

*Rick Steves*  
**HUNGER**  
**AND HOPE**

**Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala**







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## Living off the Dump

There was a sweetness in the hot Guatemala City air—like something was rotting. Vultures circled overhead, scouting for dinner. Walking through the neglected graveyard—over the broken concrete, shards of glass, and rusty bits of scrap metal—I was thankful I had my high-top leather boots. My guide, Fito, said, “Wait here,” while he peeked around the lanes of this necropolis to be sure no thieves were lurking in the shadows, awaiting some naive and vulnerable tourist. Then he motioned for me to follow him to the bluff.

There, across a moat-like canyon, we spied a desperate world. Stretching before us were a thousand humans scavenging a vast dump. As trucks spilled their refuse, people scrambled to sort through anything that could be of value. Some specialized in cardboard (100 pounds gets you 50 cents) or plastic (100 pounds nets \$3), while others gathered glass. Fito said that various metals had been most in demand, but just that month China had stopped buying, causing the value to drop in half.

A steady parade of trucks lumbered in and out of the dump. Professional recyclers clung to their running boards and tailgates as they made their daily commute to and from work. They compete for this job. On a good day, a strong scavenger can make \$4 or even \$5.

Fito, a former gang member, recalled how he’d spent years in that dump. “On a good day, you’d make a few dollars. On a bad day...you’d go home bloody.” Lifting up his scarred hand for me to touch, he said, “You could tell a dump worker by this. You smelled like trash. Even when you changed your clothes and bathed, you still smelled like garbage. At school, people treated you like garbage. You were known as a scavenger.”

Not wanting to linger here—as it wasn’t all that safe—we retreated to our awaiting van. Driving through the vast cemetery, it hit me how this necropolis was a metaphor for the daily reality of the living: Everyone has their place. Some tombs, owned by oligarchs, towered like pyramids—monuments to a wealthy man’s ego. Many more were just rented niches in a wall. And, of course, the reality for most was the boneyard: a mass burial site for the anonymous remains of the forgotten poor. When traveling in countries like Guatemala, I find myself thinking a lot about the gap between rich and poor. Passing one oligarch’s grandiose memorial, I pondered how that gap follows you even into death.

Safely buckled into the van, I sipped the latte I had picked up in a nearby gated community. It occurred to me that my drink cost me about what a strong scavenger would hope to make on a good day. It also struck me that the scavengers I had just seen were the children of the people I saw scavenging in the same dump on a visit 30 years ago. Nothing had changed...except that I was much richer.



# Making a Public Television Special about Hunger and Hope

I've been fascinated with the structural roots of poverty since I first stood on that bluff half a lifetime ago. Over the years, I've made several trips to developing countries specifically to learn about why, in a world of such abundance, people go hungry.

It's clear that there's enough food in every country to feed the people in that country. Hunger is a simple matter of buying power. If Juan's cat has more buying power than María's child, Juan's cat gets the tuna. Much of the poverty keeping people down is structural: Trade policies can keep underdeveloped countries underdeveloped. And local conditions, seemingly by design, can keep people within those countries poor.

I'm privileged in so many ways. I live in a rich and highly developed country. If I'm hungry, I go to the supermarket. If I need water, I turn on the faucet. When I'm sick, I go to the doctor. And my children enjoyed a fine education. Meanwhile, almost a billion people get none of that. It's like we live on two different planets. And it's so easy for privileged people—people like me—to ignore this reality.

As a travel writer, it's my challenge to be honest about this reality, and to share it with people back home. That's why, in 2019, I set out to make a TV special that would distill into one hour the most important lessons in the fight against global hunger. I sought to answer some difficult questions: What does extreme poverty look like? What's causing it? What's working in the fight to end it? How has development aid become smarter and more effective? And why is investing in the fight to end hunger a good and practical investment?

According to the World Bank, of the over 7 billion people on our planet, about half are struggling to live on under \$5 a day. And roughly 700 million live in what experts call "extreme poverty"—trying to make it on under \$2 a day. Again, the latte I enjoy every morning costs me a day's wages in the countries where the beans were grown. It's not a guilt trip. I'm not wrong to be wealthy; but I believe I'm wrong to be oblivious. And I'm right to help work for economic justice and fairness.

There are big and positive changes going on in the world's poorest corners. Just in the last generation, we've made dramatic progress in the fight against hunger. Since 1990, the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped by more than half, from 2 billion to less than 1 billion (according to World Bank figures). We are on a trajectory to end extreme poverty in our lifetime.

My goal was to travel to the Global South (a term used to describe low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia) not as a tourist, but as a student. I wanted to use one country in each hemisphere as my classroom: Ethiopia and Guatemala. In each place, I'd learn about inspiring ways that today's smart development work—often made possible by foreign aid—is having a big impact. I'd show how, by mixing new thinking, new technology, and the hard work of locals, development makes our world both less hungry and more stable.

A one-hour special about global hunger is not a recipe for a big TV hit. But for viewers who watch public television to broaden their perspectives and learn about our world, this content would be worthwhile and timely—and I was determined to make it compelling and substantial. Rather than focusing on runny-nosed kids with spindly limbs and distended bellies, I wanted to offer hope: bright-eyed children whose improved lives are the result of smart development work. And, rather than share a kumbaya hour for people inclined to love their neighbor, I wanted to frame the information in a way that would inspire pragmatic capitalists who are motivated more by national security and opening up markets than by the Golden Rule.

Tackling—and beating—extreme poverty is a realistic goal. To show how, I needed help. So I made a point to huddle with hard realists and the smartest people in today's world of development aid. With the organizational support of the United Nations World Food Program, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), I put together my plan. I traveled to Ethiopia and Guatemala for three weeks to scout, then came back six months later with my TV crew to film the special. And in early 2020, public television stations across the country aired *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala*.

This book is a companion piece to the TV special. It shares many of the same lessons, but with more depth and many things I learned that couldn't fit into the show. My goal for both is the same: To help my fellow privileged Americans better understand the plight of hungry people around our globe, and to see how smart development aid can be a good investment. Because when I travel in the developing world, I find hunger...and I also find hope.

*A one-hour TV script is limited to 6,000 words. With this report, I have the luxury of three times that verbiage to share the lessons I learned that couldn't fit into the show.*





# Ethiopia: From Skyscrapers to Thatched Huts

My film crew and I sat down at a dusty roadside restaurant in Tigray (in northern Ethiopia), and our lunch hit the table immediately. I didn't see a menu. It was just "lunch": the standard meal of injera, a spongy sourdough flatbread made of teff (the staple grain of Ethiopia since ancient times) with a variety of stews and salads atop it. The injera functions as the bread, the eating utensil (you rip off a piece and grab other food with it), and the plate—all at the same time. When the stews and salads are gone, you get to eat the injera—so tasty with all the juices and flavors soaked into it. Watching six hungry hands descend on the spread and gobble every bit of it up, it occurred to me that in Ethiopia, you do more than "clean your plate"—you eat it.

We had chosen Ethiopia as our African classroom for our *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* special. With vibrant and unforgettable images—both epic landscapes and eye-catching close-ups (like that roadside injera feast)—it's made-to-order for vivid TV.

Ethiopia, with a rich and ancient heritage, is proud of its status as an African country that was never a European colony. It's a country of many ethnic groups, some of the oldest Christian churches anywhere, a world-renowned coffee tradition, and dramatic natural beauty. Ethiopia has just over 100 million people and only 700,000 cars. According to the World Bank, the average per capita income is less than \$1,000, but its GDP is growing at about 10 percent a year. Over the

last generation, the fertility rate has dropped from seven children per mother to four. While Ethiopia has long struggled with poverty and famine, it's making great strides. In 2000, Ethiopia had one of most dysfunctional economies in world, but after 20 years of steady growth, it's a model of hope.

Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa—with over 3 million people—is emblematic of a developing world that is becoming more and more urban. A tale of two cities, it has its high-rises, efficient mass transit, and the headquarters of the African Union on one hand, and chaotic market scenes and teeming slums on the other.

Big cities like Addis are a seductive draw for young people from the countryside. For a poor rural person, a high-energy city—with an enticing consumer society and office towers that seem to promise job opportunities—has a strong appeal. This is part of a global trend: The allure of the big city depopulates the countryside and fills the barrios. Ravines, considered uninhabitable by the local government, become shantytowns crowded with people who came to the big city dreaming of solid employment...only to find themselves mired in urban poverty.

In any country, venturing beyond the capital gives you a more complete picture. But if you just drive the main highway, you have "road bias"—seeing only what can afford to gather along that main thoroughfare. A more complex, often more challenging reality lies off the road...and that's where we found our most vivid examples of extreme poverty.

It's easy to ignore something if you've never actually seen it. Most of the world's extremely poor people—which the UN defines as those living on less than \$2 a day—are small family farmers, living off the grid and beyond the view of the developed world. While our public television special would focus on the promise of development and hopeful scenes, I needed to start by showing extreme poverty. What was life actually like for the 700 million people on our planet who are struggling to survive?

The round, thatched hut standing amid a few widely spaced trees in a vast savanna landscape looked idyllic as we approached...almost like some kind of exotic tourist attraction. But entering the hut, I was reminded why it's a mistake



Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, with modern public transit and the gleaming headquarters of the African Union, is a leading African city.







700 million people live in extreme poverty, on \$2 a day: dirt floor, no electricity, no running water... precious little hygiene, good nutrition, or hope.

to romanticize poverty. Inside was a gripping reality: people living on a dirt floor, with no electricity and no running water.

I noticed how lethargic the mother was, how absent the father was, how the sun slashing through the door hit the three children sitting listlessly on the dirt floor. I considered this family's lot in life: little education, no "job skills" training, and minimal understanding of good hygiene. These people will probably never feel the refreshing splash of a shower. They might never be seen by a doctor. One unanticipated crisis—a storm, an accident, a sick parent—and their children go hungry.

If a family like this is fortunate enough to own animals, they live together. The steaming pile of manure next to me, smelly and swarming with flies, was of no concern... just part of where they lived. With an open fire on the floor and no chimney, the home was dark and filled with smoke. Work was done by hand. They ate one or two plates of a starchy staple each day—not enough for their children to grow healthy.

For people around the world—from Ethiopia to Guatemala and beyond—this is what it looks like to live on less than \$2 a day... out of sight and out of mind for those of us who live lives of privilege.

We retreated to our van, our driver cranked up the air-con, and we ate the boxed lunch our hotel had sent us off with. While children gathered around us to watch, I munched my cold French fries—windows up and doors locked. I

remember looking at bare feet, calloused and leathery on the steaming-hot ground. I stared at eyes staring at me... curious eyes trying to imagine the depth of our wealth and power.

This is the kind of poverty that development organizations are determined to end. When the United Nations or the Gates Foundation or the pope or a volunteer collecting donations declares, "We can end hunger in our lifetime!", their goal is giving people like the family in that thatched hut stability, security, and a reason to hope. And with smart, modern development assistance, it is a realistic goal. There will always be rich and poor... but we don't have to have the extremely poor.

Those in extreme poverty are improving their lives by addressing very basic needs. Progress is incremental. And it happens with a combined and coordinated effort: smart NGOs, the support of local governments, development aid and fair-trade policies from wealthy countries, and hardworking local people.

In my travels, I needed to see some extreme poverty—simply to understand it. But what I needed to see even more were success stories in the battle against hunger: concrete examples of what works and why. That's why my *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* documentary is five minutes of desperation and 55 minutes of hope.



In Ethiopia, as elsewhere in the developing world, the extremely poor spend much of their time and energy fetching water and firewood.





## Guatemala: The Gap Between Rich

The gap between rich and poor in our world is huge. It's huge between rich countries and poor countries. It's huge within rich countries—including the United States. And it's huge within poor countries.

