violence that harm poor people in Zimbabwe.

**Part IV. Conclusion**

Slavery, apartheid and the Holocaust were all wrong and morally reprehensible. Permitting abject poverty to continue unabated is immoral, for it is a punishment without a crime. The following statement from the Chronic Poverty Report echoes this belief:

“Allowing people to live in conditions of extreme deprivation throughout much or all of their lives is morally wrong.”\(^{31}\) From a purely humanistic and compassionate point of view, it is disturbing that so many people suffer harsh lives their entire time on earth due to extreme poverty. By reducing poverty across the board, it is hoped that the suffering of the poor, the old, orphaned, widowed, and the disabled will be eased considerably. Compassion must play a role in poverty alleviation both in recognizing the hardship and suffering that poverty engenders, and in acting to mitigate it.

Following is a diagram of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. It is used here to illustrate that it is inherently immoral for a few people across the globe to reach the state of “Self-Actualization” or “Peak Experiences” while billions of people worldwide cannot attain the first rung of the hierarchy, the “Basic Needs” which are food, water, shelter, and warmth. The poor population groups in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe have not managed to achieve the second rung which includes protection, security, freedom from fear, and stability, and are known as “Safety Needs”. The third rung,

“Psychological Needs”, can really only be met once the first two have been met, so this effectively means that the poor people in the countries under examination in this thesis barely rank on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The inability to meet even the most basic need, i.e. survival, constitutes poverty.

Figure 5.1

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as it Relates to Poverty

There is an inherent immorality in failing to act decisively to combat chronic poverty and ease the misery of millions of people. If it is impossible to meet the most basic needs (having food and shelter), let alone the safety and psychological needs, then self-actualization or peak experiences are well beyond the scope of possibilities for poor people. This prevalent condition of abject poverty is therefore an indictment on society if no remedy is forthcoming to ameliorate it or to provide relief, since it permits people to be sentenced to poverty for life, a type of forced imprisonment. It is therefore a moral obligation and responsibility that the world combat poverty. This would have been the case with or without the adoption of the UN Millennium Development Goals. These goals shine the spotlight comprehensively on what needs to be done. The issue of chronic poverty links to the
philosophical and fundamental question of the value of life in general. Is it morally
acceptable that a person can be born into extreme poverty and live a harsh and bitter reality
for the rest of their life without hope of escape? Can it be considered fair or just, especially if
the means to remedy the situation exist?

The hardship that poverty brings with it is directly linked to the quality of life and
how it is perceived. Apart from making basic necessities unobtainable, poverty curtails future
opportunities and the outlook for a better tomorrow, a phenomenon that economist
Amartya Sen terms “Poverty as Capability Deprivation.”32 The term “Capability deprivation”
is a useful tool not only for comprehensive poverty assessment, but also for analyzing
human development and progress. So far in this thesis, poverty has been studied from an
income perspective. Amartya Sen analyzes poverty as a capability deprivation, and states that
“human capabilities focus on the ability of – the substantive freedom – of people to lead the
lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have.”33 This definition
lends itself well to the moral argument that Dr. Sen makes when he states that “The basic
failure that poverty implies is one of having minimally adequate capabilities, even though
poverty is also inter alia a matter of inadequacy of the person’s economic means to prevent


33. Ibid., 293.
the capability failure.” The poor people in the countries under examination do not possess the freedoms to live their lives as they might maximally value. Granted, the same may be true for people in middle-income countries who are not poor. However, their capability function is higher and their capability deprivation is much lower. Thus, in aggregate they enjoy greater freedoms of existence than do the poor in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe.

The poor in each of the countries in this thesis have varying capability functions and the sum total amounts to very little true freedoms as matters currently stand. It is incumbent upon the world community to help release the shackles of poverty and allow the millions of people caught in the poverty trap of capabilities deprivations a chance to be free from poverty, free from desperate want, and free to truly pursue their lives, rather than merely struggle each day to subsist. They will also, then, be free to contribute more fully to the societies in which they live.

The importance of inclusive economic growth or a viable alternative cannot be overstated in the five countries examined in this thesis. As it stands, the situation of the poor in each of the five countries under examination is precarious and any further shocks to the economic system only serve to exacerbate their vulnerabilities. Bangladesh, Bolivia, The Dominican Republic, and recently, Haiti, have experienced economic growth that did not benefit the poor, which is a reason for their continued poverty.

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With respect to social inequality, it is clear that the indigenous people, ethnic populations with darker skin tones, and religious minorities are discriminated against. This is the case in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. In Bangladesh, discrimination is directed by lighter skinned Muslims towards dark-skinned Muslims, and by Muslims towards the Hindu minority. The injustice of extreme inequality has effectively resulted in a two-tier class system in the most unequal poor countries, which are Haiti, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. In these countries the vestiges of colonial racial policies continue to exert a form of social inequality by preventing access to education, healthcare, social, and business services that are readily available to the rest of society. The policies and laws that entrench mostly dark-skinned people in poverty must be duly addressed in this discourse because they play a critical role in the perpetuation of discriminatory policies. With regard to unfair laws and policies, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. agreed with St. Thomas of Aquinas’ assessment that, “An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law.” Dr. King added that “any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.”

35 The esteemed Mother Theresa lamented that although England had a welfare state, she had gone into people’s home, “…and found people dying unloved.” She talked about a poverty of the spirit, of loneliness, and admonished, saying, “I think England needs more and more for people to know who the poor are.”

36 It is time for


this generation of the world’s citizens to put their compassion for the poor into action. There is a moral obligation to help the poor to feed themselves: this is far better and fairer than any charity, helping them to break the cycle of charity and dependency, and successfully overcome poverty. Mother Theresa’s point was one of love and compassion. There are humanitarian imperatives for helping the poor.

As regards transportation infrastructure, it is better in countries with a tourist industry, but again, the network does not extend to remote and rural areas that are far away from tourist destinations. A good transportation infrastructure is one of the hallmarks of a vibrant As regards transportation infrastructure, transportation infrastructure is lacking in all the countries in this thesis, and even Zimbabwe’s more advanced transportation network has fallen into disrepair.

With regard to environmental conservation, all five countries are vulnerable to environmental degradation which, in turn, threatens the livelihoods of the very poor who are most dependent on the environment. The propensity for ecological and environmental shocks in the form of droughts, hurricanes, flooding, mudslides and landslides exerts tremendous pressure on Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Haiti, in particular. The fragility of the environment and eco systems in all five countries must be taken seriously and steps taken to reverse deforestation in Haiti, Bolivia and Bangladesh. Haiti has just 2% tree coverage.37 The first African woman to win a Nobel prize, the recently deceased Dr. Wangari Maathai of

Kenya, was a fervent environmentalist who early on recognized the connection between environmental degradation, social injustice, and poverty. Her chief method of reversing deforestation and helping to combat global warming was to plant trees. This is what Haiti must do – plant trees. When it comes to climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCCC) predicts that:

The global temperature will rise by 1.4 to 5.8°C and global average sea level by 0.11 to 0.77 metres by 2100. Such rises would cause storms, floods and droughts, damage food production and cause massive loss of life, livelihoods and property damage. This in turn would produce millions of refugees, with potential for increased conflict.  

