



Come see EPN at the Warped Tour

End Poverty Now is at the Vans Warped Tour! In an effort to further promote awareness about poverty-related issues, EPN will be setting up a booth at two Warped Tour locations. The Vans Warped Tour, which tours around Canada and the United States, not only features over 50 bands at most venues but also offers a number of opportunities for people to become more involved in global issues. End Poverty Now already participated in the Vancouver concert, with much success! We will also have a booth at the Montreal concert, taking place August 12th at Parc Jean-Drapeau (Metro: Ile-Ste-Hélène), so if you're in town, come check us out! Bands featured at the Montreal concert include K-OS, New Found Glory, and Bad Religion. For more information about the Vans Warped Tour, including how to purchase tickets, visit www.warpedtour.com.



Vans Warped Tour 2007 Official Logo

Yaletown Laser Centre spreads the EPN message

What do lasers, beauty, and cosmetics have to do with poverty alleviation? More than you'd think. On Thursday, May 31st, in the heart of trendy Vancouver, End Poverty Now teamed up with the Yaletown Laser Centre (YLC) for an elegant soirée. The evening provided the opportunity for more than eighty clients of the YLC to learn more about the issue of poverty and how everyone, in their day-to-day life, can make a difference.

The partnership between the YLC and EPN is just one example of the many retail partnerships that End Poverty Now is currently establishing. The clinic was in fact the first member of the End Poverty Now Retail Team.

Between four and eight days a year, the YLC donates five percent of money from the procedures that they perform to End Poverty Now. They held their first "EPN Day" in February, when all the staff wore EPN t-shirts and raised awareness about our organization and the struggle. The soirée offered a similar opportunity to raise awareness about the issue of poverty. Each of the guests received an information card about the organization, and five percent of all the procedures booked as a result of the event will be donated to End Poverty Now. Who says high society doesn't care about social issues? Yaletown Laser Centre is a glowing example of how everyone can do something in the struggle against poverty.

To learn more about the Yaletown Laser Centre in Vancouver, check out their link on the sponsorship section of our website.

If you or someone you know might be interested in establishing a retail, corporate, or sponsorship partnership with End Poverty Now, please don't hesitate to contact our finance director at finance@endpoverty.ca

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ENDPOVERTYNOW

Environment and development

Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor

—SARA FINKELSTEIN—

While many may think that environmental issues are the sole concern of the developed world – recently found guilty of causing global warming – nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, recent studies have shown that the poor in developing nations are much more likely to be affected by environmental degradation, such as climate change, than those living in countries like Canada.

There is a mainstream belief that for poor countries to develop, environmental concerns must take a back seat to commercialization. Presumably, the plan is to address environmental issues only after the issue of poverty has been dealt with. To be fair, factors such as excessive third world debt make it harder for developing nations to make environment and sustainable development a priority. For example, poor countries will often focus on the production of cash crops, which uses environmentally damaging industrial agriculture, just to get by on a day-to-day basis. These cash crops reduce biodiversity, taking away food sources from humans. Due to such short-term policies, 60% of the world's natural resources used by humans are deteriorating. In the past twenty years alone, we have seen incredibly high rates of forest and land degradation. This overuse of ecosystems leads to their degradation, thus ensuring that any development made is non-sustainable.

So why are the poor more highly affected by this environmental degradation than those who are better off? This question has a complex answer, but two major factors stand out when examining the issue. The first is that the poor tend to rely more heavily on natural resources. This is mainly because they simply do not have other resources available to them, as outside resources generally have to be purchased. In poor countries, environmental assets account for 26% of wealth, as com-

pared to 2% in wealthy countries. Unfortunately, the poor also have many more barriers to overcome when it comes to deriving full benefits from their environment. This is due, in great part, to a lack of land rights, as well as a lack of information on the rights they do have. This, combined with a lack of energy services, severely limits the ability of the poor to use their land productively.

Environmental degradation also greatly affects the poor due to the fact that they tend to live on marginalized land; for example, land where the soil is very degraded. This means that the poor, who depend more on the land directly around them, tend to live on the worst lands. Currently, there are 1.3 billion people worldwide who live on marginalized land. Not only do many poor live on land where the natural resources have been depleted, but others live on marginalized lands, such as steep hillsides, that are much more prone to weather disasters brought on by global warming.