We chose Guatemala as our “Western Hemisphere” classroom for understanding the Global South. It's a land that always gets me thinking about inequality and economic injustice. While a fertile country with plenty of wealth, Guatemala has a poor distribution of that wealth. In restaurants filled with Guatemalans, I noticed the basic structure of society: non-indigenous Guatemalans were eating, and indigenous Guatemalans were serving.

Guatemala is the most indigenous country in the region, and its poorest people are part of an enduring Mayan culture. While the per capita annual income is about \$4,000, a small segment at the top of society owns the majority of that wealth (per World Bank statistics). Historically, a handful of very wealthy and connected families—none of whom represent the indigenous people—dominate Guatemala's economy and politics. Their influence is felt throughout the government, and attempts to change these structures have been met with fierce resistance.

Education tends toward creating a functional workforce, but not critical thinkers. Students graduate without learning about the 36-year-long civil war that engulfed their parents' youth, from 1960 until 1996. During that war, the

## and Poor, as Seen from a Chopper

words “justice” and “peace” were considered subversive. The Bible, so filled with “communist” ideas, was forbidden in homes. To this day, the UN—which celebrates women's rights, gay rights, and economic justice—is demonized (or at least seen with great suspicion) by the strata of Guatemalan society that benefits from maintaining the status quo.

Economic justice remains an issue many upper-class Guatemalans choose not to confront. Considering social investment as something that creates risk, they say, “We don't want to be Venezuela.” While Venezuela is “the masses gone wild,” Guatemala can appear to be “elites unlimited.”

Like any big city, Guatemala City has its poor districts and its wealthy districts. We'd already seen its poorest corner: that sprawling dump that provided scant income for desperate scavengers. For a look at the other side, we visited the planned community of Ciudad Cayalá, a protective haven for people with wealth. It has stylish boutiques, name brands, and the kind of relaxed ease that comes with a sense of physical and financial security. It feels like it's in the US—but with a moat-like security.

The Ciudad Cayalá realtor knows how to sell a condo. Walking me through the community as if I were in the market to buy, he gave me the polished spiel: “Here, you have everything you need: a movie theater, the supermarket, church, restaurants.” I said, “You never have to leave this place.” He responded,

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*The entire world is a tale of two cities. In Guatemala City, the gated community of Ciudad Cayalá (which means “Paradise” in the indigenous language) lets privileged elites live in a world apart from the reality of that country's poor.*





“Actually, that’s the concept. You have everything within walking distance.” I asked him what *cayalá* means. “‘Paradise’ in the Mayan language. This is Paradise City.”

While most residents here were Hispanic (people of European descent), I did see some indigenous Mayans in Paradise City...guarding the entries and keeping it clean. Sitting on a bench, watching a worker scrubbing the outside of a garbage bin, I found myself thinking of the people just a couple miles away, riding trucks into the dump to eke out a living sorting through the garbage that the residents of “Paradise” have tossed.

Heading from the capital into the mountainous homeland of the country’s indigenous poor, I took my first ride in a helicopter. As if heading us off at the pass, the clouds were galloping in. As our pilot, Óscar, scrambled to find a saddle in the mountains to safely cross, I thought it seemed dangerous. But, I reasoned, not as dangerous as many hours on the rugged roads below. Óscar masterfully dodged the clouds, sneaking over a pass, slipping up one canyon and down the next beneath the encroaching whiteouts, eventually getting to our destination in the remote Huehuetenango region in Guatemala’s north.

Even from the helicopter, Guatemala was splashes of color: the oranges, yellows, and reds of markets bursting with produce, plus locals who put on their colorful folk costumes just to go shopping. And each town’s cemetery—



colorful as a paintball court after a school holiday—was still decked out from Day of the Dead festivities.

Looking down from our helicopter over a densely populated country with such scant infrastructure, I remembered how some Guatemalans brag that they have one of the lowest tax rates as a percent of their GDP—and how the country relies more on helicopter travel than most. I guess if you’re an elite with all those tax breaks, you don’t need infrastructure...you just hop in your chopper.

I’ve always said that you can learn a lot about your own country when you leave it and view it from afar. For example, to understand the consequences of a shrinking middle class and a growing gap between rich and poor, I visit a country like Guatemala. Then, back home, when I notice that the hottest trends in real estate are gated communities for the wealthy and prisons for the poor...I recognize it as a problem.







## Smart Development Aid: Diego, Catarina, and Reason to Work

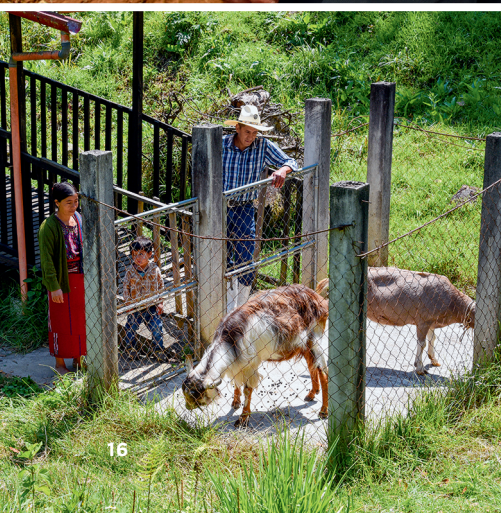
As you travel through the Global South, the difference between charity and development aid becomes clear. Charity—essentially, handing out money to deal with a crisis—is important for emergencies. But development aid is about investing in long-term solutions. Charity is for today, and development aid is for the future. And today’s development aid is smart. It’s designed to break the cycle of poverty, connect people to markets, and open the door to the global economy—allowing poor people to benefit from capitalism and globalization, rather than becoming a casualty of it.

In a village in the highlands of Guatemala—another community, coincidentally, called “Paradise” (El Paraíso)—I walked into a family farm. While I have a car to go to the grocery and a pantry and refrigerator to store my food, this family has the dairy, meat, veggies, and fruit departments growing all around their humble cinderblock home. It’s DIY, with the focus on fresh.

Walking along a muddy path, I thought, “If I slip, the only thing I’d have to grab onto is that barbed-wire fence.” As children romped by me, I wondered how they managed not to be ripped to shreds in this slippery, muddy world of barbed wire. In the backyard, I found Catarina and Diego bringing grass to a shack with six goats. The shack was elevated, and clever nets under the floorboards collected manure to help fertilize the garden. This indigenous Mayan couple, while still poor, had worked hard to climb out of extreme poverty.

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*Extremely poor people have an open fire on the floor with no chimney. This not only wastes firewood, it creates a perpetually smoky environment and leads to respiratory illness.*







*Simple technology upgrades are cheap and make a huge difference. A modern stove with a chimney means far less respiratory disease (a healthier family) and far less firewood consumed (less deforestation).*

Catarina and Diego told me how, unlike their parents, they were able to buy their land—with help from an NGO from the US. They now had firm title, had paid off their loan, and had diversified their sources of income, growing more crops than just corn. They were even raising goats.

When asked how their home was better than their parents', Diego took me on a tour. He showed me the features he was most proud of: corrugated tin roof, a concrete floor, separate bedroom for the kids, latrine, and kitchen with an elevated stove equipped with a chimney. Twisting on a lightbulb, Diego demonstrated how they even had electricity.

The grand finale of Diego's tour was just outside the kitchen: a prefab, mass-produced double sink with a single faucet. Catarina was bent over, with her head under the faucet. She was washing her long black hair, gracefully lathering and rinsing. The glancing sunshine made her wet hair sparkle. Seeing us, she wrung out her hair, tied it behind her head, and stepped aside so Diego could continue his tour.

In farmhouses throughout Guatemala, I kept seeing that same double sink: one flexible faucet, two basins, and a ribbed washboard. Next to the family sink was generally a small, hanging toiletries shelf with soap and a few basics for hygiene. This rudimentary plumbing seemed to be the answer to each family's prayer for running water at home. And with that, cooking, cleaning, hygiene, and nutrition all suddenly became much easier.

Diego is employed as a teacher, while Catarina works the family farm and raises the goats. Talking with them required a double translation: from Mayan to Spanish, and then from Spanish to English. But I didn't need a translation to see they were proud of what their hard work had produced.

Around the world, great strides in fighting poverty are being made with simple technical upgrades like that sink. Another example: smarter stoves. Diego's parents cooked on the ground in the middle of their hut with no chimney. Kneeling before the fire was tiring (and degrading), the open fire was an inefficient use of firewood and a risk for little children, and having no chimney meant a perpetually smoky environment. (Respiratory illness remains a leading cause of death among the world's poorest people.) A modern stove, like Diego and Catarina's, comes with a chimney—no more smoky air, the flame is away from the kids, and it consumes a quarter of the firewood to do the same cooking.

We happened to visit on the day one of Catarina's goats was ovulating. Another NGO—mindful that dairy is a great source of protein and that Mayan children are better able to digest goat's milk than cow's milk—has helped this community build a goat breeding center. This gives local families a chance to produce a carefully selected breed of goat and raise them at home to produce more milk. After a few minutes in the breeding center's "love shack," goats like Catarina's go home pregnant. Soon the family will have plenty of extra milk, better nourished children, and surplus dairy products to sell.

A few years ago, there were no goats (and no milk) in El Paraíso. But change comes hard. There are cultural hurdles in getting very conservative villagers to embrace something new. Development workers have found that, rather than well-meaning but ineffective government promotions and NGO publicity campaigns, the best way to promote a new program is by getting one family to try it. Their success makes neighbors curious, interested, and—eventually—jealous. For example, in El Paraíso, one family embraced the idea of raising goats. Soon they had healthier children and extra money. And the word spread. Now, the people of El Paraíso refer to their goats as "ATMs with four legs."

After experiencing the sadness of extreme poverty—both in the Guatemala City dump and in the thatched hut in the Ethiopian outback—getting a tour of Diego and Catarina's home illustrated to me, quite clearly, the goal of development...and how extreme poverty can be transformed into a better life. Families like Diego and Catarina's have been provided not with charity, but with a path to development. In return, they've worked hard, and they appear to be flourishing. Their children are healthy and educated. The aid they've received has made them not dependent, but independent. That's what smart development aid can do in the 21st century.

*In this world, there are people with water at home and people without. A single faucet at the house is a boon for hygiene and nutrition.*







## FOREIGN AID MYTH-BUSTING

When I started this project, I was struck by how many hard opinions based on misinformation dominate conversations about foreign aid. Here are a few common misperceptions I heard over and over—and why they simply aren't true:

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**THE MYTH** *We've already spent so much on "world hunger" in recent decades, and what does it get us? Nothing!*

**THE TRUTH** It's not "nothing." Far from it! In the last generation alone, extreme poverty has dropped by more than half because of smart and coordinated development aid programs (mostly funded by wealthy countries). We can end extreme poverty in our lifetime. What could be a better cause than that?

**THE MYTH** *If you feed those poor people, they'll just have more babies—and it'll make things even worse.*

**THE TRUTH** Experts understand that poverty causes population growth. When people are well-educated and well-employed, and when women are given the same rights and opportunities as men, birth rates go down—not up—and population growth levels off (according to UN and WHO statistics). On the other hand, when there's high child mortality and no economic stability, having children is seen as a kind of financial security for old age—and family sizes increase.

**THE MYTH** *The CEOs of NGOs are getting rich off of our donations.*

**THE TRUTH** Important work needs to be managed by smart professionals, and that requires reasonable pay. As a donor, I'm happy to support well-run organizations that pay their staff a market wage for their time and talents. (By the way, there are websites—like Charity Navigator—designed to help donors check up on how efficiently NGOs spend their funds.)

**THE MYTH** *The US already gives more than its share!*

**THE TRUTH** That's only true if you count military spending. When it comes to giving as a percent of GDP, we are in the lower tier of wealthy nations—giving on par with Greece and Slovenia, and less than half what countries like Germany and Canada give. World Public Opinion found that most Americans estimate we give 25 percent of our budget to foreign aid; in fact, we give around one percent.