The author, Michael Freeman, goes on to say that the people who will be most affected by global warming include those living in low-lying islands or coastal regions and in arid or semi-arid agricultural land. These vulnerable locations describe Bangladesh, Bolivia, which is fast becoming more arid, as evidenced by the drying up of the Milluni reservoir, near La Paz 39 - The Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, which also suffers from severe drought – all five countries. Freeman also states that “the poor are most vulnerable to climate change and least able to adapt to it.” 41 This underscores the importance of fighting to reduce poverty to prevent even further suffering of the vulnerable poor in these countries. The incidence of environmental and natural disasters requires the world to take collective moral responsibility for reducing poverty. It is not a question of whether a disaster will strike, but a question of when. Knowing this makes it imperative for countries and agencies


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to be prepared, especially as the poorest countries like Haiti and Bangladesh suffer the harshest impacts and have the least resources to recover from such disasters. From a moral perspective, these countries also create less of the pollution that causes the global warming that triggers the violent storms. It should be noted that as natural disasters strike in Europe and North America, these countries’ fiscal budgets will be constrained by their own disaster recovery. Since these are principal providers of relief assistance to developing nations, this will reduce the amount of funding for relief in poorer nations. It is only prudent to reduce poverty and help Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe, to better withstand natural disasters and recover from them within a reasonable amount of time. The catastrophic earthquake that hit Japan and triggered a devastating tsunami wave on Friday, March 11, 2011, demonstrated that even a country as well prepared for earthquakes with the requisite infrastructure in place, is vulnerable to natural disasters. There was a remarkable outpouring of international help for Japan when 116 countries donated money and supplies, including the town of Kandahar, in Afghanistan, which sent $50,000 despite itself being ravished by war and in tremendous need of money. This demonstrates that there is compassion and goodwill and that even the poorest countries are willing to help and to contribute towards disaster relief and recovery. There will be more disasters, and scientific studies have shown that poorer countries will be directly affected by such disasters. It is better to shore up their infrastructure now before worse devastation follows: and not preparing in advance is shortsighted and ill-advised, because it is certain that disasters will occur in specific disaster-prone regions and countries such as Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and increasingly Bolivia.
There is a direct correlation between the human development index (HDI) and overall economic growth, provided that the income from the growth is relatively equitably distributed. HDI measures long life and good health, education or knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The stronger the economy, all things being equal, the higher the HDI. A high HDI can stimulate strong economic activity through more skilled and highly trained people contributing to the country’s GDP and increasing revenue for infrastructure improvements, improved healthcare, and educational facilities and gradually moving people out of poverty, provided that the growth is sustained and the income well-distributed. This is an achievable win-win situation.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established in 1948, and to wit, the world is several decades behind in adhering to article 25 of this declaration:

> Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and wellbeing for himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.  

The world cannot wait any longer to take decisive action to reverse abject and chronic poverty. Failure to do so would result in greater burdens and increased political instability in many countries, especially those where inequality is already pronounced. In all the countries in this thesis, the elderly, orphaned, widowed, disabled, and those suffering from chronic and crippling diseases are the most vulnerable and in need of care and support. Not only are they

deserving of compassion, it is the most prudent course of action. For this reason, as well as all the others mentioned in this chapter, there must be a stronger and more sustained push to reduce poverty.

Another moral imperative for combating poverty now is the unpredictability of the future. No one knows what disasters, economic crises, and other destabilizing events or wars lie ahead or when and where they will strike. Additionally, the current goodwill and commitment might not last and major advocates, supporters and proponents of poverty alleviation in public and private spheres may not always hold those interests dear or have the positions of positive influence that they currently have. It is incumbent upon the world to adopt an appropriate farming adage and “make hay while the sun shines.” The time to act is now. Perhaps, the best quote that sums up all the arguments presented in this chapter is the following, excerpted from a speech made by the freed slave, Frederick Douglas, on the 24th anniversary of emancipation in Washington, D.C., in 1886, “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe,” Having discussed why poverty alleviation is critical to collective global wellbeing, politically, economically, socio-culturally, and morally, Chapter VI will provide some recommendations that can help to reduce poverty.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The goal of this chapter is to present recommendations for reducing poverty that can be applied to Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. Some of these recommendations have already been successfully applied in other countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Costa Rica, lifting their populations out of poverty and into the middle class. The scope of this chapter covers the early years of the 21st century and four main recommendations. The chapter is organized into six parts. Part I, the Introduction, lists the different recommendations. Part II discusses the first, expanding political participation while Part III, examines increasing educational opportunities. Part IV deals with the importance of healthcare in reducing poverty and Part V with promoting microcredit and partnerships with multi-national corporations. Part VI, the Conclusion, evaluates the effectiveness of these recommendations with regard to the UN Millennium Development Goals for each of the countries under study.

Part I. Introduction

The sign above the main entrance of the World Bank in Washington, D.C., reads, “Our dream is a world free of poverty.” Reducing poverty is long overdue and it is time to build on the work of all the scholars, practitioners and anti-poverty advocates and examine some additional solutions. With regard to expanded political participation, the discussion will focus on the importance of democratic political participation by the poor, the application of

anti-corruption initiatives, and the need for transparency. The issue of increasing educational opportunities will highlight the need for better access to education in underserved poor communities and expanding adult education programs. Under healthcare, better healthcare delivery, especially the merits of improved maternal and infant health, and vaccine programs will be discussed. As regards microcredit and partnering with multinational corporations, the discussion will revolve around the benefits of microcredit and of working with companies to address infrastructure challenges in poor countries. The conclusion will discuss the most important recommendations for each country.

II. Expanded Political Participation

A. Bangladesh

Under expanded political participation in Bangladesh, three things must occur: the government must remove obstacles to political participation by underrepresented groups, such as women, the poor, and marginalized minorities; the culture of corruption must change; and there must be greater transparency, which will lead to accountability. Barriers to political participation such as difficulty in obtaining photo identification voting cards, having a fixed address, and the means to be able to take the time to vote, must be addressed. In the last election, after two years of emergency military rule, 70% of 80 million registered voters cast their ballots. This meant that in a country of over 150 million people, only a third, approximately 56 million, voted. History and politics around the world have clearly

demonstrated that more democratic and equal societies have better prospects for economic growth and prosperity than authoritarian or unequal ones. No government can take pride in its leadership record when the majority of its citizens live in poverty.

With respect to corruption, Bangladesh’s government has been accused of this, which has led to inefficiencies in public sector fund allocation and has helped to perpetuate harsh living conditions for the poor. For instance, the care of the wildlife sanctuaries falls to gamekeepers, but sometimes they exploit these natural resources to make money by selling endangered species to illegal traders. Such a practice of coopting public resources for one’s own benefit is not confined to gamekeepers; many public servants require a bribe to perform their work, and as poor people have no means to pay a bribe they are unable to access certain public services. To counteract bribery and corruption, public works employees should receive regular performance reviews and be eligible for cost-of-living pay increases.