Together, these two major factors – heavy reliance on natural resources and living on marginalized lands – lead to a high vulnerability of the poor when it comes to change in their environment. In fact, many development organizations have now begun to recognize that this high vulnerability to external shocks is one

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End Poverty Now is an organization that is dedicated to the long-term battle against abject poverty. Born out of the international Make Poverty History campaign, *End Poverty Now* represents a group of dedicated individuals, mainly students, who want to make a difference in the world through working to end abject poverty. For more information on how to get involved with *End Poverty Now*, email info@endpoverty.org.

of the major factors of poverty. Events such as weather disasters tend to hit the poor much harder, because of their high dependence on their land. When their land is flooded or swept away by mudslides, they have no other resources to fall back on. As the frequency of such weather disasters is increasing every year due to global warming, the bottom line appears to be that those who will be most affected by global warming, the poor, are also those who are least able to cope with it. And in the meantime, all of this poor environmental health only makes it harder for the poor to move out of poverty.

Now that the world is finally recognizing the links between poverty and the environment, development organizations such as the UN are finding ways to cope with these factors. First of all, in order to better utilize their lands, farmers need more information about soil, crops, livestock breeds, pests, markets, habitats, and nutrients. On a larger level, policy-makers also need to have access to and be able to effectively apply this information. If utilized well, ecosystems should be able to improve diet and provide relief during times of famine, crop failure, and droughts. In a recent paper by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), it was found that communities themselves can be very effective in conserving the basic functions of ecosystems. Through following a set of locally adopted rules and regulations, communities can protect their own lands. For example, certain lakes in Madagascar are closed for a season every year in order to allow the fish population to replenish itself. This yearly closure is dictated by a traditional leader known as the 'lord of the water.' Thus, communities, through the medium of local customs, can be critical players in helping to stop over-use and deterioration of lands.

In Africa, where there is still a great deal of development to be done, the IIED makes several recommendations, the goal of which is to help Africa leap-frog "dirty development." This can be done in number of ways, such as by investing in sustainable and renewable energy, increasing support for small-scale agriculture, and testing whether initiatives are climate-friendly. This kind of sustainable and environmentally friendly development will help to ensure both the long-term stability of the African economy, as well as preventing African countries from making the same mistake that led the

developed world to creating global warming in the first place.

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**For information about environmental issues
within Canada, visit www.thegreenpages.ca**

To do or not to do: reflections on volunteering in Africa

-CHRIS CONNOLLY-

May 14th: 4th day in Africa

On one of my group's first nights in Botswana, a light-hearted chat among my roommates segued gradually into an interwoven, scattered philosophical debate many times larger than our internships – and, without a doubt, many times larger than our selves.

How do you cope with problems when their enormity confounds the good intentions of any singular well-meaning individual? What to make of the inherent unfairness produced by an accident of geography?

Are our intentions transient? Are our consequent actions sustainable? Even if they are, how do you reconcile our combating of others' misfortunes with our incredibly fortunate life?

...So, yeah. There it all was, staring us in the face. Before a single hour of volunteer work had been clocked, we were being weighed down by cynicism.

May 21: 12th day in Africa

My first impressions of the centre from at home in Canada were strikingly positive. From cruising the website ahead of time, I could clearly see that it was a well-intentioned, fairly well-established organization. After only my first day, I have already witnessed a snapshot of the overwhelming dedication, passion, love, faith and resolve of the staff, even in the face of stifling hardships – hardships that I have only begun to understand. Though modest, the centre has had a few generous donations, including a new computer centre from the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. So it is with a sense of almost accomplishment – not for myself, obviously – that I faced this pristine collection of 6 new computers, 2 printers, internet access, and matching furniture. The project is an incredibly worthy and well-targeted cause aimed at helping disadvantaged youth to get job skills. As it turns out, though, the project - so far as I can tell from speaking to various long-term volunteers - did not include a sufficient allocation of funds to pay for the salary of a computer instructor. At its inception, however, I'm told that this was not a glaring flaw. The centre hired a trainer and lessons had proceeded relatively success-

fully. However...

The centre, some time around January of this year, appears to have fallen on hard times financially. Funding dried up, and the employees' salaries still have not been paid in months. The employees, displaying what is now a self-evident dedication and commitment to a good cause, have remained; months of continued work, and no pay. The computer training instructor, on the other hand, sought employment elsewhere. (And, certainly, I am not passing judgment. People need food to eat, and money for food. His was a heartbreakingly understandable decision.) So for almost four months, these pristine computers, which I had initially looked at as a *fait accompli*, have gone almost completely unused by nearly all except the savviest of students. The others seem to modestly poke around on the internet, but lack the fundamental skills to use this tremendous resource to reach any significant realization of its massive potential.