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*See pages 72-73 to learn how you can help.*



## Development on Abedi's Farm: Shit Matters

Shit happens. And on farms throughout the developing world, shit matters. Abedi, a farmer in Tigray (in the north of Ethiopia), gave me a tour of his farm. And his pride and joy was a tank filled with manure.

With a wiry body about half my size, Abedi straddled the concrete lid of his tank and pulled it open. Then, bending down, he gently opened a small, makeshift gate to let a greenish-brown river ooze out. This precious muck would fertilize his soil, his family would be fed, and he'd have an extra harvest to sell at the market.

At Abedi's farm, the animal dung is mixed with water in a kind of barnyard septic tank. Out one end drizzles fertilizer, and out the other steams biogas (methane), which is piped into his house. As if being led by that little pipe to an exciting surprise, Abedi took me behind a stone fence, through his courtyard, and into his home—where he lit a match to demonstrate how he can now fire up his stove and boil water without using firewood. As if cued by the fwap! sound of the flame engulfing the single element of his well-used stove, he flashed his biggest smile.

Then Abedi had another off-the-grid source of energy to show off: his solar panel. His old kerosene lamp had grown dusty—unused, but still hanging on the wall, as if to remind his family how far they've come. Now the bare lightbulb dangling from the tin roof was powered by a solar panel. And the same panel provided enough juice to charge the family's cell phones. While an extremely poor child lives without electricity and can't study after the sun goes down, Abedi's children have a big advantage: With light at night, hours that used to be literally "in the dark" are now available for study and other productive activities. (Apparently, one productive activity having light means less of is making babies. UN statistics show that families with electricity have fewer children.)

As with Diego and Catarina in Guatemala, Abedi and his family were beneficiaries of a government working with NGOs to help hardworking locals develop. While still poor, they had a spacious, modern home—with a concrete floor, a sturdy corrugated-tin roof, plenty of windows for ventilation, and an elevated stove with a chimney—and were making real progress.

Abedi and his son rearranged big burlap bags of grain to make room for us as guests in their living room. The family had worked hard, and they'd stored up enough food to get them through the "hunger season." Abedi's father grew only corn. His goal was mere subsistence—to grow enough food for his family to survive the annual hunger season. But Abedi is all about diversification: getting

more harvests and a better yield out of his land, and growing enough to feed his family, plus a surplus to sell in the market. The sheep that share the family courtyard may seem like pets for the children, but they are part of the family business. And when the time is right, they'll be sold to boost the family's income.

Ironically, most of the hungry people in the world are farmers. Helping farmers grow more food, more profitably, is essential in overcoming extreme poverty. More food means more money, which fuels development. Exciting advances in agriculture have resulted in a green revolution throughout the developing world. Long a poster child for hunger and famine, Ethiopia has become a model of development—thanks largely to good policies. Most of its people are small farmers. And for several years in a row, its GDP has grown at a 10 percent clip.

Ethiopia is divided into 18,000 administrative districts called kebele—each with a farmers' training center. Taking advantage of this structure helps the government implement initiatives effectively. The government employs 60,000 teachers and coaches to make sure smart agricultural policies are implemented throughout the country. The government coordinates and communicates with its 100 million people at the kebele level. NGOs are allowed here only if they work within the kebele system.







*With a community-wide investment in water infrastructure, rain that now comes in torrents can be captured and used efficiently as farmers employing “climate smart agriculture” techniques become small independent businesspeople. Beyond feeding their families, they harvest crops for the market.*

I joined Abedi at his local kebele farmers’ training center. The director, Tedi, was teaching Abedi and his neighbors how to increase their yield and care for their soil. They learned why it’s important to plant seeds in a line rather than the traditional practice of scattering them. For another crop, because spacing seeds just the right distance is important to maximize yield, farmers were given a simple measuring string with knots at just the right spots. They learned to rotate crops with plants like alfalfa, which reinvigorate the depleted soil. And the government has studied the soil across Ethiopia and recommends just the right mix of fertilizer—dung and chemical—for the health of each district’s soil.

Tedi explained how farmers in distant corners have been resistant to adapting new techniques. He showed me his favorite corner of the farmers’ training center, the “demonstration plot.” This is where farmers can actually see the results of planting with a new seed. Just like the skeptical farmers of Missouri who made it the “Show Me State,” Tigray’s farmers want to actually see different tomatoes growing side by side—making the logic of smart, modern agriculture clear. And, as in Guatemala, it only takes one farmer to have success with a new approach to encourage their jealous neighbors to get on board.

Tedi took me into a stone hut to find a big, beautiful cow that looked like it just dropped in from Switzerland. Smart farming is more and more about diversification—and that includes raising strategically selected breeds of animals. Selective breeding gives the farmer animals that can survive local conditions as well as increase production. Tedi bragged how this cow was a Holstein crossed with an African breed—“hardy in the heat, and giving triple the milk.”

The value of these new farming techniques is evident back on Abedi’s farm. While his parents subsisted on corn only, he’s diversified his crops. Better seeds allow three harvests a year rather than two. He grows mango, coffee, guava, orange—whatever he figures will bring the best price in the market. And his new hybrid chickens lay triple the eggs compared to the local breed he used to keep.

My last stop with Abedi was at the distant corner of his farm, where a stone reservoir was filled with about 10 feet of water. Abedi turned on a pump, and his son laid out a series of long, interconnected plastic pipes, directing the water to distant parts of his thirsty fields.

I learned that with Ethiopian government guidance, the farmers of Tigray dig infrastructure to keep their water table healthy even in times of violent rain or drought. Every worker gives 20 days a year to soil, reforestation, and water conservation activities—a necessity in this land with such a tragic history of drought and famine. These work parties are creatively funded by USAID: The money is used to purchase food from local farmers, which is then given to poor farmers in return for working on these water infrastructure crews. The result: a community that provides a market for its farmers (rather than demoralize them by distributing free food as aid) while feeling personally responsible for its water conservation, road maintenance, and reforestation.

Today’s vision in Ethiopia is a top-down one, emanating from the government in Addis Ababa: strong national government programs, with coordinated international aid and NGO support, embraced by kebele leadership, helping Ethiopia’s farmers work smarter and grow well beyond subsistence farming. And at the same time, it’s bottom-up, with national policies that empower and embolden small-holder farmers like Abedi to take risks and work hard to get ahead.

*At the local farmers’ training center, Abedi learns to increase his harvest by planting seeds in a line rather than scattering as his father did.*







## WATER: WORTH WALKING FOR

Rising out of extreme poverty through development requires certain basics. Water is fundamental to hygiene, health, and nutrition. But hundreds of millions of people live in villages with no running water or well...so they walk for their water.

Leaving the main road while crossing Ethiopia to Hawassa in the south, it seemed that human beings were beasts of burden. A visitor just dropping in from some distant world—like the industrialized world—might think there were no men...just women and children. They all came equipped with big, yellow, plastic water jugs. The local term for these containers is “jerry cans” (derived from the WWII term for German 20-liter water and gas cans). For each of the women, a good part of their day and their energy is dedicated to securing water for their family. The typical poor woman in a poor country spends hours a day walking for water and firewood. And, because of the impact of climate change, her walk gets longer every year.

Women and children also carry laundry. In the middle of nowhere, we saw women balancing big loads of colorful laundry on their heads, walking gracefully across a vast plain. Their destination: a cluster of dirty ponds surrounded by flat rocks where women were washing and drying clothes. A casual traveler might consider this a great photo op. But for many women, laundry day without running water means leaving their families,





interrupting their farm work, and trekking several hours to some meager source of water. Water is so heavy that the women wait for their clothes to partially dry before making the long slog home.

While Americans aspire to have a bathroom attached to their master bedroom, for half of humanity, simply having a spigot within a five-minute walk—even a spigot running just a few hours a week—would be the answer to a prayer. Development is incremental. The relative convenience of public spigots in each neighborhood is a major step forward. The arrival of the water truck or the releasing of water at the neighborhood faucet is an event that people line up in advance for. A delay or some interruption in that service sends shudders of anxiety through a thirsty village.



Digging a village well costs about \$4,000. And with that, women can stay at home or at work on their farm, and children have more time for school and studies. Marveling at one such well, I was told that modern aid projects are not simply given to a community. Experience has taught development workers that locals who own these

projects take better care of them. Once built by an NGO, a pump is community-owned. A locally elected committee manages it, and each family pays about a dollar a month to maintain it. UNC Water Institute studies back this up: With ownership comes responsibility, good stewardship, and sustainability.

Water infrastructure divides the poor from the extremely poor. Having to rely on river water—rather than a well—means farmers and families are dependent on rain. River water can vanish when the rains don't come. And when it's there, it may carry water-borne diseases. With safe water reliably available right in the village, there's better hygiene: Families are sick less often, children have more time and energy for school and work, and the moms have more time and energy to nurture their children.

Aid workers told me that, to determine what people care most about, they leave cameras in a village and see what they film. The vast majority of photos taken feature wells, local water systems, and people enjoying water...as if it's the very basis of life itself.





# Teaching Better Childcare and the Tragedy of Stunting

Traveling through indigenous regions of Guatemala, I feel very tall. Most Americans would, too. I long assumed that it was genetics that made Guatemalans so short. But that's not true. Guatemalans—young and old—are short because they are stunted. They're short because they did not have quality nutrients during their first couple years of life—they never got the nutrition that would allow them to fully develop.

Extremely poor people have no money for health care, and people living off the grid may never see a doctor. But in many developing countries, the United Nations World Food Program (UNWFP) maintains a health post and offers educational programs.

I spent a day with Laura Melo, who runs the Guatemala branch of the UNWFP, as she made her rounds—visiting with women in one of the poorest communities in the country. I walked up a steep lane with Laura, under a sky filled with colorful kites. While little boys tugged on strings to keep their kites lofted, the big boys were nowhere to be seen. But with the walls facing the street tagged with gang symbols, I sensed that the young men—hopeless and angry—were nearby.

The moms were gathering in a backyard to meet with their UNWFP coach to hone their mothering skills. These Mayan women are part of a national crisis: Stunting is ravaging the indigenous Guatemalan population. Being a mother comes with no manual. And these mothers understood that the education they received here was critical for the well-being of their babies.



*Governments and aid workers now understand the tragedy of stunting and the value of teaching mothers the importance of good nutrition in the first thousand days of a child's life.*

Laura explained that stunting is one of the great tragedies of the developing world—and one of the “low-hanging fruits” of development aid. In so many cases, children get plenty of calories—they just don't get the right calories. Author Roger Thurow has demonstrated how the first thousand days after conception (prenatal, and then the first two years) is the window when a child must get quality nutrition to fully grow—both physically and cognitively—and become a healthy adult, able to reach his or her full potential.

In a country like Guatemala, almost half the children are stunted. That means that half the children in this country will be disadvantaged for their entire lives. And, tragically, those stunted children are disproportionately indigenous. If a country's population is not fully developed, that country will not develop. And when the stunting divide echoes an ethnic divide, racism becomes a bigger part of the societal mix.

Later we dropped into the local health post, where children were weighed and the diameter of their arms was measured by a small band. If they were too skinny, they were given a fortified cereal and a super peanut butter.

I had a strikingly similar UNWFP health-post experience in Ethiopia, in the remote village of Alidada Dayla—with no electricity, no water, and no local health services. The settlement seemed to gather around a dusty square as if worshipping the giant, shade-giving baobab tree that dominated the center. Little kids rolled a tire with a stick and gathered around a battered old foosball table that somehow functioned despite being far from level on slanted ground.

