Affirmative Case: Poverty

There’s a disturbing video on YouTube in which poverty-stricken African refugees look into the camera and describe the horrifying beatings and indignities they suffered. One woman says:

“My husband was struggling with two men, and I was with another. I just had one piece of clothing tied around me. They took me to the middle of the road and tied my hands with a rubber cord. My children ran to me but the wildlife officers drove them away. As we were going along the road, they threw me to the ground onto my stomach.”

She describes how they took her to a checkpoint, filed papers that criminalized her, and cut her hand with a machete.

“If I see them come through here like they did that time,” she says, “I’d hate it so strongly in my heart. They should go away. They shouldn’t come here amongst us.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

These cruel men weren’t Hutus mid-genocide. They were government anti-poaching squads, working to protect the endangered gorillas who lived in the forest.

When we’re beating the poor and tearing families apart to protect animals, our priorities need help. I hope you’ll vote to give the survivors hope by standing with me, “*Resolved: Developing countries ought to prioritize economic growth over environmental protection.”*

Let’s start with an

# Anti-Value: Poverty

An anti-value is just like a normal value, with one simple difference. We want to avoid it, meaning the less you uphold it, the better. I’m arguing that you should measure economic growth and environmental protection based on which one best reduces poverty.

Here’s why this is the best way to measure the round:

## Value Link: Top Priority

Human suffering is an easy thing to forget here in America. Standing in line for a grande frappuccino, the last thing on our minds is that more than one of every five humans is living in extreme poverty, according to Gallup data.[[2]](#footnote-3) That’s a dollar and twenty-five cents or less per day—for water, food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and anything else they need.

With poverty that rampant, no other consideration really matters. Developing countries need to focus on ending poverty as soon as possible and not a moment later.

## Application: Child Starvation.

Picture 18,000 children. That’s enough children to fill half a baseball stadium, a vast amount of vibrant life and potential. Today, 18,000 children will starve to death, according to the United Nations.[[3]](#footnote-4)

I repeat: 18,000 children will starve to death today. Tomorrow, that will happen again. That’s one every 5 seconds.[[4]](#footnote-5) The tragedy is absolutely staggering.

It is quite evident that help is desperately needed. We have to stop poverty now. Every day that we wait, more children die.

# Contention 1: Economic Growth Reduces Poverty

This seems almost like a truism. Of course economic growth reduces poverty! I won’t belabor the point, but I do want to make sure we’re on the same page with this.

It’s impossible for an economy to grow in a perfectly equitable fashion. Some people get a lot richer, some only get a little richer. But even the smallest ships rise with the tide. Developing a strong, stable economy is critical to addressing poverty.

According to a 2001 International Monetary Fund report:

“Generally, poverty cannot be reduced if economic growth does not occur.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

Again, uplifting a country uplifts everyone in that country.

A 2003 World Bank policy research working paper said that every percentage point of economic growth yields about two-and-a-half points of poverty alleviation:

“He finds that growth represents an important means for reducing poverty in the developing world. When economic growth is measured by survey mean income (consumption), there is a strong, statistical link between growth and poverty reduction.”

The next paragraph continues:

“Economic growth reduces poverty because growth has little impact on income inequality. In the data set income inequality rises on average less than 1.0 percent a year. Since some income distributions are relatively stable over time, economic growth tends to raise incomes for all members of society, including the poor. When growth is measured by survey mean income (consumption), the elasticity of poverty with respect to growth is -2.59. In other words, on average, a 10 percentage point increase in economic growth (measured by survey mean income) will produce a 25.9 percent decrease in the proportion of people living in poverty ($1 a person a day).”[[6]](#footnote-7)

The statistics are unambiguous. The more an economy grows, the less people are in danger of starvation.

# Contention 2: Environmental Protection Exacerbates Poverty

Of course we all want the environment to be green and pristine, but that takes a back seat when you consider that a child that was alive when I started this sentence just starved to death. Environmental protection doesn’t put food on the table, or buy life-saving medicine, or put a roof up to keep out the rain and mosquitoes. It’s a luxury issue.

Fred Pearce is a global environmental author and consultant. He has written 15 books about environmental and development issues. I quote from his 2011 article in *Conservation Magazine*:

“Despite the promises of conservationists that they can deliver green sustainable development, around the world extreme rural poverty continues to show a disturbing correlation with the richest biodiversity hotspots. Natural riches, however well protected, do not translate into better lives for the most vulnerable. Indeed, often those who live closest to nature seem to gain the least from its protection.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

Overvaluing environmental protection seriously hurts the poor. Here’s an example.

## Application: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Bwindi is a beautiful national park in southern Uganda. Today, the only people in the rainforest are tourists on safari, who pay hundreds of dollars for a guided tour to see the gorillas. But not too long ago, Bwindi Forest was the home of communities of ‘pygmies’ who had thousands of years of tradition and identity in the forest.

When conservationists convinced the government to turn Bwindi into a national park, the pygmies were driven out at machine-gun point. One pygmy man said:

“Since we were expelled from our lands, death is following us. We bury people nearly every day. The village is becoming empty. We are heading towards extinction. Now all the old people have died. Our culture is dying too.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

John Makombo is a park warden for the Uganda Wildlife Authority and a renowned conservationist. Speaking of the human beings he helped displace, he said:

“Their conditions of living are not our responsibility. Questions of poverty are not our responsibility.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

I disagree with Mr. Makombo. I think people are more important than gorillas. If you agree with me on this life-and-death issue, I hope you’ll vote for this resolution. Thank you.

1. Unnamed woman, “Baka plead for an end to abuse in the name of conservation,” Survival International, YouTube video uploaded October 27, 2015. <https://youtu.be/7qaEx_llBsQ> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Glenn Phelps and Steve Crabtree, “More Than One in Five Worldwide Living in Extreme Poverty,” Gallup, December 23, 2013 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166565/one-five-worldwide-living-extreme-poverty.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “About 18,000 children die every day because of hunger and malnutrition, and 850 million people go to bed every night with empty stomachs, a "terrible indictment of the world in 2007," the head of the U.N. food agency said.” Associated Press, “Hunger is on the rise, U.N. official says” Los Angeles Times, February 18, 2007. <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/18/world/fg-hunger18> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. 18,000 per day / 24 hours / 60 minutes = 12.5 dead per minute, or one every 4.8 seconds. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Mahmood Hasan Khan, “Rural Poverty in Developing Countries: Implications for Public Policy” International Monetary Fund, March 2001 <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/issues/issues26/index.htm> Mahmood Hasan Khan is a professor of Economics at Simon Fraser University. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Richard H. Adams, Jr, “Economic Growth, Inequality, and Poverty: Findings from a New Data Set,” The World Bank, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, February 2003. <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/03/22/000094946_03030704153293/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Fred Pearce, “Conservation and Poverty Reduction,” Conservation Magazine, March 3, 2011. <http://conservationmagazine.org/2011/03/conservation-and-poverty/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Mutwa man from Kalehe, DRC, “The ‘Pygmies’”, Survival International, Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/pygmies> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. John Makombo, “The ‘Pygmies’”, Survival International, Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/pygmies> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)