Regarding the lack of transparency, according to Transparency International’s rankings, Bangladesh was considered to be the most corrupt country in the world from 2001 to 2004. Bangladesh should follow Thailand’s example after the 1997 Asian Crisis. Thailand’s governance and accounting standards improved, and its new constitution promised a stronger democratic government, including a provision embracing the citizens’


5. Ibid., 17.
“right to know” and promising a level of transparency beyond that of international financial institutions. Like Thailand, Bangladesh’s government must practice transparency. This requires a cultural change throughout all levels of the government that must start from the top and go down to the lowest-ranking public worker. Transparency must be a practice that is proudly instituted with repercussions for those who fail to abide by it. While over a third of Bangladeshis struggle to live on $1 a day, over $40 billion has been poured into the country in foreign aid since 1971, some of it is not accounted for.\(^6\) With transparency and accountability firmly in place, any misappropriation of public monies will not be condoned and can be punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both.

**B. Bolivia**

Expanded political participation is essential for reducing poverty in Bolivia, especially the rural poor and indigenous populations who must be encouraged to participate in local politics at the grassroots level. Although poor indigenous Bolivians are becoming more engaged and there are seats guaranteed to them in Congress, they still lack representation in municipal positions. To that end, the government must increase voter registration in rural areas, particularly in the western Altiplano. Government-sponsored grassroots initiatives at the local level are the best way to achieve expanded political participation for poor rural Bolivians. This is a better political engagement than the hijacking of the indigenous population as a type of extended

\(^6\) Ibid.
is guerilla movement centered within the MAS party.\footnote{7}

When it comes to anti-corruption initiatives in Bolivia, because Morales’ government giving citizens the right to vote “should empower them into disciplining governments into doing their best for the citizens.”\footnote{8} The indigenous Indians are the majority in Bolivia and their collective votes should carry weight and let their voices be heard. planning to re-nationalize some industries, openness about business dealings and their revenue streams must be paramount, and information pertaining to these transactions must be made public. The government should mandate that all public monies and aid to federal, state, and local agencies should be publicly accounted for in order to reduce corruption. The former Vice President, Victor Cardenas, also a respected Aymara leader, criticized President Morales’ new constitution, led the campaign to defeat it, and also opposed him on other issues.\footnote{9} Presently, President Morales seeks to hold former elected officials accountable for past acts of corruption through a law that he passed in 2010.\footnote{9} However, this does not address corrupt practices by current government officials and must be amended to include


\footnote{9}{“Bolivia approves anti-corruption law,” \textit{Americas Quarterly}, \url{http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/1409} (accessed October 21, 2011).}
this provision.

Transparency in Bolivia is a problem as the president is the Head of State, the leader of his political party, Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS), as well as the president of the coca growers’ syndicate. Bolivians are particularly concerned about the remittances made by foreign governments, primarily Venezuela and Iran, in support of military programs and training in Bolivia, because “None of the money passes through the normal budgetary process, but rather flows directly to the presidency with no outside accountability or oversight.”10 Furthermore, the only public records of what is spent from such sources comes when presidential announcements indicate what programs these funds support. However, some of these programs are non-existent.11 It is therefore important for transparency to be included at the top of the political agenda so that there is accountability and adequate tracking of public monies and how they are being spent, particularly with regard to poverty alleviation.

C. The Dominican Republic

The expansion of political participation in Dominican Republic must begin with representation of poor and underrepresented population groups as this is indispensable to reducing its poverty. The government must lead efforts by encouraging a voter registration groundswell in rural areas, urban slum settlements, and in the bateyes. In each of these areas, ________________


11. Ibid. 177
community members must be organized to elect a local leader to represent their community’s interest at the national level. For the predominantly poor blacks in the Dominican Republic, facilitating their participation in local government and political activities will help to reduce poverty by giving them a voice that helps to integrate them into mainstream society. 42% of Dominicans live under the poverty line, and in spite of the fact that the country boasts fine world class resorts the needs of the poor are not being met. The only way to effect a change is for the poor to be politically active and for the democratic process to be open, fair, and free from coercion and corruption; otherwise it will be business as usual while the poor remain sidelined and marginalized.

With regard to anti-corruption initiatives in the Dominican Republic, one such measure would be ensuring that there is a legal separation that prevents people in high political office from practicing nepotism and granting construction projects to family members and friends. The government must legally adopt the stance that even the appearance of impropriety or conflict of interest will be treated as a serious and punishable offense. Another measure would be to establish clear guidelines prohibiting the unauthorized comingling of public and private funds without prior approval from an independent advisory board that is not affiliated with the current administration, in order to be able to track these funds in public works projects.

With respect to transparency, if all Dominicans are to benefit from the country’s leadership, then the dealings of the government must be transparent and information must be accessible to everyone, including the poor. Transparency must be embedded in the law.
and all public officials who are sworn in must uphold this law. In a situation where the leader of the country has a near monopoly on power it is very important that there are checks and balances in place to prevent the abuse of power. This is also the only way to ensure that public money intended for infrastructure improvements in poor communities is used for the intended purpose and does not end up lining the pockets of officials and leaving unfinished projects.

D. Haiti

In order for Haiti to expand political participation it must first have political stability as the lack of this has played a critical factor in its persistent chronic poverty. With regard to expanding political participation, in a country where 80% of the people live below the poverty line, this is a massive voting block – it is the majority of the country, and should carry some weight. This 80% of the population needs to mobilize and effect a change for their own future. Positive economic change will only be possible when the people most affected by poverty take a hand in changing the state of affairs, and the only way to do so is by using their political voice loudly, clearly, and frequently. The World Bank has declared that Haiti is “limited in capacity to establish law and order or to create conditions for economic growth and poverty reduction.” But, by mobilizing Haiti’s poor through rural grassroots initiatives and campaigning, this potential voting block can have a significant impact in contributing to the country’s political stability through their

expanded political engagement, making their voices and demands heard in parliament and at the highest levels of government. Another factor in expanded political participation is for the poor to shed any shyness or inhibitions about vociferously voicing their disapproval about the socio-economic and political system that entrenches them in poverty. They cannot afford to be shy or silent in the fight to reduce poverty and demand accountability from the government.

Regarding corruption, Haiti has a fair share of it as the statistics attest: 80% of the population is poor, only 53% is educated, and 1% of the population holds approximately 50% of the country’s wealth. A cultural change towards corruption is needed and it must start with President Martelly declaring that corruption is unconstitutional and punishable under the law. With so much poverty, this is the only way to effect a change in the prevailing attitude and politico-economic system that foster this widespread poverty.

