



ENDPOVERTYNOW

THE BACK TO SCHOOL ISSUE

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What's New at EPN

End Poverty Now is excited for the fall of 2009 as many new initiatives will begin. Not only will our chapter groups commence their work (warm thanks to McGill, Guelph and the University of British Columbia), but we will also be recruiting new staff and members. We encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and join the EPN team.

Email apply@endpovertynow.ca for information on the positions available for staff, writers, photographers, educators, event coordinators, overseas interns, and numerous other opportunities.

We are also proud to announce the launch of EPN's curriculum, "Your Classroom, Your World: Poverty 101". There are two curriculums in place for middle school and high school. These lesson plans engage youth on international issues, poverty alleviation techniques, and how your school can become involved in the global movement to End Poverty Now.

Email schooloutreach@endpovertynow.ca for more information.

EPN's first academic journal, "Means to an End," is also being launched for this September. It will be found at universities and libraries across Canada. For a copy or a more extensive list of its availability, email journal@endpovertynow.ca.

Stay tuned as there are many great things to come from EPN in the coming months in the areas of Education, Grassroots Projects and InReach. For more information, come to our general meeting in mid-September or contact us at any time.

Jennifer Sault
Executive Director

Our Mission

End Poverty Now is an organization that is dedicated to the long-term battle against abject poverty. End Poverty Now represents a group of dedicated individuals, mainly students, who want to make a difference in the world through working to address the causes and relieve the effects of poverty. For more information on how to get involved with End Poverty Now, check out our website at www.endpovertynow.ca.

To contribute to the production of the newsletter, e-mail

newsletter@endpovertynow.ca.



Poverty in the News by Valerie Bello

Here are some of the stories posted last month on our Poverty in the News website on Twitter at www.twitter.com/epnnews:

How the Other Half Life: A new “documentary series that aims to show what it means to grow up in poverty in 21st-century Britain. In each episode, a wealthy family decides to assist one that is living below the poverty line.” <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/how-the-other-half-live>

A critique of this new series can be found here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/aug/02/poverty-reality-tv>

UNDP: Poverty, Conflict Inhibit Arab Development: The latest “report by more than 100 intellectuals from Arab countries” argues that “poverty, unemployment, authoritarian rule and conflict are undermining freedoms and quality of life for people in the Middle East and North Africa”

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-07-31-voa42.cfm>

Poverty Sucks Clothing: A clothing company whose mission includes proving “the highest/best quality clothing and apparel products to our customers at the lowest prices possible while working to end poverty by supporting high impact grass root projects here in the U.S and around the world.” Note that “portions of all proceeds will be used in our mission to end poverty here in the U.S. and abroad, because.... Poverty Sucks!” <http://www.povertysucksclothing.com/>

Valerie Bello
Poverty in the News Officer
povertyinthenews@endpovertynow.ca

Help us be better!

If you are interested in contributing to the newsletter, weather you want to help us edit, research, write articles or how ever else you think you can help us, please let us know by writing to:
newsletter@endpovertynow.ca .

We would also be more than happy to hear your comments and suggestions!

THANK YOUs

This letter could not be possible without our wonderful staff and volunteers.

A special thank you goes to our writers for giving us amazing material and to our editors Nina McCurdy and Reem Javid.

Thank you for taking the time to help us!

Laura Nhem
Newsletter Officer
newsletter@endpovertynow.ca



From the Grassroots: Harvesting Hope in the Philippines

The Tribal People's Backyard Gardening Project

by Alysha Kassam, Director of Grassroots Projects

End Poverty Now is proud to partner with the International Association for Transformation (IAT) on the Tribal People's Backyard Gardening Project in Northern Philippines. The IAT is a Canadian non-profit organisation that works on environmental, social, and educational projects while collaborating with Indigenous peoples.



