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Urbanization in the developing world is accelerating, offering many opportunities to those who are fortunate enough to escape from poverty, while exacerbating the inhumane conditions for those who cannot. Empirical data describing the serious impacts of this deepening poverty seem to move us only so far, and funding to address the many complex problems of urban poverty remains grossly inadequate. Development practitioners do employ robust quantitative analyses of these development challenges, but such empirical approaches fail to capture the "personhood" of those affected, or the ethical dimensions of the relationship of "us" to "them." Indeed, seldom is the moral landscape in development policy or practice mentioned at all. Even more morally troubling, nearly all reviews of development programs and policies implicitly accept as largely immutable the very low levels of funding available. What ought to be our moral response to this situation?

The venue of my current assignment is hot, humid, tropical, and brilliantly sunny. Dar es Salaam, or "Dar" as it is commonly referred to, is the rapidly growing capital and port city of over 2.5 million Tanzanian people. This city confronts its future bearing a burden of concerns not uncommon to other burgeoning cities of developing and transitional countries around the world: crushing poverty, weak institutions of local governance, scarce resources, a growing divide between rich and poor, few formal sector jobs, a degraded environment, and so forth.

And so forth? The litany of problems posed by, or constitutive of, urbanization in the developing world makes grim reading—"and so forth" is a very long list indeed. Development practitioners, analysts, and policymakers will capture it in charts and tables, portray it in regression analyses, reflect it in succinct descriptive narratives and empirical calculations, and then move on. If one pauses to look, however, the reality of Dar is so much more than one could surmise from tables, diagrams, numbers or text. Dar epitomizes a people who are resilient, enterprising, hard working urban Tanzanians. Given the luxury of an extended stay, making time to forge personal relationships and to listen, one perceives something more of the texture, depth and intensity of the struggle to live, love, and raise families in Dar. It is a struggle in which losers outweigh winners, and some

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people just survive. Many get by, but few people in Dar flourish, live long lives, or dare to entertain high aspirations. The poignant drama of the human spirit continuously negotiating and renegotiating a grudging, unspoken acceptance of the long list of development burdens cannot be communicated well by the tables, diagrams, or numbers.

Losing the Person in the Numbers

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Numbers—they take development practitioners such as me a long way in understanding, making choices, allocating resources and justifying these decisions to others. We, “outsiders” and passing observers of the daily struggles of the urban people of Dar, often end our thinking with numbers. We lose the “persons,” abstracting them out of our calculations. In the near future, perhaps, we will be challenged to change that practice. The

people of Dar es Salaam, or whatever similar urban center being considered, will tell us either directly or in some measured way that they choose not to be abstracted to numbers. Urban residents are acquiring “voice.” Cities are where communications technology and information technology advance; people cast aside “target group” status

and communicate to us and to each other. My own experience over the past twenty-four years tells me that people, particularly in such cities, are beginning to articulate their common values and concerns, to express their “personhood,” to demand that we treat them as dignified human beings rather than the targets of our interventions. Their voice is growing, challenging us to consider many deeply troubling moral questions largely lost to our present way of thinking about “doing development.”

Anyone who, like me, has chosen her or his life’s work in international development labors within an intricately complicated framework of social, political, and economic systems. Our choices—even the range of tools we apply—are constrained by political agendas, worries about cultivating aid dependencies and the imposition of foreign values, commercial and trade concerns, institutional policies, and—most of all—by the gross inadequacies of time and money. Yet international development theorists and practitioners, and the policymakers they advise, still exercise choices, make decisions, and help to shape programs and interventions that bring benefits to some people, inevitably ignoring others. The goals vary: bringing urgent humanitarian relief to residents of a city struck by a massive earthquake; facilitating long-term capacity strengthening of local governments; teaching girls to read; designing massive infrastructure projects to serve basic human needs. We endeavor to support good governance, to preserve cultural treasures, to honor traditions, to challenge entrenched prejudices. And so forth. How would it benefit any of us (or, for that matter, hurt us)—in our work or in our personal lives—to seek intimate knowledge of the per-

sonal struggles and triumphs of poor individuals? What would it benefit the recipients of such assistance?

