

# The Toughlove Solution

By Garrett Hardin

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**Why** should the United States be concerned with the suffering of poor countries? Two sorts of reasons are given, one moral and the other prudential.

The prudential reasons are plausible, but basically unsound. We are told that if we don't take care of a poor nation it might attack us. Nonsense. Modern warfare is so expensive that even rich nations cannot afford it. If a poor country can't afford bread, it certainly can't afford guns. International terrorism comes cheaper, of course. So long as there is envy in the world – which is forever – terrorism will be a tempting option. The answer to terrorism is police action: this is not a perfect answer, but it is the best there is.

What about this: "If we don't take care of poor people in their own countries, won't they migrate into ours?" Unfortunately, there are 2.5 billion poor people in the world, and they are increasing by 40 million per year. We cannot possibly keep up with this need. Our responsibility is to keep our country from being overwhelmed by immigrants. The responsibility of each poor country is to keep the excess population from being produced.

**Lesson:** What remains are the moral reasons for helping other countries, and these are weighty. But we must remember what we have learned from domestic experiences: we can't solve social problems by blindly throwing money at them. We've had a salutary lesson in the development of India and China during the past three decades. Since 1950 India has received massive foreign aid from many countries, but China from only one country (the Soviet Union) and that only until 1957. At the outset, the two countries were equally miserable and had equally poor prospects. Today? Without question the people of China are far better off. Foreign aid did not rescue India from poverty; lack of aid did not handicap China. In fact, it may be that China did so well precisely because she was not "helped" by "aid."

Back in 1945 Mao Tse-tung committed China to a policy of "regeneration through our own efforts." Fertilizers and factories are splendid things, but far more important than technology is what is inside the heads of men and women. Foreign aid can supply technology: the people must be willing to make the social changes that will make technology work.

It is essential that we distinguish between crisis and crunch. When an earthquake killed 23,000 people in Guatemala in 1976, *that* was a crisis. The world responded generously, and it should have. But when thousands – or millions – of people die of starvation in an overpopulated country like Bangladesh, what we are confronted with is not a crisis but a crunch. Ninety-four million Bangladeshi live in an area the size of Iowa – which has only 3 million people. Bangladesh, with its fertile soil and a climate that permits three crops a year, is a rich country, but not rich enough to add three-quarters of an Iowa every year to a population already 30 times as large. Direct food aid to such a country merely subsidizes further destructive population growth.

Sensing that gifts are bad, we generate euphemisms to hide our tracks. "Concessionary rates of interest" is a euphemism; anyone who can borrow money at 3 percent when the going rate is 8 percent is getting a gift. Poor countries ask for, and get,

loan after loan. As their debt mounts, the burden of "servicing the debt" – paying the interest – becomes unbearable. Finally, since foreclosure is out of the question, the lender has no choice but to forgive the debt.

**Drugs:** Way back in 1953 John Foster Dulles saw the direction foreign aid was taking. "You know," he said to a friend, "aid is like opium. There are withdrawal pains when you remove it." I think we have now reached the stage when foreign-aid addicts should be subjected to the "cold turkey" treatment. Most of the world's wretchedness is caused by the crunch of overpopulation, which will only be made worse by the drug called "aid." That this drug is addictive is shown in a statement made by the President of Kenya in 1980: "No country can maintain its economic independence without assistance from the outside." What a long way from Mao, and what a curious definition it implies of "independence"!

Now that rich countries are catching on to the corruption of the word "loan," poor countries are taking a different tack: they are demanding concessions in foreign trade. They want to be paid more than market prices for their exports and to buy at less than the market – gifts under another name.

Times are changing. Notice what is happening to parenting. We are relearning what has been known for thousands of years: love must be combined with discipline. Recently a group of American parents, driven to distraction by their children's drug taking and rampant hedonism, joined forces to lay down the law to their children – with love. These parents meet to exchange ideas, and they meet with their children to say, "Shape up or ship out." Significantly, the parents called their organization Toughlove.

**Courage:** Toughlove parenting is perilous, but it has at least the possibility of solving problems permissiveness has created. Toughlove takes courage. Some of the children clear out. This is hard on parents, but they accept the risk because the alternative of continuing to support irresponsible behavior is worse.

Relations among nations must be guided by Toughlove, too. Spokesmen for poor nations now threaten us with the loss of their love if we do not give them everything they demand. We must be prepared to lose their love out of genuine concern for the long-term interest of their people. Most of the poor countries are, in fact rich – rich in natural resources. It is their governments, usually, that are poor.

To realize a country's inherent richness, a government must see to it that a population matches the carrying capacity of the land. China has shown how to use incentives and disincentives to work toward this goal. China's methods may not be acceptable everywhere, but the goal should be universal. Each country must choose the means that meshes with its culture. Outsiders can furnish the technology of birth control, but population control must grow out of the will of the people, expressed through their political decisions.

There is no survival without self-reliance, which cannot be donated from the outside. Self-reliance must be generated inside each nation, by the people themselves. There is no other way.

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