Tribal People's Backyard Gardening Project – Establishing a communal garden in early January

The Tribal People's Backyard Gardening Project is aimed at helping 21 families, made up of approximately 168 individuals across four villages. Due to a lack of fencing, one of the main challenges the villagers faced was roaming animals who were searching for food. These animals, such as pigs, dogs and chickens, damaged and defecated on the villagers' produce and crops. An additional challenge was the farmers' inability to cultivate the land to its full potential. The project was aimed at helping villagers address these problems, and began at the end of October in 2008. It is due to end in October of this year.

Throughout the program, community members and families have attended workshops and training sessions organised by an on-site community facilitator. During these sessions, villagers gained knowledge about backyard gardening and its

implications. Shovels and seeds were purchased, and land preparation began. A variety of seeds were sowed including beans, cabbage, eggplant, squash and tomato. The fences demarcate the gardens and fend off the animals from destroying the produce; therefore chain links for fences were acquired. The fences do not need much maintenance, and more importantly, they protect the produce from the invaders.

For its implementation, the Backyard Gardening Project relied principally on beneficiaries at the grassroots level. Beneficiaries also received training on how to manage and save their earnings in addition to the establishment of a savings and loan group. Harvesting began late last year, in December, and by March 2009, savings had already been accumulated. Gardens and vegetable plots are tended to by the families, working according to different shifts. The families have also built specific enclosures for the pigs and dogs to prevent them from damaging the agricultural yields.

The advantages and benefits of this development project are manifold relating to health, nutrition and sanitation. Firstly, the inhabitants have access to fresh produce and are able to provide healthy food for their families. This also has benefits for their health, particularly the children's, since their diets are composed of nutritious food and are hence able to fight diseases and infections. They no longer have to scavenge or starve, nor worry about a food source. Excess crop also serves as income generation for the families, which helps improve families' economic condition and stimulates the local economy. Additionally, sanitation is improved since animals no longer have access to the vegetable gardens. With this project, other villagers are encouraged and can be inspired to undertake similar initiatives by preparing and fencing their plot of land and growing their own food.

The photographs are but a glimpse of the actual progress, however the positive results that have been achieved are felt locally and abroad. The seeds being harvested are not only providing nutritious crops, but are bringing change and a new beginning for a healthy future.





EPN School Outreach

by Andreas Mertens, EPN's School Outreach Officer

EPN School Outreach is dedicated to creating and promoting materials in order to educate secondary school students on poverty as it is today. Hopefully the information and lesson plans we provide will lead some of them to alleviate poverty, if not work directly with EPN. It is our hope that some of them may even start high school chapters. Last fall, we worked to create two series of lesson plans for two distinct grade levels based on the research that was conducted the year before. Since then, we have promoted these lessons by approaching student teachers, public and private schools, and school boards.

Aalia Surani, the School Outreach Officer at **University of British Columbia (UBC)**, has promoted the lessons in many schools in the area. York House, an all girls, K-12 school has agreed to use our curriculum in all of their 6th grade Social Studies classes starting this school year. EPN will also be making a presentation about the curriculum at the school's International Opportunities Fair in October. Furthermore, the school is interested in working directly with UBC's EPN chapter to volunteer within the community and learn more about our organization.

Andreas Mertens, McGill chapter's School Outreach Officer, is currently working with David LeMay, the History and Citizenship Curriculum Adviser for the English Montreal School Board (**EMSB**), to create a proposal that, if accepted, would make EPN a resource in the EMSB's 11th grade Contemporary World Class. EPN's articles and research would be used by students in at least five lessons. We could promote these five school board developed and approved lessons independently of the Contemporary World class. The students would also begin to know EPN and may use our site to conduct further research, allowing them to become acquainted with our organization and the many ways they can be a part of it. We would also be recognized at the annual conference that discusses the Contemporary World class at Concordia next May. This would make our name and work known to thousands of professors, school administrators, and teachers.

School Outreach will continue to promote the existing lesson plans in the most effective ways possible, provide ideal, age-appropriate articles and research to classes that need them, and promote poverty awareness among secondary school students. EPN is in a rare position to serve as both an understandable and comprehensive resource and a role model for students. By using and promoting EPN's resources, we can help students become more aware and conscientious citizens of the world.