On a previous but recent trip to Dar es Salaam, I facilitated a conference of academics, development experts, and representatives of aid organizations. It was a conference that had almost nothing to do with the people of Dar; the subject was the many persistent, tragic conflicts far to the west in the Great Lakes countries of Africa.¹ Dar es Salaam, like many relatively safe cities throughout the developing world, provided a convenient and relatively high-tech venue close enough to, but not at, the front lines of conflict. The papers presented were articulate and informative, the discussions rich with personal anecdote, insightful observations, and lessons learned, and the conference culminated in a list of important actions that ought to be taken. It was an efficient, productive conference, and remarkably impersonal. I assume, but was not told, that a few participants knew first-hand what horrors these wars and brutality had inflicted on the people of the region. Probably most knew these grim facts second hand, others only conceptually. I do not know, however, because that is not what we talked about. There was no sharing of angst, no moment of silence, no wrenching case studies of afflicted widows or orphans, no vivid, troubling documentaries shown. Conference participants did not want to get that close or to share these tragedies. We retreated to a safe—some would argue more effective—place behind our thoughtful analytical papers, our strategies, our numbers. We made our recommendations in the usual way: using well-reasoned arguments that are justifiable, empirical, and promise to be cost-effective. If the holders of the purse strings concur with the recommendations made, programs will be designed, resources will be allocated, interventions will happen, results will be measured and monitored, and we will all move on.

Urban Development Priorities

Compared to the slaughter of the innocents in the Great Lakes countries, or in northern Uganda, or in far too many other locations, the challenges of urbanization in cities and mega-cities (roughly defined as cities over 10 million inhabitants) appear far less urgent. Security and peace come first in the hierarchy of development, as they must. In either case, however, wrestling with the challenges of urbanization or peacebuilding (which often overlap), we must ask where the numbers eventually take us? What would happen if we go beyond the numbers—if we get personal? And, once again, what good would it do?

First, consider some of the numbers. Select a subset if appropriate. (As an urban development practitioner, I naturally gravitate towards urban data.) Whatever subset selected, the demographics of poverty and urbanization are readily available and remarkably sobering. Globally, 60 percent of the world's population will be urban by the year 2030,² and in just eleven years from now, half of the population in the developing world will be urban residents.³ There will be twenty-three mega-cities in the world by 2015, and nineteen of them will be in developing countries.⁴ Many of the poor

are not living “quality” lives, as around the world, 2.4 billion (mostly female) persons already lack access to basic sanitation, and more than 1 billion (mostly female) persons now exist on unsafe water.⁵ Stepping down from the “billions” plateau, nearly 800 million persons are undernourished.⁶

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Viewed from a daily perspective, 34,000 children younger than five die each day from hunger and preventable disease—that’s almost twenty-four children each and every minute of every month of every year.⁷ If awesome numbers start to sound fuzzy, think in fractions. About one-third of all human deaths are linked to poverty, deaths that

are in most cases preventable.⁸ One-fifth of the world’s population live in cities where the air is unhealthy to breathe.⁹

The empirical dimensions of the development problematic are well described. So too are the facts regarding the paucity of resources currently allocated to alleviating the misery and suffering of under-development. Rich countries currently spend about \$11 billion annually in development assistance targeted at basic social services. Over 60 percent of this comes from individual people in rich countries through contributions to international NGOs and the other 40 percent comes from their governments.¹⁰ Estimates place this combined sum at just 3.6 percent of the amount that would actually be needed to eradicate severe poverty,¹¹ or \$300 billion annually—a figure that would lessen significantly over time.¹² This sum may sound like a lot, but raising annual development expenditures at this level would barely make a perceptible impact on the quality of life of those living in the wealthiest countries, who only represent 15 percent of the world’s population.¹³ Easily affordable,¹⁴ yet current funding levels are \$11 billion. Why the discrepancy?

Perhaps the numbers are letting us down. We are unmoved, or at least not sufficiently moved, by the stories that the numbers tell us. As elements in a larger argument, numbers are essential, but without the personal connection to the persons behind the numbers they only move us a short distance. The numbers even take us to destinations we would rather avoid. The philosopher Thomas Pogge has recently explored this phenomenon, causing no small degree of consternation. Adopting a largely utilitarian argument, he points out the inescapable fact that in a world in which the demand for urgent humanitarian aid and basic development assistance is vastly greater than the supply of resources, decisions about where and how to spend money inevitably leave people out—and in many cases, leave people to die. Even those who contribute to international NGOs (INGOs) share this moral dilemma, as Pogge notes: “Different INGOs prevent different deaths. And by contributing to one rather than another, I am then indirectly deciding who will live and who will die.”¹⁵ Pogge journeys far with

these numbers, exploring where money and resources spent on international development assistance ought (and that's an intentionally moral "ought") to first be directed. As posed by Pogge, ought the available resources be used to:

- a) Protect persons from the most serious harms instead of lesser harms; or
- b) Protect an extremely poor person from serious harm instead of to protect a merely poor person from serious harm; or
- c) Protect a larger number of persons from some serious harm rather than to protect a smaller number of equally badly-off persons from equally serious harm; or
- d) Support a greater number of less expensive development interventions, thereby reaching more people, or fewer more expensive interventions thereby affecting fewer people?¹⁶

The answers seem clear enough. We would naturally want to minimize harms, give most aid to those most adversely affected, and distribute our resources so that they achieve maximum benefit for the maximum number of people. Persisting with Pogge's logic, however, and the "numbers approach" will lead us to some unexpected situations. For example, using empirical analyses of what it costs to take one person permanently out of poverty—which varies by country—it seems sensible to use the few resources that we do have to accomplish the most good, in other words, raising the maximum number of people out of poverty. Yet this moral argument, interpreted strictly, would mean that *all* international aid should then flow to those countries where this unit cost is the least (currently identified as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, and Uganda), where we could generate the greatest benefit, *and to nowhere else*. Arguments for distributive fairness of resources across regions, countries, or cities¹⁷ then fail against this utilitarian claim that we ought to maximize the number of people we can help permanently raise from poverty—regardless of whether they happen to reside in just four countries.

Cities in poor countries, however, which have relatively high densities of poor people living in close proximity, fare rather well under this type of analysis. For example, due to high concentrations of poor people, it is more cost-effective to provide safe water to an urban location than a rural one. Therefore, by the intentionally provocative philosophical argument that Pogge makes, we ought to maximize the provision of safe water and concentrate our water projects exclusively in cities. After all, for the same cost of providing just one rural person with safe, potable water, many urban residents could have this basic human need met. Is the moral claim of one rural person to safe water more persuasive than the combined claim of many urban persons?

Heavy Moral Burden

Where Pogge's argument trails off is where I become even more interested. Pogge's articulation of the dilemma of choices leads us to confront a conundrum central to those of us who have resources and/or who make de-

cisions regarding the allocation and distribution of resources (money, supplies, services) to poorer people—we bear an untenable moral burden of choice. Our every decision becomes a triage, a tragic decision. If we consult only numbers, the calculation feels less oppressive—but what if we must look the rejected person in the eye, or hear her words? Could we send the father carrying the malnourished toddler, too weak to walk on her own, away to face the suffering of a slow death because it is not cost-effective to distribute food aid in his city?

The numbers—and the associated arguments of cost-effectiveness—only address some of the parameters in deciding where the money goes because the money will not come close to satisfying all the urgent needs. The political will and “national interest” of the wealthier nations compel policymakers and aid practitioners to walk away from people who—on the basis of political calculations—matter less than others. After all, we (the wealthy) can only do so much.

How can we bear to do it? How do we, the wealthy, walk away from the pleas of the young girl who has been raped by members of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) cult of northern Uganda—a girl forced to watch her parents and siblings hacked to death—because the political environment (national self interest and political will) and the resources (money, supplies, expert services) will only allow us to intervene once both sides to the conflict agree to negotiate peace terms? When do we calculate that it is “worth” intervening? The LRA has no agenda other than wanton destruction and death—it is a savagely brutal cult—but no one with the capacity to act has

sufficient moral momentum to do so. The numbers have not moved us enough. We read the statistics, but accepting a Pogge-like conclusion, we chose to make the most of what few resources are available and balk at Northern Uganda. We can agree that it seems wrong to turn our back on whole cities, countries, conflicts, because our money goes farther somewhere else. Even if the moral cost-benefit argument is that we ought to favor the poor of Africa and Asia over the poor of South America (or

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North America, for that matter), it seems unfair—even callous—to ignore the poorest people of an entire continent, simply because the poor of a different continent are brought out of poverty at less “unit” expense. Is there no escape from the utilitarian argument claiming that because we can raise more people out of poverty in some locations than in others, and that because each person is morally equal to another person, we ought to favor

the choice that maximizes results? If it were only a matter of helping people to various stages on the ladder of human flourishing, we could come to some peace with our decisions. Instead, the decisions that we have to make keep some people alive, and leave others to die.