The day's big event was the arrival of two white vans from the United Nations to open up the Alidada Dayla health post. Suddenly the parched land around the clinic was filled with colorfully clad young women and their infants. It was the bimonthly health post training session.



Pauline Akabwai, an Ethiopian UN worker, stepped into the shade under the eaves of the clinic, pinned a few government posters promoting healthy living onto the wall behind her, and started to teach. Moms—many of them nursing—sat attentively, eager to learn. Pauline repeated that by-now-familiar nutrition mantra: “Not just any calories, but smart calories.” She taught birth control, the wisdom of breastfeeding, and the importance of washing hands with soap—one of the easiest ways to save lives, because diarrhea is a leading cause of child mortality.

Along with being malnourished, children in the developing world are more likely to contract a host of dangerous diseases. The increase in inoculations is a prime example of the global success of UN-led initiatives. Measles, typhoid, and pneumonia (commonplace in the developing world until recently) are easily avoided with cheap and simple vaccinations. Thanks to this UN program, child mortality has dropped dramatically (according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation).

Women lined up with their babies to get their shots and to be weighed. Those who were too scrawny went home with supplements. After the mothers walked—babes in arms—happily through town and back to their homes, the white vans rumbled away, and the health post was locked up and once again quiet.

Both in Guatemala and in Ethiopia, I was impressed by how tirelessly Laura, Pauline, and other health trainers worked. And I was thankful that the United Nations—and, indirectly, the United States (with its financial support of the UN)—was able to fund these important programs.

*The United Nations World Food Program runs health posts that bring basic medical services and health and nutrition training to young mothers way off the grid in countries like Ethiopia. Witnessing this helps the American taxpayer appreciate the practical value of US aid.*





# Education and Empowering Women

In an Ethiopian village called “Glimmer of Hope,” you’d expect the school to be the centerpiece...and it was. And of all the places the proud teacher could have taken me first, she chose a small and simple freestanding building called “The Girls’ Club.” She said, “Because of the Girls’ Club, girls having their period no longer miss any school.”

A theme in the developing world is the importance of education—and making sure that girls are not disadvantaged. The traditional taboo surrounding menstrual cycles is just one of many ways that happens. In many places in the Global South, a woman is discouraged from being out in public during her period. For schoolgirls, that means a loss of several days of school each month. How can a student keep up while missing so much instruction? Historically this didn’t matter, because, well...they were girls. Thankfully, these days, attitudes are changing.

With the Girls’ Club, Glimmer of Hope girls get counseling, support, and the sanitary pads necessary to comfortably be at school every day. Now they’re able to compete fairly with the boys and excel in their studies. The Girls’ Club also teaches about health and sex education (in a society where any discussion of the birds and the bees may not be part of conventional parenting).

As a man who’s used to being “the boss” around my office, I was humbled throughout my travels in both Ethiopia and Guatemala to see how women were

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*For these students, a few months of vocational training prepares them to get a job. Girls with an education have fewer and healthier children later in life. Empowered, they take more control of their lives.*



taking the reins, getting the attention, and making things happen. A recent sea change in smart development work is the recognition that, in the Global South, progress hinges upon women.

Several experts told me that, ultimately, it’s the women who are expected to raise the children and be responsible for the family income. While a man may squander much-needed money on gambling, prostitutes, and alcohol, women invest it in the well-being of the family. And when women have an education, legal rights, and employment, they are empowered. Development workers have learned that if they want to be successful in addressing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, they’re smart to work with women—because that’s most likely to result in the development of the entire community.

But to unleash the power of women in development work, a hard look at the status quo is necessary. Throughout the world, it’s the women and girls who have fewer opportunities and who bear the brunt of poverty. Traditionally, if there’s not enough food, it’s the women who go hungry. If there’s not enough





*A theme in the developing world is the importance of education—and making sure that girls are not disadvantaged.*

While it's clear that education is an important tool in fighting poverty and fostering development, there are many impediments built into the cultures. While school is often "free," attendance requires uniforms, books, and pencils—which the families of the poorest children can't afford. Classes are often taught only in the language of the dominant or privileged ethnic group (for example, Spanish in Guatemala—where many poor people speak only Mayan). And instruction is often available at schools that are beyond walking distance—out of reach for people who cannot afford public transportation. Old-fashioned parents might figure a child belongs helping on the farm. Standard education systems are designed for elites, by elites.

These impediments to boys and girls alike in getting a good education are now under fire in well-governed developing countries. Basic economics tells us that workers are "human capital"—invest in them (with an education, for example), and they will produce more. Like many developing nations, Ethiopia aspires for all children to have about eight years of schooling. And in both countries, I was impressed to see committed teachers and eager students.

money for all the children to get an education, the boys get priority. In a world where firm title to land is a ticket to empowerment, women are not welcome. Women have babies early and few legal rights.

Education is seen as critical. Governments, private enterprise, and parents are all realizing that an educated workforce is a prerequisite for development in today's global economy. In both Ethiopia and Guatemala, in the most remote of communities, the biggest building was often the school—favored with funding by the national government or an NGO. In fact, in Ethiopia, I was told children are considered "fully employed." Their work: getting an education.

Development workers have learned the value of education for girls. Girls with an education gain more control of their lives. Educated women have fewer children. And when they do start a family, their children are generally healthier. (For more on this topic, see Hans Rosling's *Factfulness*.)

## ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY



Accessible technology—whether financial, like microloans, or more conventional tech—has become a boon to developing countries. Low-cost, high-tech innovations are offering solutions to age-old challenges. Remote, off-the-grid communities are employing wireless technology—leapfrogging past older energy and communication

infrastructure. For example, solar panels are powering villages that were literally in the dark without electricity. At the Glimmer of Hope village, a simple solar panel powers a water pump that fills a reservoir so they can make it through dry periods.

Accessible technology is bringing previously unimaginable efficiencies to the most remote corners of the developing world. For example, cell phones are revolutionizing the world of small businesspeople. Farmers can find the best price for their produce. Herders learn when and where to bring their stock to market. Entrepreneurs can make a direct sale and avoid a needless middleman. And those with cash to move can make and receive mobile payments and do their banking without making a trip into town.







## Lisa's Bank: Access to Capital

Exploring the Piassa neighborhood in Addis Ababa, I was walking down a steep cobbled lane. I was growing nervous about the stares I was getting from the young men who seemed to be gathering in the street. Then I made eye contact with a woman in a flaming gold dress, who, as if providing me shelter from a gathering storm, invited me through a makeshift gate and into her courtyard. Suddenly I was surrounded by a dozen happy women, all squatting around a cash box.

This was what I came to call “Lisa’s Bank”—and it beautifully illustrated both the resourcefulness of women in poor conditions and the importance of personal finance.

New opportunities in banking are bringing capital to the people—and it’s making a difference. Here in a crowded neighborhood of Addis Ababa, Lisa has organized her neighbors to create their own community bank: a cash box with two keys. Each woman banks a weekly deposit and earns interest. They take turns borrowing from their common fund for business purposes. Thanks to this rudimentary banking service, Lisa’s sister runs the neighborhood coffee shop and was happy to serve us—for a price—an aromatic cup of Ethiopian coffee.

In my travels, I’ve learned that in much of the world, capitalism is a private club. Firm and legal ownership of land and wealth is complicated. This

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*A microloan goes round and round. The same capital kick-starts one business, is paid back, and starts another, creating a world of successful entrepreneurs and a circle of development.*





often leads to a situation where a few prominent families become oligarchs and major landowners. There's no national stock exchange, so only elites have the wherewithal to actually own anything big. Extremely poor people simply cannot access personal banking or finance—so they're excluded from the economy. Capitalism requires capital. And without capital, there's no development.

The poorest people I met want the opportunity to work in order to break out of poverty. That's where microlending comes in. This system of making tiny loans, and then recycling the capital, is kickstarting small businesses throughout the Global South.

Marta is a loan officer for an NGO that gives microloans to people in her Guatemalan valley. Her favorite saying is “not a handout... but a hand up.” She took us to the home of Señora Ana, a dynamo of an entrepreneur who just needed a little cash to ignite her business. A small loan helped her become a professional beader and seamstress—and she now employs 30 people.

Marta stressed that along with the loan, the “case worker” coaches recipients in business, budgeting, marketing, and life skills. And 98 percent pay back

their loans—with interest—successfully. Women are often the recipients—and their first employees are often their husbands and sons.

With microlending, the same capital can be used again and again—and I saw it in action. High in the mountains of Guatemala, where the soil is rocky, I met a Mayan woman who got a loan to start a little store. When that cash was paid back, it was loaned again to help a man start his metalworking shop. The same capital was re-loaned to a family to purchase cows, and, when paid back, was loaned again so another family could start their rabbit business.

In case after case, I saw the potential of empowering people whose desire is to work and produce. These are the success stories of smart and modern development aid. And, aid workers reminded me, many people employed in these cottage industries would have otherwise been driven to migrate to the US in search of employment.

*A small loan helped Señora Ana start a beading business—and she now employs 30 professional bead makers and seamstresses.*







## DEVELOPMENT VERSUS THE THREE Cs: CLIMATE CHANGE, CONFLICT, CORRUPTION

While there's been tremendous progress in the global fight against hunger during our lifetimes, the UN World Food Program found that hunger has ticked up again over the last few years. To a great extent, that is because of a combination of three things, which I think of as “the three C’s”: climate change, conflict, and corruption (bad governance). The next several sections delve into these themes from a variety of angles.

**CLIMATE CHANGE:** Globally, the weather has become more severe and less predictable. While arid regions may still get the same amount of rain, it now comes in torrents, washing away the topsoil. And as struggling people cut down trees for fuel and big corporations clear-cut forests, land becomes even more vulnerable to erosion. Later, I examine the importance of addressing climate change if you want to address global poverty.

**CONFLICT:** Conflict causes poverty. Poverty causes conflict. Conflict—in the form of civil war, the drug trade, gangs, sectarian violence, and so on—rattles a fragile society. As if systematically targeting critical steps in developing an economy, conflict breaks down markets, destroys infrastructure, causes financial institutions to collapse, and results in massive capital flight. In a poor country mired in conflict, a war ends education and health programs, and it spells the end of trust within that society. Social capital (human relationships fundamental to a well-functioning society) falls apart. More civilians than combatants die, institutions that hold societies together fall apart, and economies grind to a halt. Experts (including the Brookings Institution and the OECD) believe that, in the future, most hunger will be in “fragile” countries struggling with conflict.

**CORRUPTION (BAD GOVERNANCE):** Irresponsible, self-serving governance is an epidemic in the developing world. Whether it's a Latin American “banana republic” whose top priority is maximizing profits for businesses in other countries (plus a few wealthy domestic elites), or failed African states that divert international aid into regrettable boondoggles, corruption kills development. While greedy politicians who put their own self-interests above the needs of the people will always be a problem, progress is being made. Countries that have independent judicial systems, strong rule of law, and checks and balances on leaders tend to have the best economic performance.





## Climate Change Hits the Developing World Hardest

Sitting in a hut in the Highlands of Guatemala—walls and thatched roof blackened from years of smoke—I watched a woman grinding corn between two stones. Some of her neighbors could afford a more modern grinder or could take their corn to a miller. But she was in extreme poverty, living on less than \$2 a day. She lived on corn and ground it by hand, just as her ancestors did centuries ago. She smiled as she labored, as if thankful to have corn to grind. She was happy to let me observe her at work. And as I watched her, I thought about how, when you live on \$2 a day, most of your family budget goes to food. And when unpredictable weather ruins a harvest and the cost of your food goes up, it's the \$2-a-day people who suffer the most.