Haiti requires transparency in order to effectively utilize the development assistance and foreign aid that are pouring into the country. Otherwise money earmarked for public projects will find its way into the hands of corrupt officials and their friends and families. This fact may also play a role in how long it has taken for infrastructure changes to occur. Even before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti was the recipient of millions of dollars in foreign aid and yet there was not much progress in infrastructure development. It is incumbent upon the President to adopt a “no tolerance” stance when it comes to the lack of transparency and

to mandate that all government ministries and registered domestic and international aid organizations operating in Haiti must legally affirm that their work is beyond reproach, free of fraud, and lawful. In fairness, this transparency must also apply to inter-government dealings to avoid a repeat of the situation that occurred in 1998 when the Haitian government paid $5 million in interest on loans that had been approved by the Inter-American Development Bank, but that were subsequently blocked by the US, resulting in lost money, and in critical projects being shelved: clean drinking water, health, education, and roads.16

E. Zimbabwe

When it comes to expanding political participation in Zimbabwe, the next generation appears ready to engage, according to the 2007 World Development Report, which indicates that young people in Zimbabwe are at least as interested in politics as older people are.17 There are youth advisory assemblies, councils or parliaments in Zimbabwe that bring together local youth representatives at the national level.18 Consequently, they can work towards change by being youth leaders in grassroots organizations, particularly in rural and underrepresented areas. This augurs well for the future but greater participation is needed from all Zimbabweans right now. The government, in spite of its reluctance to yield any


18. Ibid., 170.
power or change the status quo, must support voter drives and registration in all districts of Zimbabwe, including the rural poor and women. Local political leaders must emerge.

With regard to anti-corruption initiatives in Zimbabwe, this may be difficult to implement given the pervasiveness of corruption, but it would be a high-minded show of good faith if President Mugabe took a strong stance against corruption and graft, and embedded this in the country’s constitution and then legally enforced it. At present the graft and plundering could be stopped by Presidential decree or by a taskforce of opposition party members.

Transparency is very much needed in Zimbabwe as it is hard to ascertain how public monies are being disbursed. In 2006, the country received $300 million of foreign aid.18 And yet there is not much to show for all this aid. Over the years, economists and African opposition leaders have pressed for greater transparency and accountability in how aid money is being used. Even the leader of another African country, Rwanda’s President, Paul Kagame, was vocal about criticizing some African leaders.19 There must be grassroots lobbying starting at the local level in poor rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe in order for transparency laws to be passed. The leaders must be placed on alert that they are being watched and will eventually be held accountable even if their current dealings are inscrutable; transparency and accountability will come one day.

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18. Dambisa Moyo, Dead Aid (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 147.

19. Ibid.
Part III. Educational Opportunities

A. Bangladesh

Regarding increasing educational opportunities for the poor in Bangladesh, NGOs are filling much of the need, but it is not enough and the government must dedicate resources to allow more poor Bangladeshis to gain at least a basic education. When it comes to children who must work to help their families, some compromise could be reached with their families to allow them to learn during the hottest hours of the day and then return to work afterwards. Though not ideal, it is a means for these children to get some education versus remaining illiterate. Girls in Bangladesh are made to pay a high price for being married off early and forfeiting their education. Providing them with access to education once they are married could help to reduce poverty. Village elders could show husbands that the entire family benefits from the continued education of young wives in the form of better skills to care for the family, and a higher income earning capacity outside the home, and not just in subsistence farming or petty trade.

With regard to adult literacy, many poor rural Bangladeshis complain about lack of technical and functional education for themselves.\textsuperscript{20} This means that they want to learn, so the government must acknowledge their demands. Recommendations for achieving this, beyond increasing the support that is currently being provided by NGOs, include offering special pay incentives for people to return to their hometowns or villages to teach. This

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\textsuperscript{20}. Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera K. Shah, and Patti Petesch, }\textit{Voices of the Poor} (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), 274.
\end{flushright}
could be on a rotation schedule. Reduced tuition rates could be offered to university students who are willing to teach during school breaks with bigger stipends paid to those students who are able to teach during the semester as well. Literacy is the key to maintaining good health, qualifying for better paid work, and to alleviating poverty.

B. Bolivia

When it comes to increasing educational opportunities in Bolivia, rural literacy rates need to be vastly improved. The country has problems with a shortage of teachers and high attrition rates among rural pupils after age 11. These drawbacks must be overcome and education must be made available to Bolivians residing in rural places, and in urban slums. The government could start an initiative asking each town, village, and slum settlement to select a team of people who will promote education, and organize their communities so that children are guaranteed at least a basic education. Technologies such as satellite radios, videoconferencing, and Skype can be used to overcome geographical challenges and so children could be taught by teachers based in other countries. This form of long-distance learning can be effective. To achieve this, the government must invest in these technologies for remote and underserved areas. Offering tax breaks to corporations and businesses that underwrite rural infrastructure development would be one way to achieve this. The indigenous Indians constitute the majority population of the country and it is unacceptable and immoral that they represent the least educated populace. The only way to progress out of poverty is to advance in knowledge and learning, and this is the opportunity that education provides.
With respect to adult education, every small town or village has a central gathering place where adults could go to learn. Adults who have some education are very interested in making sure that their children also get an education. When women are educated their children are nutritiously fed and the overall health of the family improves, which can help to reduce poverty. One recommendation is technology, which can be a big factor in facilitating education for adults, by improving access. For example, technology firms like Cisco can help to overcome spatial distances to learning. Another recommendation is to have volunteer students from universities teach seasonally between semesters in remote areas for a small stipend paid to them by the government. Another proposal would be that in exchange for reduced tuition university students could be encouraged to undertake teaching assignments in poor isolated rural communities. A further recommendation is to start a National Service program in which newly minted university graduates work in public service for a modest stipend in the most underserved areas of the country as teachers, counselors, health aides, for example. This would greatly help to educate adult learners and to reduce poverty. It would also give the students a sense of pride, purpose, and accomplishment. This is a win-win proposal.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regard to increasing educational access in the Dominican Republic, rural areas, poor urban slum settlements, and batey communities suffer the biggest education deficit and need the most help. Since their locations play a part in their lack of access to education, the government must map the most underserved areas and those with the lowest literacy levels
and recruit local people to start an education drive. Poor parents would be invited to a town hall meeting to discuss how best the government can help them to educate their children and keep them in school. A separate program can be introduced that focuses specifically on expanding rural primary education and that provides funding to enable parents to send their children to school, including a stipend for books and school uniforms, if necessary, as these are the hidden costs that sometimes present barriers to education for poor people. The existing public-private partnerships and NGO programs could also be expanded through more fundraising and grants from the NGO’s respective governments. Teacher-exchange and Peace Corps programs can also be better funded to encourage teachers to spend time teaching in the most underserved parts of Haiti. The government can facilitate this by providing free housing to these teachers. In addition to reducing poverty, the benefit of education is that it can prevent youth from being drawn to illegal activities out of boredom or because they are unqualified or untrained for anything else. So far in the Dominican Republic, over 300 teachers have received gender training in relation to classroom practices, in an attempt to improve teacher sensitivity and appropriateness. Though this will also help to improve attendance and reduce pupil attrition, it does not address the issue of insufficient schools or the lack of money to attend school and so the government must step in to help.

Increasing adult literacy rates will benefit children as well, as parents will then be better able to appreciate the advantages of education and will encourage their children to

continue to learn, even under difficult circumstances. This is the seed that needs to be planted among underserved poor population groups - the importance of education must be made clear to the parents through their own experience of it and this will help them, their children, and their communities to overcome poverty. Another recommendation is to increase vocational training opportunities and night classed for adults in areas such as dress-making, mechanical repair, operating commercial vehicles, and computer technology.