And here's where I come in. My position, which up until a few days ago was supposed to be a lay-social worker dealing with, among other things, HIV/AIDS issues, has suddenly done almost a complete 180-degree turn to meet the pressing needs of the centre. With little to no specialized experience or interest in computer training or operations, I have – after some personal debate – agreed to help in whatever way that I can. Starting next week, I will be giving four groups of students one 2-hour workshop per week, for a total of five weeks.

June 4th: 26th day in Africa

Here I am, in the middle of my workday, just starting my third week at the centre, and my second week of computer instruction. About an hour and a half ago, I finished my lesson on keyboard operation and typing skills. I let the students know that, even though the lesson was over, they were welcome to stay on the computers and practice on the typing program.

After about an hour, they were all still here, diligently working away. Some good-natured complaints started to surface: 'I'm hungry.' 'I'm tired of pressing.' 'This clicking sound doesn't stop.' Taking this to mean that they wanted to leave, I reassured them that they

were allowed to take a break or leave whenever they wanted. This is a classroom, not a prison. A few of them chuckled, but no one budged from their chairs. When I prodded further, one student, Michael, piped up: “No, I don’t want to take breaks. I want to improve.”

And there it was. Coming from a North American education system, this absolutely floored me. When given the opportunity to learn - even to improve independently - the large majority of the students here are overwhelmingly resolute, and sometimes defiantly so. (I actually just had to force Michael to take a break, telling him that a few minute’s rest will improve his mental alertness and productivity).

Even though “Africa Time” (i.e., the relative laxness of deadlines, appointment times, and working hours that is often remarked by visiting ex-pats) is often perceived as laziness, this is a striking example of why this is not so. Quite the contrary, they are working harder and more diligently than any class than I can remember being a part of back in Canada. More refreshingly still, they are doing it for the very sake of learning and improving.

June 13th: 35th day in Africa

Perhaps one of my favourite parts about working where I do is the morning ritual that starts each and every day. Like (African) clockwork, at (more or less) 8:00 o’clock every morning, everyone at the centre – from the three instructors to the 40-something students – partakes in half an hour of ‘devotions.’ In other words, thirty minutes of singing, dancing, clapping, and good ol’ fashioned gospel hymns.

Never mind that I’m not a Protestant. Never mind that I don’t speak Setswana. Never mind that my dancing can be best characterized as “white-boy.” Talent and language really have nothing to do with it, and faith of all kinds is embraced unconditionally. And so, even though I don’t necessarily understand what I’m saying – and may not completely believe it even if I did – the energy is absolutely contagious.

There is no form and no structure. Rather, the hymns begin in a very ad hoc sort of way, with a series of stereotyped songs weaving into each other. Each one usually only consists of no more than a few lines or melodic phrases, that are layered and repeated in a call-and-response fashion. At some point the group collectively

decides that it’s over and, after a few seconds of uncertain silence, someone else bursts out into the first line of a new song. The singing and clapping erupt again.

May 14th: 4th day in Africa (Revisited)

An agreed-upon truth: “The world is screwed up.” Tersely put, but no less true. But while my co-interns and I grappled with the sinking anti-epiphany of the grotesqueness of the Big Picture, I was able to capture a fleeting hope which I had beforehand never really put to words.

While the world is big, and its problems are perhaps bigger, I can do nothing but accept that it – and its associated problems – manifests itself at the level of individuals. I am only one person, and I can process only so much: indeed, all I can see are these same individuals. It follows, then, that despite the seemingly insurmountable scope of our world, my world can only be processed as a segment of the whole. And, providing that I do my best to see as much of the great panorama as is humanly possible – to avoid putting the blinders on, so to speak – then all I can reasonably expect of myself is to deal with what’s in front of me.

But whereas some see in this view a narrowness, I see hope. Yes, in a moment of quiet contemplation, we all feel the enormity of the evils in our world; this weighs as heavily on me as it does on any other listless dreamer. But all that I can do, as an individual – as one segment of this great and hideous reality – is to ask myself, “What can I do?”

I can say, without hesitation, that I am here because I sincerely want to help. Awesome. But does the fact that I, in two month’s time, will get on a plane and fly back to a relatively affluent lifestyle undermine my intentions and my effort? A cynic may say yes. I, on the other hand, beg to differ. Even though, as some argue, my blessings have in many ways been by chance – simply the geography of fertility – I cannot change that. All I can deal with is what’s in front of me. If I accept my, at least initial – for lack of a better word – ‘good fortune’ as being determined by something beyond my control, then the matter at hand becomes only, “What can I do with it?”

Here’s to doing the absolute best I can with what I’ve got at any given point in time.