Quantity Versus Quality – Where Microfinance Is Now

by David Rozon

Once thought to be a sure-fire solution, microfinance has now been bombarded by critics. Some even accuse microfinance of being complicit with large business interests, thereby sustaining poverty instead of diminishing it. So, what happened?

By now, microfinance has permeated our daily vocabulary. For myself, it essentially means small loan banking, an admirable but simple concept. Some historians have encompassed microfinance within the history of farming co-ops that were established among peasant communities, an economic trend that was quite popular in 19th century rural Germany. Indeed, microfinance is difficult to define, and I think it is the equivocation developing around it that fuels much of the criticism against it (especially when one sees the microfinance hype is nonetheless matched by a global increase in poverty). Opinions are definitely clashing among scholars and economic theorists. For some, microfinance was an inevitable outcome, not a solution to anything, but a natural, evolutionary process in economics. Others see microfinance as a resistance to an imperious, unmerciful banking system. Conversely, some find that microfinance has created ennobled enterprises, which are, nevertheless, succumbing to the same profit turmoil any financial institution faces and, consequently, cannot provide adequate help to the extremely poor. Despite the varying perspectives, trying to understand microfinance's impact on poverty can not only elucidate many aspects of economics, but also human relations, current trends in thinking, and, most importantly, poverty – how it is engendered and why it seems impossible at times to reduce.



Quantity Versus Quality – Where Microfinance Is Now (continuation)

Microfinance originated in India during the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, when a professor, Muhammed Yunus (who won the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize, specifically for his work in microfinance), lent a woman roughly \$27 US to make bamboo furniture. The humble gesture continued on to form the Grameen Bank, which specializes in small loans to the poor and unemployed in order to promote small entrepreneurs. Currently, the Grameen Bank boasts to have lent over US \$5 billion to over 5 million people, 97% of which are women. Women are singled out as the desired microfinance client for a number of reasons, but mainly because they perform over 70% of the world's labour but often remain the poorest. As a result, microfinance institutions (MFIs) endeavouring to replicate Yunus's example have spread across the globe. Yet, despite the growth and praise surrounding microfinance, some remain sceptical. The primary root of criticism is profit – how can MFIs legitimately combat poverty and remain economically sustainable enterprises? Another concern is that even if MFIs can reach the poorest families, what difference does it make if the quality of their lives improves very little or hardly at all? Every MFI is different, according to region and administration. Nevertheless, it is the ratio between small loans to impoverished families and much heftier loans to large businesses that have created controversy. For example, MFIs typically measure efficiency by the dollar amount of successfully repaid loans. That means while maybe only 30% of an MFIs clients represent big business – large loans that are invariably paid off – and 70% of their loans are small and paid back in full only intermittently, because their business is measured in dollars it appears as though microfinance lending works. As some would say, however, it remains only an appearance.

Sam Daley Harris, who works in microfinance and is organizing its upcoming convention in London, is seeking to address the quantity versus quality problem by trying to shift the focus from merely poverty, to poverty and social development. He writes: "I do believe that MFIs should find cost-effective ways to measure social progress in order to create a sense of accountability and set performance standards. Just as any credible MFI would track its financial health[,] it should also track the social progress of its clients if poverty reduction is one of its stated objectives." The immediate action required for Harris is reaching the poorest of the poor. Commonly, MFIs only lend to the upper echelons of the poor in order to secure the probability of repayment. However, Harris has already successfully lobbied in the US to create legislation requiring half of the US Agency for International Development to ensure its microfinance resources are directed to families living on less than US\$1 a day.