D. Haiti

Increasing educational opportunities in Haiti is crucial to securing a better economic future for the country. In a country with a literacy rate barely above 50%, it is the only way for poverty to be overcome. The dire economic and infrastructure situation in Haiti calls for far-reaching measures to reverse the illiteracy trend. The fact that 80% of the education is currently provided by private schools is detrimental to achieving higher literacy rates. Education must be more broadly available and primary education must be free. Haiti suffers from insufficient schools and this is an obstacle to basic education for many children. As the facilities in which children are taught are very basic, the lack of these facilities should not present a hindrance to expanding educational reach, as such facilities are easy to construct.

With respect to adult literacy, there is a deficit that must be overcome in order to reduce poverty. In spite of several organizations trying to ameliorate this situation, for example, at a meeting with the La Gonave Haiti Partnership, a woman raised her hand to remark to the organizers that they taught their children and helped with their school, but
that they, the mothers, wanted to learn to read and writes as well.\textsuperscript{22} This sentiment is felt by many illiterate mothers in Haiti. The government must launch a parallel initiative for adult education as well as re-dedicating resources to ensuring universal primary education, which President Martelly promised in his campaign and which is MDG 2. Educating adults is important because with at least some education they can learn to exercise their citizenship rights and hold the government accountable. If the majority of adults cannot read or write, then they cannot decipher new government policies to determine whether they are beneficial or harmful to their socio-economic wellbeing, and they are ill-equipped to fight poverty.

E. Zimbabwe

Regarding increasing education opportunities in Zimbabwe, this is more crucial than ever because of the severe economic downturn that has caused several pupils to drop out of school. To counter this, the government has the primary responsibility to educate its citizens, and, despite the lack of funds, it must still set aside a portion of GDP for its education budget so that schools and universities can be kept open, teachers can be paid, and pupils and students can get an education. Although the country’s Education Act calls for gender equality in education, in Zimbabwe, as in other countries, there are fewer girls enrolled in primary school, as parents with limited resources opt instead to educate their sons.\textsuperscript{23} In Zimbabwe, education is the key to personal and economic growth. The author John Iliffe


remarked that education had bestowed benefits on Africa, saying that “Women could benefit from religious and educational change. Christianity also had ambiguous effects, for although it made divorce more difficult for women, and risks of unsupported widowhood higher, its schools emancipated by raising marriage ages, expanding horizons, and giving access to employment.”

When it comes to increasing adult literacy in Zimbabwe, this is particularly crucial because of the high rate of mortality from disease and decreased life expectancy. Educating illiterate adults would result in better health and sanitary practices and help to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and help to prevent further outbreaks of cholera. Vocational training and education can help adults to develop better job skills and make them more marketable which can reduce their poverty.

**Part IV. Healthcare**

**Bangladesh**

When it comes to healthcare delivery, Bangladesh must improve its healthcare infrastructure as it is simply inadequate to meet the vast needs of its people. The first recommendation therefore is a reassessment and possible overhaul of its current healthcare system. Secondly, the government must increase healthcare expenditures as a percentage of GDP to keep up with inflation and with Bangladesh’s large population. Thirdly, there must be a vigorous campaign to recruit more people to work in healthcare: frontline providers like physicians, nurses, health aides, physicians’ assistants, registered midwives, nutrition

specialists, mental health specialists and counselors. Improving its healthcare infrastructure is very important given that there is multiple-drug resistant (MDR) TB in Bangladesh. Another recommendation is to improve access to healthcare for urban slum dwellers as a 2001 report from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare stated that health indicators were even worse for the urban poor than for the rural poor.25 This could be achieved by having nurses and health workers assigned to different sections of slum settlements who make regular rounds to check on people's health as a first round of triage, and if it is determined that a person needs specialized care or referral to a physician, then this can be arranged. The government must have a part in sponsoring such a program, must in fact be the chief underwriter. Additional problems of access in Bangladesh include the fact that government doctors and nurses are absent from work 35% of the time according to a 2002–2003 World Bank World Absenteeism Survey on health workers, and that patients are not well treated.26 To counter such systemic absenteeism, another recommendation is for the government to demand greater accountability from the government doctors and nurses that it employs and to impose severe fines on those who are in dereliction of their duty.

With respect to improving maternal health, it is recommended that the government ensures that mothers have access to healthcare facilities irrespective of where they reside.


This requires the government to include the remotest chars and to study the latest census data to determine what maternal healthcare needs will be. To prevent maternal mortality through complications during childbirth, the government can provide free pre-natal vitamins and to expectant mothers. A recommendation for improving access to vaccines and removing any fear or barriers is to educate the public about the benefits of vaccines to their children and their community, and this can be done by regular maternal and public health announcements on the radio. Because mothers invariably bring their infants along when they are going for their own health check-ups, as a practical matter, they should be treated in tandem. Infants are less likely to suffer from malnutrition when mothers maintain a good health profile and there are lower overall rates of morbidity.

B. Bolivia

With regard to better healthcare delivery in Bolivia, the greatest need is among poor Bolivians in the western highlands and those Bolivians residing in urban slum areas. The first recommendation is to train healthcare workers in the respective indigenous languages of the Indians. To this end, the government must increase its healthcare budget and include special fund allocation for the most isolated communities. The second recommendation follows from the first, to increase healthcare training among indigenous Bolivians, especially women, because Bolivian women are culturally more comfortable discussing health matters with women rather than men. The third recommendation is for the government to increase its health budget and to assign special funds for the poorest indigenous Bolivians so that they may have access to emergency care such as surgery if they need it, this is comparable to
Medicaid in the US.

With respect to improving maternal healthcare in Bolivia, one recommendation is to increase the number of trained midwives and community healthcare workers as women in remote regions often suffer unnecessarily difficult births due to lack of care and qualified personnel. Another recommendation is to educate poor women about the benefits of prenatal care and to make this available to them through implementing the first recommendation. Another recommendation involves teaching mother better infant care. This is especially important for indigenous women since their infants suffer higher malnutrition rate.

C. The Dominican Republic

With regard to healthcare delivery in the Dominican Republic, there is inequitable access to public healthcare facilities. This is true for the 43% who live in poverty and especially the 16% who live in extreme poverty. Consequently, one recommendation is for the government to invest in mobile clinics in underserved regions and to grant incentives to healthcare workers who care for patients in these areas. In order to fight TB and to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS, the Dominican Republic must step up inoculation efforts.

In order to improve maternal healthcare, the first recommendation is to increase obstetric and gynecological training among healthcare workers to prevent deaths from routine complications. The second recommendation is to ensure that poor pregnant patients have adequate nutrition by giving them a meal and pre-natal vitamins at each medical appointment. Thirdly, medical facilities for maternal health should have pediatricians on
hand as well, as most mothers with young infants will need to bring them along on such visits so that infants can be examined while the mother is there for her checkup, and this saves her from having to make two separate visits; one for her infant and another for herself. Since the vaccination rate in rural areas in the Dominican Republic is comparatively low in relation to urban vaccination rates, the focus of any government-sponsored national vaccine campaign must be on increasing vaccination rates through targeted education, offering monetary incentives to mothers to have their children vaccinated, and organizing mobile clinics for the underserved. A further recommendation would be to hold regular health fairs to provide continuing education on child and maternal health.

