

Eradicating Poverty – Leaving no one behind

Submitted by: International Committee for Peace and Reconciliation (ICPR)
NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations

Poverty may be understood as a condition in which a person or community is lacking the basic need for minimum standard of well-being particularly as a result of persistent lack of income. A person can be pushed into that state of poverty by external circumstances. In that context a person is an innocent victim of the situation. Poverty is a pronounced deprivation in well-being and has many manifestations which include hunger, malnutrition, inadequate access to education, unhealthy living conditions, inadequate physical security, lack of participation in social activities. A person who has to struggle all the time for physical survival cannot invest any additional time to achieve higher qualities of life. Poverty then becomes a function of diminished capability of people to live the kinds of life they aspire for.

The economic aspect of poverty focuses on material needs and can be put into three categories: extreme, moderate and relative. Absolute poverty refers to a condition which is consistent over time and among countries. The World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than US \$1.25 per day per person. Moderate poverty is the state in which one can survive by meeting the basic need for the minimum standard of well-being but cannot meet the other aspects of life adequately. Relative poverty is viewed on social context and is a measure of economic distance between two individuals in a chosen domain. This is an indication of inequalities rather than material deprivation or hardship.

It is often argued that world has enough resources to lift all women and men up from extreme poverty. Yet, extreme poverty persists. One oft quoted explanation is that there is no agreed upon mechanism to distribute resources to the deserving needy. Uncontrolled population growth is diminishing the resources by making poverty a fate accompli for many.

Luckily, there is awareness in a section of people that the eradication of poverty is beneficial for all otherwise, poverty like a contagious disease will also bring the rich down. But if the poor remain silent and wait for the rich to call for justice they will have to wait and transmit their hope to the next generation and the poverty cycle will continue as Voltaire noted, "The comfort of the rich depends upon an abundant supply of the poor".

Even though poverty is a curse upon the human society its effect on the society is not always sex independent. Because of existing social structures, physical capabilities and mental aptitudes poverty affects men and women disproportionately.

Therefore, in the quest for finding how to reduce poverty the issue must be addressed in terms of men and women because of the women's unique and unequal position in the existing society.

One of the many causes of poverty one is forced migration.

Of the more than 50 million refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the world, 80 percent are women and children. For IDPs the average length of displacement is seventeen (17) years. Given these statistics, it is critical to listen to the priorities of women and girls

affected by forced displacement and migration. Women's health issue is an important factor to fight against poverty. An unhealthy poor mother gives birth to an unhealthy poor baby, and if not taken care of at the beginning he/she will only be a part of the statistics of the poor people. Therefore, the empowerment of women in the decision making process to reduce is a very important component. Women must be included in all decision making processes which affect the well-being of all members of the society. It is encouraging to note that women's empowerment is slowly getting recognized in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) . Microcredit and women's savings groups aim both to reduce income poverty and contribute to women's empowerment.

Yet, there is another side of the picture. Given the opportunities some poor both men and women will not take advantage of all the available opportunities to reduce poverty with the expectation that other will take care of them. This type of self-inflicted poverty is a disease and if there is no immediate cure for this disease, affected people shall be put under quarantine so that disease cannot spread.

There is another face of poverty. Some rich people give up material wealth and embrace poverty to help poor and elevate the downtrodden. These types of people are not liability of the society rather they are the asset.

Shocking, as it may sound, based on the finding of Walk Free Foundation, slavery is no longer a bygone issue. More than 45 million people around the world are enslaved and they earn 45 billion dollars for their masters. Economic slavery is slowly engulfing the society. According to recent Oxfam Report 1% now own more than the wealth of the rest 99% of the population and control the economic destiny of the rest of the world. Social injustice, slavery, environmental destruction, wars, poverty, economic disasters are all caused by human beings. So, they can also be prevented by the efforts of human beings.

Further, on the basis of the available statistics almost 21 million people are victims of forced labor 11.4 million women and girls and 9.5 million men and boys.

The poverty eradication program can only work if the poor can be motivated to play their due role. If a poor person ignores all the calls for liberation and is determined to live inside a prison of poverty she and he can never be liberated even if the walls of the prison are demolished.

A society where people live without fear, where peace and justice prevail, where there is no exploitation of the poor and the downtrodden by the rich and powerful, where knowledge is easily available, is a distant possibility. In the meantime a wakeup call should be given to all to march forward. Those who will not respond will be left behind.