Unfortunately, despite changing the law, little change has been enacted, suggesting that more regulation and accountability is required. In fact, some have pointed out that microfinance is merely easing the pressure off governments to diminish poverty by reducing public programs. However, if the microfinance community follows Harris's lead, microfinance could bolster social programs and governmental accountability by setting legislative standards. But, it has to work both ways, with congruent regulation working at both ends between governments and financial institutions. As Yana Watson has argued, "one cannot escape the reality that today's microfinance is more closely tied to the international capital markets..." To ensure efficiency and effectiveness, one solution put forth by Watson is to consolidate MFIs in the same region, which is actually in the spirit of microfinance (often individual loans are given based on collaborative debt obligations, meaning a community of women share the responsibility of all individual loans). Consolidation has many possible benefits such as the creation of regionally sustainable standards, effective regulation methods, and economic security for both the institution and the borrowers.

As microfinance continues to grow, different trajectories present themselves. So far, I can see two trends: one, MFIs buckle under the pressure of sustaining their business and redirect their focus to large businesses, while maintaining small loans to keep the image of a financial institution that tries to combat poverty (sound familiar?). And two, MFIs explore ways to balance quantity and quality; they collaborate with each other and governments in order to effectuate real social change in a way that is mutually beneficial for all parties – the financial institution, government, and community. It always seems to me there is a tendency to denigrate what seems to be *the* solution. Above all else, when it comes to poverty, criticism abounds when commendations are shouted out amidst enduring hunger and deprivation (and rightfully so). That being said, microfinance may not have ended poverty (I suspect Yunus's initial intentions with his first loan to a poor woman were not global but personal), however it presents much opportunity in the way of reducing poverty and ameliorating the quality of life for many. Instead of seeing microfinance as the lone saviour that failed to be, we should see it for what it is – a current economic tendency in response to a deplorable condition that requires more public as well as private support and regulation in order for it to have a significant impact.

Sources:

Harris, Sam Daley. "Mission (Im)possible: Can Microfinance Really Change the Lives of the Masses?" *Microfinance Insights* Volume 12 (May/June), 2009.

Watson, Yana. "From Crisis to Catharsis: How Microfinance Can Make it Through the Global Recession." *Microfinance Insights* Volume 11 (March/April), 2009.



Featured organization: the Drop-in Centre, Calgary

by Maxime Rejouis

Since February 2005, the Drop-in Centre in Calgary has been offering the Career Training Initiative (CTI) program. In creating the CTI, the centre's aim was to fill a gap in training programs offered to homeless and low-income earners. It started when Bruno Gagne saw that people needed more than just a certificate to succeed within society. According to CTI Program Coordinator Jason McKay, "Bruno Gagne felt there was a need for a more holistic approach towards employment preparation." With this in mind, Gagne and McKay sought advice and funding, and two years later the CTI program was started. Four and a half years later the program is still running and is set to grow.

The program, which offers computer training, also touches and teaches about money management, employment issues, and finding balance with yourself and society. The aim of the program and the classes they offer is to get low-income earners out of the system and become self-sufficient. At three weeks in length they cover a lot of topics, and some of the life skills don't get covered in great detail. The intake for this program is a maximum of 12 students a month; selection is based on a need for the program.



Jason McKay
CTI Program Coordinator

Despite what may at first glance seem like a small offering, when considering the challenges of homelessness and poverty, they have a good success rate with two thirds of graduates continuing on to employment or further education. McKay states, "I believe we're looking at about 50% of our graduates moving out of the shelter system...and obtaining their own (housing)."

Due to this success, there are plans to expand the program. According to McKay, "It would be nice if we could expand our extended hours, we'd like to be able to run it every evening. Develop it more as a curriculum program and not just certification. Expanding on the life skills course we offer and add more certifications to it. We have three volunteers for computer instructors, and we recently got another volunteer whose going to be doing an employment strategies workshop...and if we get the extended hours program working successfully we'd really like to get the volunteers working for that. With only four staff that really puts a time limit on how often we can be in here."

The Career Training Initiative program has a total of 697 graduates to date. It is tackling an ever-rising need not only in the homeless community but also in society for more qualified workers. The fight to end homelessness and poverty is far from over. It must however always continue, and with the aid of programs like CIT it can be won.