D. Haiti

Haiti’s healthcare system is woefully inadequate to the task of delivering healthcare services to its population and so healthcare delivery and medical services are largely left to international organizations like Medicins San Frontiers, the International Red Cross, CARE International, Partners in Health, who all work in concert with local Haitian medical personnel. Haiti has serious disease burdens such as malaria, TB, cholera, and HIV/AIDS. The first recommendation, therefore, is for the government to convene a panel of medical experts, healthcare management specialists, and hospital administrators, to draw up a short-term and a long-term plan for overhauling the healthcare system so that it can meet the country’s needs. The recommendation for its short-term needs should include specific targets and anticipate any vulnerabilities or health threats, while long-term needs should cover how to build up the healthcare infrastructure. Another recommendation is for the
government to invest in healthcare education and training and to promote science teaching in schools and encourage students to think about a career in medicine. To this end, another recommendation is to provide special scholarships to Haitian medical students both in Haiti and studying abroad, with the understanding that they will return to Haiti to serve their communities with their medical training. Another recommendation is for the government to appeal to expatriate Haitian doctors to consider working in Haiti on a rotational basis to provide relief and help the underserved communities. Lastly, since the majority of Haiti’s poor speak Creole, Kreyol, in Haitian, medical literature should be made available in this language.

With respect to improving maternal health in Haiti, the first recommendation is for the government to create a special emergency fund for the poorest pregnant women to ensure that they have access to Vitamin A and iron to reduce their risk of anemia, which leads to low birth weights and other complications during pregnancy and child birth. These women may not have access to an NGO and so the government must be the savior of last resort. The second recommendation involves the government guaranteeing payment to any pharmacy, clinic or NGO that provided vitamin A and iron to the patient, perhaps through use of a pre-paid prescription card. Another recommendation is that since maternity health influence infant health, providing healthcare services for infants in the same facility where mothers seek care is a must.

E. Zimbabwe

Better healthcare delivery is crucial for reducing poverty in Zimbabwe as this will help to combat malnutrition in young children, and to help treat HIV/AIDS patients more
effectively. Zimbabwe suffered a serious cholera outbreak in 2008 and this overtaxed a healthcare infrastructure that was already strapped and further compromised the health of the poor who are most vulnerable to opportunistic diseases such as cholera.

With regard to maternal healthcare which directly impacts infant healthcare, the author John Iliffe points out that significant benefits have accrued to countries such as Zimbabwe through the “widespread use of cheap, synthetic drugs against endemic childhood disease complaints like pneumonia, malaria, along with measles, polio, diarrhea and malnutrition – through the extension of health services to children and mothers.” Such vaccination efforts should be stepped up, particularly in a time of great poverty and deprivation. This is because many opportunistic diseases of poverty occur during such times, cholera, is one such disease. The author asks leave to return to the subject of overall healthcare delivery here and recommends that the government insists on improved coordination of healthcare delivery efforts, particularly with respect to complex diseases like AIDS, as this is an important issue. Although the chart which follows on the next page pertains to Tanzania, Zimbabwe also has numerous NGOs working on HIV/AIDS care, and so it is appropriate to discuss this matter. The chart depicts HIV/AIDS healthcare delivery by numerous NGOs and shows that there is often fragmentation of effort and overcrowding by NGOs. To be of better help, multiple organizations working for the same cause, must work more efficiently. The figure illustrates how confusing and complex this work is.
Figure 6.2

HIV/AIDS Stakeholders and Donors in Tanzania

Part V: The Promotion of Microcredits and Partnerships with Multi-National Corporations

A. Bangladesh

The Grameen Bank, which in Bengali means ‘Bank of the Village’ which was founded in Bangladesh in 1974 by Dr. Muhammad Yunus, is the pioneering financial institution for lending microcredits. Whilst working with the poorest of the poor in the village of Jobra, Dr. Yunus saw an opportunity to help and make a difference. When he lent $846 to forty-two people in the village of Jobra, the seed of his idea for the Grameen Bank was planted. Hailed as a major breakthrough for poverty relief for most of the last two decades, this poverty alleviation strategy has recently run afoul of some critics who cite exploitative methods and the abuse of the poor when it comes to collecting unpaid loan balances. This is true of certain moneylenders in India, where harsh collection methods have even resulted in some suicides. However, tragic occurrences should not detract from the fact that microcredit is useful. At the time of this writing, Dr. Yunus was ousted by the government from his chairmanship of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh for allegedly moving money out of a Swedish bank account that was intended for microloans. The motivation for this may have been political and should not distract from the benefits of microcredit. When asked by billionaire Pierre Omyidar, the founder of E-bay, about allowing private industry to get involved in microfinance as a for-profit business, Dr. Yunus indignantly asked, “Why do you want to make money off the poor people? You make money
Eventually there should be access to credit and mainstream financial services for poor people. But until then, microcredit can put food on the table and help to start a small business that give the borrower some dignity and helps to reduce poverty. There are, however, several for-profit microcredit lenders in Bangladesh and other countries. In addition to the longstanding presence of the Grameen Bank, Bangladesh has one of the highest per capita ratios of NGO and aid organizations working there which bodes well for future work, but it also means that expectations for results and deliverables should be higher there. Another popular and very active microcredit lender in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which is active in various areas of human and social development, including health, education, job training, and business management.

With regard to partnering with multi-national corporations, engineering firms could building bridges and could help to build a sustainable mega port in Bangladesh, which would permit it to become an international commercial seaport for its landlocked neighbors to whom it would grant port rights, as has been suggested by Dr. Yunus. The same is also true of solar energy in Bangladesh as electricity is sparse in rural areas. A possible engineering partnership that could aid in energy conservation and management would be with ConocoPhillips, a global oil and energy company.

**B. Bolivia**

For Bolivia, microcredit is an important recommendation for poverty alleviation as it elsewhere. Here, you come to help them.” This is the benefit of microcredit, it does help.

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fills a need for poor Bolivian indigenous women, who use these funds to open a small business such as a coffee shop, or a fruit and vegetable stand at the market. The proceeds from such businesses are then used to send their children to school, so this microcredit is an important factor in education and poverty relief. A further recommendation for microcredit in Bolivia is to expand the program further and make it more widely available, even in the remotest regions of the Andean highlands as this will aid economic activity in these areas. Microcredit is often the only lifeline towards a better future and a modicum of economic self-determination that these women have and it is vital to keep this lifeline open and to expand its reach. Bolivia currently has amongst the lowest microfinance rates in Latin America. Therefore, another recommendation is to encourage more microcredit lenders to provide this service and enter the market place, while another recommendation is to ensure that such services are available for the poor who live in remote rural areas and whose income is subject to seasonal swings or impacted by inclement weather. One such provider, whose business model could be emulated is Pro Mujer which is a major provider of microcredit in Bolivia. Since some microfinance lenders charge interest rates as high as 80 or 125%, the government should carefully monitor the actions of all leaders. Another recommendation regarding microcredit is to provide special incentives to women who may want to provide educational services, either themselves if they are literate or by hiring someone to do so.


Such an arrangement could help to address the literacy problem in poor areas.