Climate change is happening—and it's hitting developing nations the hardest. In Africa, with each decade, more arable land becomes desert (according to the UN). And in our own hemisphere, a vast and growing swath of Central America is now called the “Dry Corridor.” A Guatemalan farmer whose family has worked the land for generations told me, “Rain patterns are now unpredictable. When it rains, you plant seeds. Suddenly it stops...and your crops fail. What we call the ‘Hunger Season’ used to start in April. Now it comes in February.”

Poor people depend more directly on the natural environment than wealthy people do. Deforestation, growing deserts, and water scarcity impact hundreds of millions of impoverished people. These trends all drive up the cost of food, which hits poor people the hardest. These people become caught in a “poverty trap”: Environmental degradation causes poverty, which causes conflict, which causes more poverty (and more environmental degradation), and so on. It's a vicious cycle.

The use of fossil fuels by both industrialized and rapidly industrializing countries—such as the US, Europe, China, and India—is a global concern. But struggling farmers in the developing world also contribute to the problem: They cut down forests to make fields, and their animals' farts emit the greenhouse gas methane. And in less-industrialized countries hell-bent on fast-tracking development, unregulated industries are allowed to abuse the environment.

Half of humanity is made up of poor, smallholder farmers and their families in the developing world. On the one hand, it's essential to teach and empower a billion farmers to contribute less to climate change. On the other, they also need help dealing with the problematic environmental changes that are already here.

Water management infrastructure is critical in dealing with the impact of climate change. Reservoirs enable farmers to dole out their precious water







*The Rick Steves' Europe Climate Smart Commitment is a kind of self-imposed carbon tax. It helps mitigate the carbon our tour customers create (by flying to Europe and back) by supporting climate-smart agriculture projects in the developing world. To learn more, visit [ricksteves.com/climate](http://ricksteves.com/climate).*

more efficiently. In Ethiopia—notorious for droughts—the government has organized local communities to reforest and terrace eroded hillsides. People here understand that planting trees increases humidity, and therefore increases rainfall. And terracing allows rainwater—even if coming in a torrent—to soak into the earth. This replenished water table is what allows Abedi, the farmer we met earlier, to irrigate his crops.

Another, more innovative solution is “climate-smart agriculture,” a relatively new approach to farming and forestry designed to deal artfully with the challenges posed by unpredictable and warming weather patterns, while enabling developing-world farmers to work in ways that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, climate-smart agriculture is helping Ethiopian farmers become more resilient. They are now planting drought-resistant seeds and seeking more diversity in what they plant. And with improved water infrastructure, it’s believed that while there will always be droughts, famines are now preventable. In fact, in recent years, Ethiopia has had several serious droughts (including one in 2016 that would have been devastating 20 years earlier)—but no famines.

While we can respond to climate change, a far better approach would be to halt or reverse it. When climate change destabilizes the developing world, it drives migration, which in turn threatens the security of wealthier countries. And to compound the problem, capitalizing on the fear of refugees empowers far-right political movements to undermine well-established democracies. If you’re concerned about the rising number of refugees fleeing from the developing world to the US and Europe, then you need to take environmental policy seriously.

## The African Union, Abdul Mohammed, and My Fancy Hotel

Africa has had a difficult history, from the slave trade to brutal colonialism to rampant corruption under modern-day tyrants. Today Addis Ababa hosts the African Union, an organization of all 54 African nations dedicated to helping the continent heal and develop. Its stated mission is to overcome the conflict, bad governance, and corruption that’s long wracked Africa. During my Ethiopian travels, I was impressed by several chance meetings with scholars and diplomats from different African counties who worked at the AU. One such scholar agreed to join me for dinner back at my hotel.

My Addis Ababa hotel—across the street from the National Palace—was one of those high-security hotels where photos out front are not allowed, where walking through the grand front door feels like going through a TSA checkpoint, and where any visiting head of state or dignitary stays. (Ivanka Trump was in town when I was, which made security even tighter.) It’s also the kind of place where one night in a standard room costs the equivalent of about six months’ wages for the average person just outside the fortified gate.

*At the African Union, smart and dedicated people from across Africa are working to overcome conflict and corruption and to foster development in all 54 African nations.*





I typically prefer to stay in a more local-style place. But in this case, a break from culture shock, a safe place to leave our TV production gear, and the certainty of a solid night's sleep are a good investment when you fly halfway around the world to get some work done. Still, it felt over-the-top. Stewards stood sentry by each elevator. Asking, "Which floor, sir?", they insisted on pushing the button for me. The ballrooms were booked long in advance for high-society local weddings: Photographers know just how to pose a bride with her party by the fountain. And the pool came with tinselly music piped in underwater—which I found more disturbing than relaxing. Strolling through the palatial lobbies and sprawling grounds and taking a dip in the pool—while working on a TV special about hunger—offered a parade of poignancy.

I had a dinner date with a local diplomat, Abdul Mohammed. In the dining room, it seemed everyone had come to have hushed conversations. We all talked quietly and intently—as if the future of Africa depended on what we shared.

I immediately got the sense that Abdul was connected to and an expert in nearly everything that mattered at the African Union. The positions he held meant little to me—as someone so new to the issues challenging Africa—but for 25 years, he had worked throughout East Africa as chief of staff, founder, senior political advisor, chairperson, and executive director of weighty-sounding organizations with acronyms like AUHIP, UNAMID, and UNICEF.

The conversation exhausted me from the start, making one thing abundantly clear: Much as I wish for problems to come with simple solutions, the reality in Africa is bewilderingly complex...and I am far from being able to grasp the

nuances. Still, talking to Abdul was like a crash course in African politics. (I can't even remember what we ate.)

I expressed my admiration for the African Union and its priorities of fighting corruption, climate change, and conflict. He said that, like the UN, it's easy for people to complain about the AU. But they'd miss it if it weren't there. The AU is grappling with big challenges. Of 54 African countries, Abdul figured a third are on the right track, a third are just OK, and a third are a mess—dealing with resource-based conflict and corrupt leaders with no cohesive plan to develop.

*Walking the halls of the African Union—and enjoying the political art and posters celebrating current initiatives—it's clear that the AU is targeting conflict and corruption.*



One challenge in Africa is how to administer the many multiethnic nations whose borders were drawn by Europeans with no respect to tribal boundaries. The countries most in conflict all seem to share the same problem: They don't effectively balance competing ethnic concerns. "We need government that respects tribal needs at the local level," Abdul said, "while also providing strong central leadership." In other words, for a multiethnic country (like Ethiopia) to function well, it needs to de-centralize to some degree. Regional and tribal governments need to be empowered while still being accountable to the national government.

For our second course, we talked about turning this youthful nation of 100 million into an efficient workshop—to put to work people who want to work. Abdul was encouraged by how the government was welcoming joint ventures from the industrialized world and by how it was trying to create a good environment for investing. Gesturing toward the young and attentive waitstaff in the dining room, he said, "Half our population is young—under 25. A young man has three options: stay here and be bad, stay here and be good, or emigrate." He stressed the "good governance goal" for a young population: provide a solid basic education (eight grades plus vocational or technical training) and make agriculture attractive enough to keep young people on the farm, rather than moving to the city.

Nearing the end of our meal, I asked him point-blank: "OK, what is the key to success for a country like Ethiopia? What will pave the way for development?" He has clearly thought a lot about precisely this question, and he replied with a surprisingly comprehensive answer: "These days, tools to fight extreme poverty are much better. But we need a foundation for development. We need a stock market so little people can get into the game and so foreigners can invest in Ethiopia. Economic success depends on the energy of capitalism, plus the energy of civil society—mosques, churches, service clubs, NGOs, parenting—all working within parameters set by our government. The government needs to invest in human capital—that's health and education. It needs to invest in industrialization, with an emphasis on export economy. And it needs to invest in smart irrigation-based agriculture."

Abdul's off-the-cuff lecture continued: "NGOs must be in alignment with national plans. And, of course, peace is a prerequisite to economic development and overcoming extreme poverty."

Like a delightful little complementary dessert, Abdul's final insight took me by surprise. He said, "A person who doesn't read books becomes stagnant. It's the same with a country. More books are published in Argentina than in all of Africa. In the coming year, the African Union will be promoting the culture of reading. And that will be good for Ethiopia and for all of Africa."



# Colonialism, Banana Republics, and Land Rights

Driving through the small city of Antigua, Guatemala makes me laugh. The roads are narrow and choppy with oversized cobbles and roller-coaster swells. Each neighborhood plaza seems like a folk festival. A steady stream of one-story buildings offer a cancan of slice-of-life shops and eateries. If I yelled “Stop the car!” every time I saw something interesting, we’d never get anywhere. Pint-sized girls play a rhythmic patty-cake, slapping an endless parade of coaster-sized corn tortillas into shape and popping them on the grill. Slamming up and down in the back seat, I wished I had a helmet. And holding my camera steady to capture the amazing scenes romping by was futile.

As we approached the historic center, the merchandise and clientele gradually morphed from “workaday local” to “tourist trap.” Finally, we got to where the buildings were big and the prices were double—the spot which, for four centuries, has been the main square.

Many countries in Latin America have one particularly cute colonial town. Nicaragua has Granada. Cuba has Trinidad. Mexico has an entire Colonial Circle. And Guatemala has Antigua. I’d imagine more tourists visit these towns than even the capital cities of their respective countries. Tourist-friendly as they manage to be, these towns also put me in a political mood—because they’re haunted by the colonial story of that land.

Conflict and exploitation have deep roots here. In Guatemala, the ruins of magnificent temples are reminders of a grand Mayan civilization that thrived here centuries before Columbus. But Spanish conquistadors subjugated Guatemala’s indigenous people. Today, the descendants of the Mayans who built those temples are the poorest people in the country.

The city of Antigua was founded by the Spanish in 1543 as their capital of Central America. It was the hub of a colonial system designed by Europeans for the purposes of exploitation. Antigua remained Spain’s capital of all Central America for over 200 years, until 1773. The grand buildings facing the main square reflect the structure of that conquest: the palace and military headquarters, Catholic church, local government, and trade center. It was all carefully designed to control the people who lived in this region and to export their natural resources. And, while pleasant today, this square has a dark past as the place where indigenous people who caused trouble were executed.

Central America’s eventual independence from Spain led to an unholy alliance of international corporations and corrupt local governments—the era of the so-called “banana republics.” Entire nations became essentially company



*Remote and impoverished people far from the centers of power benefit greatly from a simple community center where they can meet and speak with one voice.*

farms, designed to export a basic crop like bananas—raw—to developed nations. An economy dependent upon just one crop is fragile and easy to manipulate. If the crop that drives the economy fails, the entire economy of that country fails with it.

And so, countries evolved from domination by colonial overlords to domination by local elites. When there are no constraints on the ruling economic class, before long a few dominant families end up owning nearly all the arable land. And when landless peasants organize for land rights, there are inevitable civil wars.

That’s the case in Guatemala—the original banana republic—where a few oligarchs own just about everything. This makes land rights a fundamental issue: Peasants want enough land to feed their families. But the elites—with influential ties to government and a desire to make maximize profit by growing export crops—won’t let that happen.

To learn more, I left Antigua and drove high into a remote valley—to a tiny town with humble homes dwarfed by a forest of towering cornstalks. The Mayans here, who’ve long subsisted on this staple, are nicknamed “people of the corn.” I asked to see the local cemetery, and a gentle man guided me—as if through a maze—through 200 yards of cornstalks that made me feel short. Finally, we arrived in a clearing with about 50 humble gravesites. Most of the crosses and tombs were dated 1981 or 1982.



The people buried in this remote Guatemalan cemetery all died in Guatemala's civil war, which raged for 36 years until 1996. It was portrayed in the United States as a war against communism. But people here saw it as about economic justice. My guide described how his father—whose grave we stood over—was one of 200,000 who died in a war about the right for poor people to own land. This same dynamic played out in so many countries—and its legacy continues.

I asked my guide if he could sum up the reason for the wars that have wracked Central America in one word. He said simply, "Land."