Pogge implicitly accepts the paradigm of *not enough to go around*; his purpose is to explore the turbulent and unsavory moral morass that this situation causes. Being left with no choice but to make the best of a very bad situation, perhaps Pogge feels that focusing on the numbers helped us find some peace, and that the alternative of connecting to the faces or the voices of those left to suffer and, in too many cases, to perish, would be too heavy of a moral burden.

Moral Response

My reaction to this tragic-choice reality is unequivocal. I balk at the numbers, dare to look in the faces, listen to the voices, and persistently search for the moral strength to question the underlying premise of *not enough to go around*. As communications technology becomes more pervasive, I hear the voice of the poor becoming louder. Their faces get closer, they are more “human,” and the moral burden that I and we—the wealthy (which, in relative terms, includes the Western development practitioner)—bear becomes less vague. Unlike the numbers, the quavering voice of the young girl brutally traumatized by the LRA in Uganda, and many other persons like her, might motivate more of us to action with her simple message: “we are persons too.”

“Morally permissible” is a common term of moral theory. Such theories attempt to guide us to understand what policies, actions, values, and principles are justifiable—permissible—on moral grounds. Clearly the yawning chasm between rich and

poor, between what is needed to alleviate poverty and what is available, is not morally permissible. Ought we to challenge the paradigm of “not enough,” to balk at the numbers, and restate the basic needs claims of all dignified

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human beings everywhere? As we ponder to form our arguments, the voices—the moral demands—of the poor grow louder and more insistent. It is not morally permissible to turn a deaf ear to their voices, to avoid their eyes, to make tragic choices that leave many to suffer and some to die, when the resources are available.

We are what we are, the argument goes. We do things all the time that are morally not permissible, that are self-serving, lacking in compassion. While true, perhaps that truth is becoming troublesome. Those active in development careers face that truth more directly and with less insulation than others. We are left with the tragic choices that so deeply impact the

lives of others and the system that serves their dignity and needs so poorly. We must balk at the numbers and begin to question this uncomfortable, morally impermissible status quo.

After all, we are what we choose to become, the counter-argument responds. Let's commit ourselves to finding ways to change the numbers.

Notes

¹ These are generally considered to include Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

² *Population Reports*, Population Information Program Newsletter, Center for Communications Programs, School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, 2001.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ *The Cities Alliance Vision Statement*, Cities Alliance (2001), 12 December 2001 <www.citiesalliance.org/citiesalliance/citiesalliancehomepage.nsf>.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2003* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), <www.undp.org/hdr2003>, 6, 9, 87.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 49.

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture, *U.S. Action Plan on Food Security* (1999), <www.fas.usda.gov/icd/summit/pressdoc.html>, iii.

⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 1999* (Rome: FAO Publications, 1999), <www.fao.org/news/1999/img/sofi99-e.pdf>.

⁹ United States Agency for International Development (The Office of Environment and Urban Programs), *Making Cities Work* (Washington, DC, 2001), 1.

¹⁰ UNDP 2003, 290

¹¹ Severe poverty is defined as living on less than \$1 per day.

¹² Thomas W. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2004* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 253.

¹⁴ "Easily affordable" refers to the relative deprivation suffered by those wealthier persons taxed to support this increased level of funding, which would be minimal in its impact on quality of life for these persons—and relative to the impact on the lives of the poor, the gain in quality of life of the poor being lifted out of poverty is incomparable to the incremental decline in the quality of life of the wealthy.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Pogge, *Moral Priorities for International Non-Governmental Organizations* (2004), paper presented at University of Maryland seminar, 14 March 2004, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–11.

¹⁷ The determinants affecting which of these units of distribution to use are themselves worth some consideration, as they are not value-free.

In some ways, the question of God and democracy is the question of world politics today—and it makes us quake, much like Jefferson and Tocqueville. But we quake for just the opposite reason. Our fear is not that God relentlessly advances democracy but that too many people in the world worship today—particularly in the “Global South”—opposes democracy and the Western countries that embrace it.

Timothy Shah

With one billion people, a weak public health infrastructure, high population density both within the country and increasingly around the world, and a caste-based social structure, India is on the brink of this looming “breakout” when the infection is no longer confined to the high-risk population and breaks out into the general population.

Pramit Mitra

If faith-based organizations play a crucial role on alleviating poverty and promoting economic development, it is therefore time to consider how they can occupy a larger place in foreign aid policy.

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