As concerns partnering with multi-national corporations, Bolivia’s geography and environmental pressures present a unique and interesting challenge and so the recommendation is for the government to reach out several suitable engineering firms. Another recommendation would be to explore the possibility of windmill energy in the Andean region. If the right corporation is found and the project is successful, then this highland region could supply power not only to its resident, but perhaps to other regions as well. This could help to reduce poverty and improve health by powering water pumps, and by providing electricity in homes and reducing the use of harmful cooking fuels. Long distance transmission of energy has been in effect since the late 1850s when the power of the Niagara Falls was harnessed to supply New York with electricity, and modern technology has advanced since then. Another recommendation revolves around long-term infrastructure projects like constructing bridges and tunnels. Given Bolivia’s vastness and varying topography, there is reason to consider such infrastructure improvements which could revitalize a region and attract other businesses. The government must invite local and international engineering companies to submit bids and tenders for this project and the process must be open, transparent, and fair. Sustainability and environmental sensibility must be a hallmark of any design or construction. The Millau viaduct bridge in France is an example of this.

C. The Dominican Republic

Microcredit is an important recommendation because it plays an important role in
shoring up the finances and dignity of poor women in the Dominican Republic and there are a few companies that provide this service. Most popular amongst the poorest of the poor is Esperanza, which loans money to groups or cohorts of women rather than to individual borrowers. An example of how microcredit can reduce poverty is that of the mother of four who has been able to put her children through school by using the money borrowed from Esperanza for her clothing retail business. A second recommendation would be to encourage more microcredit lenders to operate in the Dominican Republic to meet the growing needs of poor women who are desperate to support their families and learn some business skills. Another MFI, Fundacion San Miguel Arcangel (FSMA), operates in the poor San Cristobal region of the Dominican Republic. This MFI operates mainly in the poorest remote rural areas foregoing areas of urban poverty, and partners with the Grameen Foundation. Here, too, the lending is group-based. Another recommendation, therefore, is to de-bundle the loan from group borrowing and allow individuals to borrow as this may encourage more women in need to come forward. In this case, some counseling and a clear idea of how the money can be recouped must be discussed. A further recommendation is for the government to provide loans to the poorest women who might not qualify for a microcredit loan. The government must provide some safety net and be the lender of last resort as these poor people have no access to traditional loans and credits. In the absence of policies that encourage banks to lend to the poor, the government must help to fill the need.

With regard to promoting partnerships with multi-national companies, the Dominican Republic has several industries such as garment manufacture, tobacco, and tourism that could be expanded. In the case of the Dominican Republic, it could use its forest as an extended asset for tourism and organize hikes and day treks and involve a greater part of the poor rural population in tourism. At present many tourists remain within their respective resorts and do not mingle much with locals. But organizing hiking trips would afford the opportunity for poor people to earn an income as trek and tour guides. This idea requires political stability so that tourists can feel safe whilst trekking. Partnering with companies that can provide or sponsor vocational training in areas such as mechanical and technical repair for cars and machinery would create employment diversification. Electricity theft is a problem in the Dominican Republic, and solar energy would increase the supply of electricity to poor rural areas, so a company that could build this would be an ideal partner.

D. Haiti

In Haiti microcredit is a lifeline for small proprietors who have no collateral to obtain traditional loans. Several banks in Haiti are involved in microcredit, with one of the most popular being Fonkaze. This bank also seeks to connect Haitians living abroad with business owners in Haiti who are in need of funds. An expansion of microcredit would permit more Haitians to gain some independence and would protect their dignity, for this is often what microcredit does – it permits a mother to feed and educate her children.

Recommendations regarding partnership with multi-national firms, include forming a
partnership with the Jacques Cousteau Foundation, which has started building environmentally sustainable hotels showcasing local building styles and architecture. Its signature resort is located on the island of Vanua Levu in Fiji. Given that Haiti lies in the hurricane belt in the tropics, the expertise of the Cousteau team could come in very handy in helping Haiti to plan for a future in sustainable tourism. The Cousteau team would understand and appreciate Haiti’s threatened coral reefs and coastal areas and could provide valuable advice on how to prevent further coral degradation, while encouraging sustainable eco-tourism. Another recommendation is to offer incentives to companies to create affordable solar energy panels to create electricity for poor rural residents. This would reduce the reliance on charcoal for cooking, and help to run a small business such as sewing, with the help of seed money from microcredit. Another recommendation would be for the government to seek a partnership or input from a company that makes deep sea fishing vessels. Currently, many of Haiti’s fishermen work relatively close to shore in small fishing boats. If larger fishing vessels were available they could venture further out to sea and make bigger catches, while protecting and preserving the delicate coral reef that lies off the coast.

**E. Zimbabwe**

Microcredit is an important recommendation for Zimbabwe, where Zambuko is the most popular microcredit institution. Here, as in the other countries, microcredit is vital to poor people’s existence. In 2006, the United Nations Development Programme provided $110,000.00 in funds to be disbursed to ten microcredit institutions in the country. There has even been a case study conducted to determine the effects of HIV/AIDS on Microcredit Financial Institutions (MFIs) in Zimbabwe, specifically to see if households with HIV/AIDS
patients are left out of communal or group loans because others in the group fear that such patients might not be able to repay the loan. Consequently, when people were found to suffer from HIV/AIDS it was harder for them to join a borrowing collective. Therefore, another recommendation is to make loans available to individuals as there poor women being denied access to this tool which can help to reduce their poverty or at least feed their families. Since some MFIs have shut down because of hyperinflation, another recommendation would be for the government to solicit microcredit businesses from abroad, who can afford to do so, to set up shop in Zimbabwe as there is a desperate need for some poverty relief.

Recommendations for partnering with multi-national corporations include finding more conservation partners to help maintain its national wildlife parks, especially given the country’s dire economic straits. In spite of Zimbabwe’s convoluted political situation and total economic breakdown, there are still companies willing to help. There is already evidence of it with the presence of Merck helping to fight malaria. Some years ago Warner Lambert, the pharmaceutical company, sponsored medical students in South Africa under a special training program. A similar program could be launched in Zimbabwe with special scholarships provided by medical schools in developed countries in partnership with business organizations. Such a program could help to ensure that there are trained medical professionals in Zimbabwe and that students who may not have the financial means have a chance to attend medical school.
VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, Albert Camus stated that “Poverty is a fortress without drawbridges,” and this phrase made a lasting impression on the author as there are now several bridges available to reduce poverty and to help meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Each bridge might be one small step for man, but it is one giant leap for mankind. The time to act decisively to meet all the 8 UN Millennium Goals is now, but the work and effort must extend beyond these goals and reach the millions that will still be left in poverty in these five thesis countries and around the world by 2015. This thesis topic was chosen because of concern regarding the suffering experienced by the growing number of people living in grinding poverty and suffering, not only in the five countries presented in this thesis, but around the world. This suffering is in sharp contrast to the consumerism and the relatively unimpeded access to healthcare and education enjoyed by the rich. This is unjust, immoral, and unsustainable. Furthermore, the UN Millennium Development Goal 1, to halve extreme poverty by 2015, would still not lift all people out of poverty by that date. As the noted economist, Adam Smith, said, “The great affair, we always find, is to get money.” The leaders of the G8 and all countries that have pledged official development assistance must honor their pledges and find this money so that poverty may be reduced and the poor in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Zimbabwe can secure the means to improve their lives. The aim is to reduce poverty in order to ensure a better quality of life, a chance at a life free from hunger and deprivation, and an opportunity to break the cycle of

A key to reducing poverty is education. It has been shown that investing in education is an important factor in poverty reduction, particularly investing in the education of girls, whose education has hitherto been lacking in some of the countries. A UN official emphasized this point when she declared that “Moreover, education for girls is the key to the health and nutrition of populations; to overall improvements in the standard of living; to better agricultural and environmental practices; to higher Gross National Product; and to greater involvement and gender balance in decision-making at all levels of society.”