He continued, "Land, hope, life. A man without land is not a man. With no land, he'll get a gun instead of being day laborer making \$3 a day."

Organizing to win land rights for campesinos (landless farm workers) is a dangerous activity. Among elites, land reform is not an option. The very idea is taboo. Every time locals organize for land reform, they're defeated as "communists"—or, more recently, "terrorists." Many are killed.

I visited a remote office of an indigenous land rights organization, which works to secure legal title to land for local campesinos. While they had laptop computers, the room was bare—little more than a table and some folding chairs. It felt temporary...as if they need to be ready to vacate at a moment's notice. Their work is dangerous. Four of their colleagues had been killed in the last year.

Working to help Mayans control their land can be particularly difficult. Mayan culture doesn't think in terms of land ownership. When an aggressive corporation with lots of capital—and lawyers, and friends in government—wants to buy a peasant's small landholding, it's intimidating. I was told that the conversation sometimes goes like this: "We want to buy your land. We can negotiate with you...or we can negotiate with your widow."

Another challenge is cash cropping: Big agriculture aggressively buys up more and more good land. This drives small family farmers out of business, or it forces them farther and farther into the hills, where marginal land makes mere subsistence farming a challenge. Meanwhile, the landowning elites who want to make serious money don't grow rice and beans to sell to locals. Instead, they grow more lucrative crops—coffee, sugar, or bananas—to export. Because of cash cropping, there's less food for local consumption, small farmers are forced off their land and become landless peasants working on the plantation, and the fabric of society erodes.

For healthy development, a country's challenge is to help small farmers avoid needing to sell to the big landowners; rather, they need firm title to their own land so they can run viable family farms. Unfortunately, that's a hard sell in Guatemala.

## On Violence and Gangs: Fito's Take

Along with a heritage of economic injustice, Central America struggles with gang violence. And my Guatemala City guide, Fito, knows all too much about that. Drawing on his own experience as a former gang member, Fito counsels boys to help them improve their lives. His story illustrates why so many young men are attracted to gangs.

Fito's world is filled with a kind of garbage-dump lint, which blows like dandelion spores down the dusty lanes of his neighborhood. There's no paint—just scavenged boards and beat-up sheets of corrugated tin. I asked about the jury-rigged electrical wires overhead. Fito said, "Creative access." Gang signs decorated walls, staking out territory...a territory that seemed to me—a person of such unimaginable privilege by local standards—hardly worth fighting over. Walking through this neighborhood was the only time anywhere in Guatemala or Ethiopia that I was afraid to have our big TV camera out and rolling.

Fito's barrio is adjacent to the dump. In fact, it's literally built atop landfill from an older dump. The only local "industries" are selling what's scavenged from the dump or joining a gang. Homes are built with a mishmash of material as parents work hard to provide the most basic of necessities. In this community, walking down the lane means dodging human packhorses hauling huge sacks of sorted garbage to depots waiting to be recycled.

Walking down the streets, Fito made it his business to know each young boy and his social road map. He'd stop and chat, do a fist bump, and then walk to the next group of bored teenagers and do it all again. He had been a founding member of the local gang, but he now works with a Christian NGO to give young men reasons not to embrace the gang culture.





I asked him why he joined the gang, and he told me his story:

“Poverty drove me into the gang. I had my first gun when I was 14. I came from a broken family. My father was an alcoholic. My mother worked hard in the garbage dump. Being in a gang, I could bring money home, even though it was the result of violence or the result of theft. It was so I could help my mom.”

“In a gang, I had friends, good friends. That’s probably the strongest motive that drew me to the gang—deep friendships. Also, I had respect. People looked at us with respect. Sometimes with fear...but with respect. That gave me a kind of dignity.”

“Now I work with the boys to stay out of gangs. I try to help them get jobs. It hurts to watch when they apply for jobs. When they’re in an interview, they don’t even treat them with respect. For these boys, it’s easier to obtain a weapon than a job.”

While we talked, our conversation was interrupted by children popping in to buy little cups of frozen lemonade. He said, “People here do what we can to make a living, usually many things. I sell homemade popsicles.”

I asked what it was like to be poor. “Part of being poor is that you can’t bank on the future. What you know for sure is only what you’ve eaten.” Fito explained that many poor people are deeply in debt. “Interest rates can be really high. There’s no limit. It’s part of a system designed to keep people down. The government puts more energy into collecting taxes from the poor than from the rich.”

A young man living here could understandably be angry. Fito said, “Angry young men are very aware of privilege. They grew up with the unfairness. The guys who had a complete set of crayons and a store-bought, not-already-used notebook on first day of school—they had the privilege. Kids who smell like the dump...you shower and you still smell like garbage. The angry young man thinks, ‘They’re going to pay.’ And so, they can kill with no guilt. You see violence at night, and you become callous to it. For parents to have a little intimate time, they tell the kids to go out for the evening. The gang becomes normal. Teenagers need more than a house—they need a home.”

Fito explained gun violence with a thought-provoking example: “If you have no money and your daughter needs medicine, you rent a gun from your neighbor and go downtown to stick someone up. It costs \$30 plus the price of bullets. You ‘ride the bus to work’ as we call it...and you come home with medicine. Any father with a sick girl in a world of no justice would do the same thing. It’s love.”

“People don’t want to be in a gang. There’s a solution, but it takes some money. If you want to fight drugs, gangs, and conflict, you must fight poverty. Poverty and violence: They feed on each other. If you feel impotent against gangs, you must fight poverty. What’s needed is jobs...and love...and money.”

## Remittance Palaces and Migration

In the poorest regions of Guatemala, some of the biggest and best homes come with American flags etched colorfully into the stucco. While still humble cinderblock constructions, these are jokingly called “remittance palaces”—paid for by immigrant workers in the US for their families in the Global South. And these families love—or at least appreciate—America.

Globalization means free trade, and it also means freer movement of people. All over the world, people are moving to the cities in search of jobs—and some people are bold enough to emigrate to more prosperous countries. Poverty and gang violence in Central America are pushing many to leave for the US. When families are desperate in Guatemala, they may mortgage their house and farm to send one person from the family to the US to find a job.

Migrants laboring in a rich country—whether Turks in Germany, Algerians in France, or Guatemalans in the US—typically work hard and live very simply in order to send home a portion of their earnings. The payments that immigrants send home are called remittances.

And in the most remote villages, you’ll see Western Union buildings busy with loved ones picking up remittance money sent from husbands and sons. The women in these queues are often called “remittance widows”—wives left behind as the husband is in the north working.







*Reading headlines reporting that the US was cutting development aid by \$500 million—alongside hardworking Guatemalans for whom that very aid was a reason to work hard, produce, and stay on the farm (rather than migrate in desperation to the big city or the US)—I felt hope taking a big hit.*

Joining this line, I talked with a remittance widow whose husband was working in construction in New Jersey. He sends home \$100 a month, and she's happy to pay a few dollars for the wire fee to pick it up. (While this monthly influx of cash may seem meager in our terms, it's substantial by their homeland's standards.) She said he doesn't like the food in the States—a common sentiment I heard from many loved ones. The workers in the US don't want to be away from home. They miss the home cooking back in Guatemala. They miss Guatemala, period.

Remittances are a big deal. The total money sent this way from the rich to the poor world is far more than what's sent in foreign aid (per World Bank statistics). In fact, remittances can make up 20 percent of a country's entire economy. For millions, these remittances are literally lifesaving.

I appreciate how immigrant workers make my life easier. For us wealthy people in the US, workers from countries like Guatemala and Ethiopia hang the drywall, clean our homes, drive us where we want to go, raise our children, care for our elders, and pick our apples. In short, they do the jobs we'd rather not do.

I've often wondered how the US would react if all our migrant workers had the organizational ability and the funds to go on a two-week strike at the same time. An America in deep denial about the important role these hardworking people play in our lives would suddenly respect how immigrant labor helps make our lives better—while making lives better south of the border at the same time.

## Globalization: Labor as Human Capital

Climbing to the roof of an office tower in the southern Ethiopian city of Hawassa with Fitsum, the public relations officer of the Hawassa Industrial Park, I scanned the horizon. It looked like a computer-generated scene, filled with 50 industrial sheds. Fitsum talked in clipped, almost robotic English, saying, “This is the flagship of many such industrial plants here in Ethiopia. When running at full capacity, Hawassa will employ 60,000 workers and generate one billion dollars a year in export income for my country.”

I asked Fitsum what will be produced here. He said, “Finished products... re-exported.” In other words, unfinished material is shipped in, cheap Ethiopian labor finishes it, and it's “re-exported” to wealthy countries. In the world marketplace, this is what Ethiopia has to offer: a cheap, skilled workforce... and an efficient way for international companies to take advantage of it.

Walking into one of the sheds, we found a well-ordered sweatshop. Fitsum boasted, “We are green and eco-friendly, off-the-grid and solar-powered.” This shed produces textiles and garments—raw cloth in, finished clothing out. And its workers, mostly women, earn from \$3 to \$10 a day. Each shed is run by an international manufacturing company. This is made possible, in part, because of supportive US trade policy, the low cost of Ethiopian labor, and the government's aggressive initiative to attract business. There's a new airport, an expressway, and streamlined bureaucracy—all designed to lure foreign companies to buy into this plan.

Let's be clear: Fitsum is a PR man for sweatshop labor. He's drink-the-Kool-Aid-cheerful about the operation. And, strangely, so am I. Having traveled a lot in the developed world, I have an appreciation of the value of any solid job. Filipinos working for meager wages and tips for months at a time on a cruise ship far from their homes and families? To me—with a realistic understanding of the built-in unfairness of global economics—it's a win-win arrangement.





Japan, China, Vietnam...all of these societies went through this developmental steppingstone of being the sweatshop for richer nations. For countries struggling to develop, having no privilege is a reality. You can't wish it away. But with a coordinated effort and lots of flat-out hard work, there is an escape—to be cashed in by the next generation. China, with its newly emerging middle class, isn't the cheap manufacturing hub it was a generation ago. That's good for China. But it's also good for Ethiopia, which can fill that cheap labor niche while providing gainful employment to its populace.

I understand the many reasons to be skeptical about globalization. But when it comes to ending extreme poverty, globalization is both an opportunity and a challenge. Globalization is a powerful force, and it's here to stay. Everything I'm wearing right now—and probably everything you're wearing, too—is the result of a globalized economy. You can complain about it...just like you can complain about the weather. Locals say, "It's like a big train. Get on it or get run over."

Globalization is all about the free market, and the free market is about buying and selling. To harness it, you have to accept it and play by its rules. For countries like Ethiopia to benefit from the global economy, they need to be in the marketplace. While Ethiopia may not export a lot of natural resources, with 100 million people, it has lots of potential labor. And that in itself can be a valuable resource.

With lots of young people looking for jobs, Ethiopia has made training a skilled workforce a priority. A couple of miles away, I toured an orphanage

*Providing cheap labor for the economies of more developed countries is a stepping-stone to development. For China, it's "been there, done that." With few natural resources other than its huge population of young and willing workers, Ethiopia is ready for the sweatshop stage of joining a globalized economy.*



whose children (who lost their parents to HIV/AIDS) eventually graduate into the adjacent vocational school, where they learn a trade. In Ethiopia, eight grades of school followed by a few months of vocational training produces a worker ready for the sweatshop. Like smart American kids get their degree in computer programming for that lucrative job, here at the orphanage vocational-technical school, rooms of young people learn practical skills such as industrial sewing—because that's where the employment opportunities are.



Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park offers a glimpse into what could be the future of an Africa more profitably integrated into the global economy. A US law allows many African imports into the US market duty-free, and the Ethiopian government has pulled out all the stops to take advantage of this opportunity. Advocacy groups who understand that fair trade between the rich and poor worlds helps development have worked for many years to establish the US law that makes this possible. Traveling here, I feel I'm witnessing a famously poor and underdeveloped country (with the support of the industrialized world) taking increasingly confident steps into the more-developed world. As Fitsum put it, "In the Global South, we feel traditional charity keeps us under-developed. People here want to work and to export.





## Sugar, Coffee, and the Value Chain

Under the shade of a fig tree on the main gathering place in Axum, a woman waited to serve me coffee in the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Pulling up a tiny wooden stool, I sat and enjoyed the ritual. Don't do this if you're in a hurry—part of the importance is how much time and care is dedicated to the routine of preparing, then drinking, the coffee. With the noisy three-wheeled taxis, animals, and hustlers all fading into the background, I let myself be swept away by this time-honored ritual of celebrating friends, family, and loved ones.

In a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony, loose grass is sprinkled on the ground and then decorated with small, colorful flowers. Incense rids the space of any evil spirits as guests gather to witness the many steps in the process. Green coffee beans are artfully cleaned, and then roasted in a pan over an open flame.

My hostess, who squatted as effortlessly as I sat, shook the beans and stirred them constantly to be sure they were roasted evenly. The beans went from brown to black, as they seemed to break out in a shiny and oily sweat. The aroma was powerful. As if to be sure my spirits were properly lifted, the woman passed the steaming pan under my nose. I let the aroma stoke my anticipation of what I was about to have the joy of drinking.

The roasted beans were then ground in a wooden mortar and pestle before being put into a black clay pot with a straw lid to be boiled over that open flame. After draining the brew through a sieve several times, the woman poured the coffee. Holding the pot about a foot above a tightly lined-up series of little ceramic cups, she swept across the line of cups, artfully filling each one without spilling a drop.

With incense burning and a bowl of popcorn as an accompaniment, the ritual climaxed with the gathering of guests enjoying their drink while praising both the host and the taste of her coffee. The coffee was a joy. But even more so was the chance to just sit under that tree and simply be... simply be in Ethiopia.

Both Ethiopia and Guatemala are famous for growing fine coffee. And my city, Seattle, is famous for appreciating it. As a coffee aficionado, I appreciate the value of a globalized economy. I guess that's a consequence of being a traveler. Each morning, I enjoy my cup of coffee, mindful of the efficient chain of links that connects my hometown coffee shop with the farmer who grew the beans on the volcanic slopes above Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, or in the far reaches of Ethiopia. While less artful than the Ethiopian coffee ceremony I experienced, my own little morning ritual makes me thankful to live on a small planet. And because of my travels, I'm also keenly aware that economic development





*Building a mountain of Guatemalan sugar—one sack at a time. Development is increasing the productivity of hard labor with smart capital investment to be competitive in a global market.*

requires each of those links to work and to be properly connected: good soil, an educated workforce, firm title to land, fair trade policies, branding and packaging, roads, ports, container ships, and so on. This is called the value chain.

To learn a bit more about how the value chain works, I dropped by the Terra Coffee plant in Addis Ababa, where the director, Samson, took me on a stroll. He lamented how a pound of his beans, which will ultimately make 40 cups of coffee, sells for only a dollar. Knowing the cost of my “extra shot” back home, it’s clear there’s a lot of profit not making its way back to Ethiopia. Samson explained, “While coffee is Ethiopia’s leading export crop, accounting for a fifth of all export revenue, total sales are less than a billion dollars a year.”

That’s largely because coffee producers in Ethiopia (like those in Guatemala and other poor countries) export only the unprocessed “green” coffee beans. These are then roasted when they reach their destination—typically in wealthier nations, who keep the biggest slice of the profit. In terms of economic impact, the difference between selling your natural resources raw versus being able to export a processed, finished product is huge. And tariff and trade policies—written and enforced by wealthy nations—often make exporting raw materials the only viable option for a poor country.

In scouting and writing my television special, I came across many different terms for the places I’d be exploring—some of which are passé, others trendy: the Global South...the third world...the poor world...the developing world. And, while I use it frequently, I always stumble on that last one. “Developing nation” sounds optimistic, as if assuming it’s already on the right track. But “underdeveloped nation” strikes me as more honest—because many of these places are intentionally kept down, fated to play only a supporting role to already industrialized nations.

Development means not just exporting, but processing raw materials—creating a vertical industry and keeping more of the profit generated (by coffee, for example) in the country where the beans were grown. But that’s not the case in most coffee-growing nations...and it’s not just coffee. Countries that grow peanuts aren’t able to profitably export peanut butter, and countries that grow cocoa don’t export chocolate. It’s one more example of structural poverty—how, in so many ways, things are designed in a way that keeps the poor world poor.

Switching hemispheres, I visited a different coffee production facility: the Bella Vista coffee plantation in Guatemala. Leaving Antigua, we drove along the dramatic, mountain-ringed Lake Atitlán—which felt like some fragile remains of a vast caldera blanketed in jungle. Driving under the swooping slopes of the biggest volcano, we came to the turnoff for Bella Vista. A long driveway took us deep into a densely vegetated world of coffee plants to the busy plantation.

Bella Vista offered a peek into the value chain that connects coffee farmers to my hometown Starbucks. This is a place where two worlds come together: Bella Vista welcomes small coffee growers from the surrounding mountains, who come here to sell their crop, as well as buyers from major coffee importers in the industrialized world, here to taste (and buy in bulk) the local beans.

I was greeted by Melanie, a spokesperson who offered a more optimistic view of the local coffee industry. Melanie likes globaliza-

*With its many links properly in place, the value chain connects beans in Guatemala with the coffee lover in the US and employs this hard worker.*





tion—which, she believes, gives countries that might otherwise be banana republics opportunity to develop. Pouring a sample of their coffee into my ceramic cup, she explained how the value chain helps industries in the developing world find customers. Many things that wealthy nations love—coffee, sugar, ornamental plants—thrive only in tropical climates. “You guys enjoy the products, and we get to work, export, and make money,” she said. “Globalization works well for us.”

The Guatemalan sugar industry is another example of the value chain and globalization at work in the developing world. While coffee is grown in the high country, sugarcane thrives closer to sea level. To check it out, I slathered on the DEET and traveled to the hot and muggy strip of land along the Pacific coast—the only place in my Guatemalan travels that really felt like the tropics.

Sugar is one of Guatemala’s leading exports. And the top producers have created an association to negotiate with a stronger voice in the global market. It’s a success story of a developing nation taking the important step of processing their resources to export them more profitably. Much care is put into building the brand of Guatemalan sugar.

While cutting cane is low-paid and grueling, workers from across Guatemala still migrate to the sugar plantations to find jobs at harvest time. The raw cane is trucked in and ground up, and then moves through a complicated refinement process.

With my hard hat on, I witnessed massive dump trucks of unprocessed brown sugar unloaded three at a time. Then, with a steady cascade, mountains of sugar filled vast warehouses. To add value to their raw product, as much sugar as possible is refined. Quality control is strict as the processed sugar is bagged. In the warehouse—with a mix of mechanization and hard labor—sweet sacks were stacked like mountains awaiting shipment to other countries. The best road in Guatemala connects the cane plantations with the country’s one big port. And thanks to this complete and efficient value chain, Guatemala exports its sugar and its coffee profitably around the globe.

Back home, every time I snap a sugar packet and rip it open, every time I pour that sugar into my coffee, and every time I feel the caffeine of my daily latte seep into my needy bloodstream, I’m more aware and appreciative of how it got there. There’s a migrant laborer with a machete hacking sugarcane on the muggy coastal plain of Guatemala and a small farmer growing beans on the slopes of the volcano thousands of feet above—and they are just the first link in a finely tuned chain that connects them to a happy coffee drinker in Seattle. We are connected by the value chain. And, because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, each link is necessary.







## Pedro's Peas: “Like Walking through Money”

While big agriculture—like sugar and coffee—is well connected with the global economy, landless family farmers are often left out. A formidable challenge in the fight against poverty is to help them get into the game. For example, high in the hills of Guatemala, an American NGO has helped Pedro and Ana buy land and counsels them to maximize their yield and profit.

Pedro used to leave his family to work in the coffee plantations. He toiled in brutal conditions. And, with employment going to the lowest bidder, the pay was terrible. He still works hard, but now he's independent. Thanks to help from an NGO, he has firm title to his land. And for the first time, his family has a promising future: When Pedro is gone, his son will own and work this same land. The once landless migrant farmer has stability—no longer leaving his family to work on the cane plantation or being tempted to migrate to the US.

Ana and Pedro's main crop? It's not corn, which would be more typical in the highlands of Guatemala, but snap peas. They don't even eat peas here. But the new generation of Guatemalan farmers is moving beyond subsistence. They are diversified. They grow enough corn and other staples to feed their families, and the rest of their land is dedicated to what the market has an appetite for. Walking through his fertile pea patch, Pedro—who is now a businessman—says, “It's like walking through money.”

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*Across the planet, small farmers are moving beyond subsistence. Their ambition: to own their land, increase their harvest, diversify, and join the global economy. They want to work and export and, when given a chance, they will.*





Stopping by the weigh station, where the dirt road hit the paved road, I saw farmers from throughout the valley bringing in their bags of peas to sell to an exporter. What seemed like the entire local population—men, women, and children—scurried to have their produce weighed and transferred into sturdy, shippable crates. The children, mixing military precision and playground joy, carried the crates to the roadside and stacked them like Legos. And then, just as the last crate landed at the roadside—plopping down with a force that sent the hair of little girl who carried it bouncing into the sky—the big truck rolled up. Moments later, the truck was fully loaded and underway, and the families dispersed back to the farms that were scattered up and down the valley. Much of this shipment will be sold in England. It's a long way from Pedro's pea patch to the supermarket in London.

While progress is being made in diversifying local crops, it's hard work. Big industry takes most of the flat, low-lying land, which can be worked with machines—letting them cash in on the economy of scale. Meanwhile, the small landowners are generally in the high country, where the land must be worked by hand. Because of the difficult conditions, there's little risk that the small farmers will be pushed off their land by the corporate farmers. Still, survival is a challenge. Being organized is critical.



When I dropped in on Ana and Pedro's village, everyone was gathering at the new cinderblock community center. It was built with help from an American NGO at a cost of \$4,000 for the materials, plus volunteer labor from the community. It stood big and proud—as if ready to host a hoedown—next to the humble, now-retired older center.

Societies develop better and faster when they can organize and unleash people power. And people get power a lot easier when they have a place to meet. When landowners gather with a lawyer to defend their rights, this community center is the place.

On this day, the community had gathered here to greet an American TV crew. As we sat like visiting dignitaries, they shared, one proud citizen at a time, their triumphs: Arturo paid off his farmland and had double the yield this year, thanks to new smart seeds. Elena graduated from vocational school and was now a solar power panel engineer. And then came the community announcements: Margarita reminded everyone to sign up to see the dentist, who'd be setting up his clinic here next Monday morning. Marcos announced that the pipes that would bring water to the community center had arrived, and tomorrow at six o'clock, anyone who was able should come to help dig them in. Anita was proud that her new breed of chicken was laying double the eggs each week—and was happy to help others get started with this far more productive breed.

Watching the community gather to share pride, hope, and fellowship was particularly poignant for me, as back home, I'm currently helping my own town build a community center. Whether at home or abroad, I believe in the value of a place where people can come together to help each other. Without gathering places like this, it's hard for downtrodden people to ever rise up. I was also struck by the huge difference in economic resources required to address essentially the same need: Pedro and Ana's center cost \$4,000; my community's will run closer to \$20,000,000. For what my town is investing, we could fund 5,000 centers for needy communities throughout the developing world.