For more information you can contact the Calgary Drop in Centre:

Riverfront Avenue (Main Building)

423 - 4th Avenue SE
Calgary, Alberta T2G 0C8
Second Floor: (403) 266 - 3600
Administration: (403) 263 - 5707
Fax: (403) 234-0677
Email: info@thedi.ca

The Career Training Initiative

Phone: (403) 699-8282
Email: cti@thedi.ca



When Money Grows on Trees, Maybe It's Not a Good

Thing

By Nick Bond

Has the economic benefit of global cash crops been outweighed by the social, political and cultural cost it incurs?

As a species, humans have come a long way in a very short period of time. Our booming progress, especially since the end of the 17th century, has been truly astonishing. In roughly 300 years, we've gone from the wooden ship to the rocket ship. If a man in the 1700s was lucky enough to make it past 21, he had a real possibility of making it to the ripe old age of 40. If he managed to evade the Black Plague, that is.

Today, the life expectancy of Canadians is around 80 years old (a little higher for females, a little lower for males). Humans have been around for roughly 60,000 years. In a time span equivalent to 0.5% of our time on Earth, we have managed to double our life expectancy. What changed?

For starters, there was the European agricultural revolution. The progress made in food production during this time meant that starvation was no longer a primary threat to life in the Western world. Since sustenance was no longer a concern, human ingenuity could be put towards things like health care, social programs, science, and art.

The agricultural revolution was a significant turning point in human history, but agriculture has now been completely twisted by the need for excess and a lack of visionary thinking. Countries are now being taken advantage of so that Westerners can choose which side dish goes best with our glass of Chardonnay. With our insatiable appetite for instant gratification and choice, we have accepted that the geographical, social, and cultural identities of entire countries are unfortunate but necessary victims of human progress. Do we really need eight different types of oranges to choose from at the supermarket?

Consider the following taken from Bill McKibben's extraordinary book, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*:

*"Agricultural super-giant Cargill controls 40% of the world's grain trade.
Five companies control 75% of the world's vegetable seed operations.
Four firms control 85% of the world's coffee roasting."*

At the end of the day, countries - especially developing nations - are not free to decide how to feed themselves. The extent to which a country is free at all when it is not even permitted to make its own dietary choices is a significant issue. In the face of significant economic and political pressure to join the global community, farmers in most regions have to operate based on the demands of the aforementioned multinational food conglomerates, which in turn operate based on the demands of their customers, or in other words, us. In order to remain price competitive, food producing regions are given little choice but to build the biggest farms possible, using as much fertilizer and genetic seed material as their land can handle. Though the problems and risks associated with giant monoculture cash crops are well documented, the economic viability of many regions depends on them. It's the price they pay to play in today's global economic community.



When Money Grows on Trees, Maybe It's Not a Good Thing (continuation)

However, the destruction of the environment, agricultural jobs, and personal freedom has not gone unnoticed by food producers. Enter today's food sovereignty movement. Introduced in 1996 by La Via Campesina, an international peasant movement, this concept rests on the notion that people in a given region should have the absolute right to determine "what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced." Specifically, food sovereignty is defined by La Via Campesina as:

"...an individual or community's right to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food, and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies."

Simply put, food is a basic human right, as defined in the UN's 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As such, no outside company, organization, or group should have the power to grant or take that right away.

Why are people in Tanzania starving to death as plane-loads of Tanzanian fish (Nile perch from Lake Victoria) are being exported to Europe? Why are the people of Borneo choosing to burn their rainforests so they can plant palm, the oils of which are being used by the West to create bio-fuels and beauty products? Do the people of Borneo really want to destroy their environment and their culture so we can drive guilt-free and have flawless skin? Doubtful. More likely is that they are left with little economic choice.

While it's easy to point our collective finger at the multinational companies for this, a share of the blame belongs to us. If we did not expect a plethora of cheap foods to be available year-round and in massive quantities, maybe this problem wouldn't exist.