Adam Smith stressed the importance of educating the poorest when he stated that while it may not be possible for the common people of any civilized society:

So well instructed as some people of rank and fortune, the most essential parts of education, however, to read, write, and account, can be acquired at so early a period of life that the greater part of even those who are bred to occupy the lowest occupations, have time to acquire them before they can be employed in those occupations. For a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education.

Smith’s point emphasizes not only the importance of education, but also defines the public’s obligation to help the poor to access education. Haiti, Bangladesh and Bolivia have the lowest literacy rates of the five countries and these rates must improve in order for people to


overcome poverty. Zimbabwe’s decimated economy is reversing many of the country’s high educational achievements, and threatening to lower its high literacy rate. Literacy, health, and poverty are interrelated, as seen in the combination of measures that the MDGs have targeted to reduce poverty.

Each of the five countries will need to apply a combination of recommendations to suit its own particular circumstances. The institutional capacity of government agencies to effectively reduce poverty will need to increase in all of these countries, particularly a populous one like Bangladesh. All structural impediments to economic growth and poverty alleviation will need to be removed. It can be difficult to find the right mix of effective poverty reduction policies and implementation strategies, as noted by former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, who coined the term “Comprehensive Development Framework,”\textsuperscript{40} to acknowledge the complexities of development work and the intertwinements of the economic and social elements. Nobel-prize winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz states this differently, but the message is the same. He said: “Because alternative policies affect different groups differently, it is the role of the political process – not international bureaucrats – to sort out the choices.”\textsuperscript{41} Selecting the right combination of strategies requires a solid government composed of ethical leaders who will act in the best interests of all the people and not a select few. Just like members of the medical profession, all leaders should abide by the Hippocratic oath to which doctors are sworn, “First do no

\textsuperscript{40} Katherine Marshall, \textit{The World Bank: From reconstruction to development equity} (New York, Routledge, 2008), 50.

harm.” The expansion of political participation is critical to successfully reducing poverty in all five countries, but it is especially important in Haiti and Zimbabwe, followed by Bolivia and Bangladesh in equal measures. In the case of Haiti and Zimbabwe, it is difficult to achieve any type of economic or social progress without political stability and expanded political participation, particularly with respect to women, who make up at least 50% of the population in each of the countries in the thesis and yet are glaringly underrepresented at all levels of government and public office. Everything that happens in a country occurs within the context of its specific political environment as determined by the country’s leadership. Therefore, the importance of having good leadership in the poverty debate cannot be overstated. Simply put, reducing poverty cannot occur while bad, indifferent, and corrupt leaders hold positions of responsibility be they presidents, ministers, or any other public officials. Leaders with integrity are critical to poverty alleviation, and in order for poverty to be reduced in each of the thesis countries, corruption must also be reduced. This is why ethical political leadership is so important. This leads to the next political point involving transparency and making certain information public that is currently hard to access in the thesis countries, such as the salaries of public servants, progress reports on how much money has been allocated for specific projects versus what has actually been spent. It is also why expanded political participation is of paramount importance, so that all voices will be heard and the voices of the poor will not be drowned out. The current tide of world events has demonstrated that people will not always be patient with inefficient and corrupt government, as has been seen with the spate of forced regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia,
and, most recently, Libya.

As for the importance of healthcare, this is vital for poverty eradication because populations will not be susceptible to disease and illness. A nation where the majority of the population have no regular access to preventive healthcare and where infant mortality rates and malnutrition are high, suffers from overall healthcare costs which drag down the economy. This is the situation that Bangladesh, Haiti, and Zimbabwe face, and their current healthcare infrastructure is unsustainable. The incidence of morbidity from easily preventable diseases like leptospirosis, malaria, and cholera is too high. The country that suffers the highest overall morbidity rates is Zimbabwe, followed by Haiti, then Bangladesh, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. With respect to meeting the health MDGs - 2, 3, and 5 - improvements must be made in the access to healthcare; the delivery of healthcare services; and the availability of qualified healthcare professionals.

With regard to micro-credit, which can be termed as the poor person’s ‘audacity of hope,’ and partnering with multi-national corporations, this is the next best recommendation because it permits people to have access to credit and grants them a measure of autonomy by being able to get money when they need it, be it for immediate short-term purposes such as feeding their families, or to buy a small amount of business inventory for resale. It is clear that micro-credit and micro-finance are important in every country under study in this thesis. The countries in which microcredit development is most critical are Bangladesh, Bolivia, Haiti, and Zimbabwe. In this case the order stated does not necessarily reflect the magnitude of the need, as all of the poor in these countries can use any assistance that is available to
them. However, microcredit should not replace granting poor people full access to more
diverse financial instruments and institutions, and should not be mistaken as a long-term
resolution to the problem of access to banking, credit, and loans. The institution of
microcredit arose in response to a need, a market void. This void has still not been
adequately filled and is emblematic of the larger perception problem that poor people
experience worldwide: they are simply overlooked as potential consumers and customers in
the poverty debate, which from a capitalist perspective is quite perplexing, as there are
millions of potential customers effectively shut out of the global market place for goods and
assets. Western governments should have been clamoring and working tirelessly for poverty
abatement in developing nations long before now.

Partnering with multi-national corporations offers poor countries a way to gain
training, harness expertise and widen access to technologies, while working with the
companies to seek practical solutions to problems. The global corporations can gain from
having access to new markets and new customers, multi-cultural exchange, new sourcing
opportunities, and improving their business brand and reputation through good corporate
citizenship. This arrangement can be mutually beneficial. All five countries would benefit
from such partnerships, but the need is currently greatest in Haiti, with Bangladesh,
Zimbabwe, and Bolivia being next, and finally the Dominican Republic. There are
advantages to globalization that can be harnessed to reduce poverty and counter some of its
negative impacts. While globalization and free trade do not benefit all countries equally and
can result in net losses to developing countries, partnering with corporations that enjoy a
global depth and reach and a well-established network of resources both in terms of human capital and technological capabilities, can help to reduce poverty.

Other possible recommendations for reducing poverty that are not covered in this thesis include: developing regional alliances; engaging in best practices; promoting philanthrocapitalism; engaging in non-profit business, known as social business; applying progressive distributive tax policies; and instituting reciprocal fair trade and practices. There are many solutions to alleviating poverty, and if there is collaborative will and effort, then poverty can be reduced. There is a growing realization that the world is only as strong as its weakest link. It is clearly in our collective best interests to lift marginalized people out of poverty by improving their access to employment, education, healthcare, social and financial services, and by giving them equal protection under the law, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, or religion.


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