After the announcements, Willy—from an organization called Siesa—dropped by to help the famers with their value chain concerns. Willy is not an NGO worker—he's a businessman and a Wild-West capitalist. His job is coaching and providing business connections for small farmers. He makes a profit when his clients get their produce to the market smartly and efficiently.



*Guatemalans don't even eat snap peas. But with a value chain in place and knowing what the market wants to buy, for Pedro's family, growing peas is like "walking through money."*



Willy told me that a well-coordinated value chain was a precondition for getting subsistence farmers integrated into the market. For development to happen, there needs to be infrastructure (roads, ports, and so on) and a healthy, well-educated workforce. And that's not possible without a government willing and able to fund big construction projects, health care, and education. Once that societal foundation is in place, the engine of capitalism can click into gear—and that's where his service enters the scene.

Willy has coached his clients on collectively producing a high-quality, well-branded product—"Antigua Peas"—that can compete in a globalized economy. To address the many challenges facing small farmers in Guatemala—corruption, organized crime, the need to pay bribes to stay in business—Willy helps them be nimble: When the market wants snap peas, you grow snap peas; if bigger potatoes sell better in the US than smaller ones, that's how you grow them. And they take advantage of technology. If a farmer has a plant with a strange rot, he texts Willy a photo and Willy texts back a remedy.

A newer dimension of Willy's work is dealing with climate change—irrigation to control drought, the right seeds to be resilient—all necessary now with erratic rain and extreme temperatures. He recommends which crops work best and where and when to plant them in the interest of diversification. A refrain I heard from Willy, like from others in Guatemala, was, "People here just want to work and export."

Sitting there with Willy after having "walked through money" with Pedro, I imagined the value-chain journey of those peas one link at a time: legal and firm land ownership; water management; smart seeds; managing crops to fit demand and market; getting the right fertilizer; selling to a middleman who packages and brands the vegetables; hiring a truck to take it to market; and taking full advantage of roads, ports, trade policies, and container ships to get into more distant markets. Pay Willy his cut, take from the sales revenue what you need to live, and invest the rest to scale up your business for the next year. With the help of that solid and strong value chain, people like Pedro and Ana can swing right onto and ride that big train called globalization.





# Global Citizenship, Hunger, and Hope

The impact of big issues like these—globalization, migration, conflict, climate change—is beyond any one individual’s influence. And challenges in the developing world can seem overwhelming and distant. But when we act collectively, we can—and do—make a difference. And I’ve seen that in person. I’ve seen it walking with people like Pedro and Catarina, Abedi, Lisa, Marta, Fito, and Pedro and Ana—the hardworking people who make the developing world develop. The huge progress made in the last generation encourages me to work harder. And the uptick in extreme poverty in recent years has made fighting it more urgent than ever.

Traveling through Ethiopia and Guatemala—witnessing the lives of people in extreme poverty, the economic realities of our world, and the promise of smart development work—makes me consider my relationship to it all. Why should I care? What should I do? How can I, as an individual, make a difference?

Like many people, I want to do something to reduce the obscene gap between rich and poor. But we can also go beyond our own modest individual efforts and support a much broader solution. That’s exciting, and it’s an opportunity.

Americans spend \$700 billion each year on our military to make us safer. (Consider for a moment: That’s one million dollars, 700,000 times over.) That’s hard power, and hard power is necessary. But it needs to be complemented by soft power: investing in development, diplomacy, and stability. And that also makes us safer.

Make no mistake: Soft power is real power. It’s good for our national security. For example, for the annual cost of one extra soldier deployed overseas, we could dig a hundred wells in thirsty villages. Each morning, all of the moms in those hundred villages, rather than walking across the county to fetch their water, could simply walk across the square. And when they pumped that clean, life-giving water, what would they think? They’d think “God bless America”... and we’d be safer. How much hard power and how much soft power we mix for our national security deserves some thoughtful and pragmatic consideration. It’s a societal choice that we—as citizens of a democracy—make.



The accepted target among wealthy nations is to invest around one percent of their GDP in development aid—and many achieve that goal. While many Americans think we’re giving far more than that, in reality, the United States gives less than one quarter that amount. For every \$100 of our GDP, our government gives less than 25 cents in development aid.

There are plenty of ways to help out. As we’ve seen, generous giving to hardworking NGOs is important. But when it comes to fighting poverty and fostering development, smart US government aid programs and fair-trade policies have a far greater impact than all philanthropic efforts combined. That’s why many people choose to make a difference by supporting advocacy. That means citizen lobbying (through organizations like Bread for the World): encouraging our representatives in government on behalf of hungry people. When we act together, as a nation, there’s certainly reason to hope.

I hope this this report on my travels has inspired you to take action. Where to begin? Learn more about the causes and impacts of extreme poverty. Get to know the many organizations making a difference, and take joy in supporting the ones that resonate with you. Be bold about sharing what you’ve learned with your friends and neighbors. Be aware that the results of our elections have an even bigger impact on people in the Global South than they do on people here at home—and take that awareness into the voting booth. The next two pages are a toolkit for making a difference as a caring American.

Considering all the wealth in our world, 700 million people living in extreme poverty is just not right. We can end hunger in our lifetime. We can do it because we care. Or we can do it because it’ll make our world more stable and our country safer. Or we can do it for both reasons. Thanks for joining me on this journey. And, like I sign off on my *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* television special, I’m Rick Steves, wishing you thoughtful travels.



# YOU CAN MAKE

If you're inspired by these lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala and would like to learn more and make a difference, here are a few ideas.

## READ A BOOK ABOUT GLOBAL POVERTY.

Here are four titles I found especially helpful.

- ***Understanding Global Poverty*** (by Serena Cosgrove and Benjamin Curtis): While this reads like a textbook, it was a huge help for me as I gathered ideas before writing my script and embarking on this shoot. Serena and Benjamin analyze poverty, teach why it's pervasive across human societies, and demonstrate how it can be reduced through proven policy solutions.
- ***The End of Poverty*** (by Jeffrey Sachs): Although it's a few years old now, this book makes a great case for why we need smart aid. Sachs introduces his readers to development theory, illustrates his points using real-life situations around the world, and leaves you inspired to be part of the solution when it comes to ending extreme poverty.
- ***The First 1,000 Days*** (by Roger Thurow): This book tracks four pregnant women in four corners of the world—Uganda, Guatemala, India, and Chicago—and explains the importance of proper nutrition for these women and their newborns' first two years of life. By taking us into the lives of these families, Thurow teaches the science, economics, and politics of malnutrition.
- ***Factfulness*** (by Hans Rosling, Anna Rosling Rönnlund, and Ola Rosling): This book's subtitle, "Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think," says it all. When asked simple questions about poverty and global trends, we generally get the answers wrong. *Factfulness* explains why and helps us better understand the challenges and opportunities we have in fighting hunger.

## SUPPORT RECOMMENDED NGOS.

It was my hope that after watching my TV special, viewers would be inspired to ask, "OK, how can I help? What can I do?" I've collected a list of organizations that we worked with to produce the special, as well as others I support. You can find these at [ricksteves.com/hunger](http://ricksteves.com/hunger).

# A DIFFERENCE

## HOST A VIEWING PARTY.

A great way to make a difference is to share my one-hour TV special *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* (designed to be the most instructive hour anywhere on the fight against extreme poverty and hunger) with a group—perhaps your school, where you worship, your book club, or a circle of friends. You'll find a viewing party tool kit, including a study guide with discussion points, and the TV special streaming in the TV section at [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com).

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS.

Your congressperson works for you—and they listen. A famous case of how individual American citizens can make a huge difference is when a group of friends in Alabama made an appointment to meet with their Republican congressman, Spencer Bachus. They explained to him how the extreme indebtedness of the poorest countries to the richest countries was keeping the most desperate people on the planet impoverished. Congressman Bachus learned from his constituents, and he ended up spearheading the initiative that ultimately led to the forgiveness of billions of dollars in developing world debt—helping many countries work their way out of extreme poverty.

I believe one of the most powerful things an individual can do is to simply let their congressperson know how they feel about an important issue. In fact, speaking up this way is good citizenship. While you can support various advocacy organizations, you can also simply write a letter to your member of Congress. Tell them you watched this TV special and explain how you feel about government policy as it relates to extreme poverty. You could mention that you see extreme poverty as a national security issue. Whatever you say, your voice will be heard, and you will make a difference.





# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit [ricksteves.com/hunger](http://ricksteves.com/hunger) for the following resources.

## WATCH THE TV SHOW.

You can watch my one-hour public television special, *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* (that resulted from all of this travel and learning) anytime, free and on demand. You can also look for it on your local public television station. If it's not airing, request it.

## VIEW SHORT CLIPS AT RICK STEVES CLASSROOM EUROPE®.

You can stream about a dozen, three- to five-minute video clips from the *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala* TV special at Rick Steves Classroom Europe® (go to [classroom.ricksteves.com](http://classroom.ricksteves.com) and search for “hunger”).

## CHECK OUT DISCUSSION POINTS.

You'll find a list of discussion points that can serve as a study guide for teachers and those hosting a screening of *Rick Steves Hunger and Hope: Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala*.

## SHARE THIS HUNGER AND HOPE BOOK.

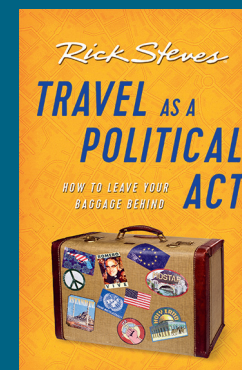
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# RICKSTEVES.COM/HUNGER



## TRAVEL AS A POLITICAL ACT

This book shares the lessons Rick Steves has learned from a lifetime of travel. Sharing adventures in transformational travel ranging from El Salvador to Denmark, Morocco to Iran, and Cuba to Palestine, Rick inspires his readers to get out of their comfort zones and travel in a way that gives you empathy with the 96 percent of humanity that lives beyond our borders. *Travel as a Political Act* inspires globetrotters to come home with that most beautiful souvenir: a broader perspective.





# Acknowledgments

To make a TV documentary about a complicated topic, you need access, local experts, connections, and a great crew. Fortunately, I got the help I needed. The special—and this book—wouldn't be possible without experts who have my most heartfelt thanks.

**The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** focuses their African work on Ethiopia, and they put me in touch with many fine organizations there.

**The United Nations World Food Program and Executive Director David Beasley.** Director Beasley's many contacts in both Guatemala and Ethiopia were a huge asset to our work, as was his enthusiasm for this project.



**Augsburg College's Center for Global Education and Experience (CFGEE)**, with whom I've taken many excellent educational tours, arranged my trip through Guatemala, linking up their contacts there with NGOs I wanted to work with.

**My TV crew** for this project was producer Simon Griffith, camera operators Karel Bauer and Sean White, and editor Steve Cammarano. Without their hard work and artistry, this project would not have been possible.

At **Rick Steves' Europe**, I work with about 100 colleagues to help Americans travel smartly and economically through Europe. We research and write guidebooks, produce a public television series (*Rick Steves' Europe*), and produce a weekly public radio program (*Travel with Rick Steves*). We also organize and lead bus tours through Europe (taking about 30,000 Americans on over a thousand tours and over 40 itineraries each year). To learn more about our work, visit [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com).

Thanks so much for your interest in this important topic.

*Rick Steves*  
**HUNGER  
AND HOPE**  
Lessons from Ethiopia and Guatemala

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## WE CAN END HUNGER IN OUR LIFETIME

Join Rick Steves in Ethiopia and Guatemala for some truly thoughtful—and hopeful—travels. In this book, we learn:

- How ending world hunger in our lifetime is a realistic goal, including how extreme poverty has dropped by more than half in the last generation.
- How modern development aid creates long-term independence rather than dependence.
- How smart foreign aid is a good and practical investment.
- And how we can do it because it's ethical or because it'll make our world more stable...or for both reasons.