As the consciousness-greed pendulum starts to swing back towards consciousness, the food sovereignty movement is there to provide a very useful framework for how we can move forward as a species using more sustainable local food sources, rather than enormous global ones. It shows us how we can develop strong communities from the economically vulnerable ones our global agricultural system has created. The six key elements of food sovereignty are that it:

Focuses on food for people;
Values food providers;
Localizes food systems;
Makes decisions locally;
Builds knowledge and skills; and,
Works with nature.

Within each of these elements exist multiple layers of policies and roadmaps regarding how to successfully achieve each objective. For example, in terms of making decisions locally, food sovereignty encourages that "populations actively take part in their community's agricultural policy choices." Localizing decisions does not imply that this is a system which exists to abolish the global food trade, but it does aim to make it fair.

The food crisis in 2008 underscores the need for such change. At the core of the worldwide food rioting in many countries such as Haiti, Cameroon, Bangladesh, and Egypt, has been an unprecedented rise in food prices – the World Bank reports that global food prices have increased by 83% in the last three years alone. This, however, has nothing to do with the quantity of food available. It has everything to do with food distribution and our priorities. According to a statistic on *globalissues.org*, "80% of the world's food production is consumed by the wealthiest 20% of the world." As long as our priority is to provide the richest countries in the world with such unbalanced access to food at the expense of developing nations, things will not improve. But there are signs of progress.



When Money Grows on Trees, Maybe It's Not a Good Thing (continuation)

Many developing countries are beginning to actively take a stand against the current system and are looking to enshrine food sovereignty into law. Nepal, Mali, Senegal, Venezuela, and Bolivia have all included food sovereignty in their constitutions or sectoral development plans. Though successfully achieving food sovereignty will take a lot more than words in law, it is a strong step in the right direction.

It is important that we recognize that some economic and social experiments work, and others don't. It's how we learn from our mistakes and adapt that will ultimately make us successful. The commoditization of food to the degree we have is not working, and while the system may not need a total overhaul, it does need a serious adjustment.

In our efforts to make the world a better place, we need to consider that our eating habits cause as much environmental damage, cultural degradation, political strife, and economic vulnerability as any of the usual suspects, including big oil. By thinking more local, by reading up on and contributing to movements such as food sovereignty, we can begin to make a significant difference for everybody. Perhaps being a truly good global citizen means, first and foremost, being a committed local citizen.

Please email the writer if you have any comments, good or bad, on this article:
nick-bond@hotmail.com

Book and Movie Suggestion(s)

Book: Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future
Bill McKibben, 2007

Written by preeminent American author and environmentalist Bill McKibben, this book provides a compelling argument for the need to shift our economic and social focus from the current global perspective towards local communities. Not just another anti-globalization book, McKibben goes out of his way to provide a useful framework for how our economies and societies could be improved with a more local perspective, and how it would positively impact life not only for the richer western countries, but for developing nations as well. Extremely well researched and engaging to read, this book forces the reader to reconsider "growth" as our main economic goal and evolve towards a more fulfilling life of investing and believing in the strength of communities.

Suggested by: Nick Bond

Movie SuggestionS: School year is almost here, which means it's a whole new year for Cinema Politica!

Cinema Politica is a non-profit media arts project that showcases documentaries and political films on campuses across the globe, though mostly across Canada. These are then followed by a discussion with a guest speaker. The project also emphasizes on supporting independent Canadian films within their network. The organization is based in Montreal Quebec, and is run solely by volunteers.

And guess what? It's free! However, we suggest that you make a donation to support the organization. Your funds will go towards helping them program, promote and support those independent Canadian films, as well as assist them in several other ways. To learn more about Cinema Politica, to see the screening schedules, or to simply see a list of documentaries that may interest you, or to even submit your own film, please visit their website at www.cinemapolitica.org.

Our Book and Movie Suggestion section, YOU CAN HELP!

Have you read a book or seen a movie or documentary that talks about a poverty related issue and want to recommend it? Anyone can send us a there suggestions with a short description of what it's about! You can email it to us at newsletter@endpovertynow.ca.

Don't forget to include the title, the name of the author, director and/or producer and the year it was released. Also, please let us know if you want us to include your name!