

# Worksheets to Teach High School Students About: **Poverty**

**WORKSHEET #G1:**

# Effects of Poverty

Poverty is defined as a person's inability to access the basic needs for survival. With a partner or in a small group, fill in the following chart.

NEEDS	CONSEQUENCES for a family if lacking the need	SUPPORT How does society help? (individuals and/or government agencies)
Food	- Kids go to school hungry & are unable to concentrate	- Food banks

**WORKSHEET #G2:**

# Poverty Statistics

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**UNITED STATES**

- Nationwide, 17 percent of children live in poverty.
- The highest rates of extreme poverty are concentrated in the south and poverty is especially prevalent among black and Latino children.
- Food insecurity, lack of affordable housing and other economic hardships affect millions of children in the United States.

**CANADA**

- Across the country, about 15 percent of children live under the poverty line (1.2 million or almost 1 in every 6 children).
- In 2005, 40.7 percent of food bank clients were under 18. Among food bank clients, families with children make up more than 50 percent of recipients. The number of people using a food bank in one month in 2005: 823,856.

Note: Population of the United States: roughly 300 million

Population of Canada: roughly 32 million

**THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE**

- One-third of deaths—some 18 million people a year or 50,000 a day—are due to poverty-related causes.
- 600 million of the world's children live in absolute poverty.
- 800 million people go to bed hungry every day.
- Every year, almost 10.5 million children die before their fifth birthday. That's 30,000 children a day. Most of these children live in developing countries and die from a disease or a combination of diseases that could be prevented or treated if the means were there. Sometimes, the cause is as simple as the lack of antibiotics for treating pneumonia or oral dehydration salts for diarrhea. Malnutrition contributes to over half of these deaths.
- According to the Worldwatch Institute, the annual expenditure of pet food in Europe and the United States is \$17 billion.
- With an annual investment of \$19 billion, we can eliminate global hunger and malnutrition.

**WORKSHEET #G3:**

# The Beauty of Smiles in the Face of Despair

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By Jason Apostolopoulos, International Volunteer

I was only 12 when I first visited Kenya through an international volunteer trip.

I discovered the magnificent beauty of the country on the first day during a hike in the Kenyan rainforest. A line of trees stood like majestic gates to the rainforest. This was just the beginning.

The first part of the hike went by slowly as the beauty of the rainforest stopped us in our tracks at every turn. In one place, rays of sun peeked through mile-high trees, reflecting off small ponds bordered by colorful plants and vegetation. In another place, rivers wound through vast tunnels of lush trees.

After three hours of hiking, we came to a place where all of the rivers of the rainforest converged into one giant waterfall that cascaded for hundreds of meters. To the sides stood cliffs covered in green vines, and before us stretched the savannah where we could see elephants, lions and gazelles roaming the plains.

That night, during dinner at the center where we were staying, one of my fellow group members gave a presentation about global hunger. As I listened to the talk and reflected on my day, one question came to mind: In a place with so much poverty, disease and hunger, how can such beauty and magnificence exist? My answer would soon come.

Our first day had been an introduction to the nature of Kenya, so it was fitting that the second day would introduce us to the country's people.

We awoke early the next morning and left for the village of "Ol Moran," where a market and goat auction would give us our first taste of Kenyan life in action. The village had no running water and no electricity, the small homes and shops were all that made it distinct as a village.

Shortly after arriving at the village, the over 40-degree Celsius (104-degree Fahrenheit) weather started making me sweaty and thirsty. I set my sights on a drink vendor a few feet away and headed in that direction.

Suddenly, I heard laughter. There, on my left, stood two small kids, their smiles covered by their hands. I turned toward them and waved, belting out a loud "hello." But my boisterous greeting only silenced their laughter. Their smiles turned into screams and they ran away, disappearing behind one of the vendor's wooden signs.

For a short 12-year-old kid who had never scared anyone in his life (although I had tried), I was completely taken aback by such a strong reaction.

But it was sweltering, and my thirst made me forget about the kids and instead refocus on making it to the drink vendor.

Then there was that laughter again. Was I hearing things? Sure enough, there in the same spot stood the same two kids.

My previous attempt at an introduction had completely failed, so this time I simply knelt down and whispered the only word I knew in the local language. "Jambo," I said, which means

“hello” in Swahili.

The kids’ once-smiley faces now looked perplexed, but curious—an expression that remained as they tentatively approached me. Very carefully they touched my hand, then pointed at my face, their smiles returning. Although there were no words, this was their own version of hello. I didn’t realize it then, but to these kids, I represented the outside world with which they rarely came into contact.

Within minutes we were playing games together. I picked them up and spun them around, and in return they taught me their versions of tag and hopscotch.

Before long, my thirst had returned. I desperately looked around and found a small water cooler that had been set up for the occasion of the market. I stumbled toward it, cupped my hands under the tap, and took a big gulp of cool water.

As I went for a second sip, I noticed four small hands had also taken their place under the tap. I looked and found that the same little kids had followed me.

Smiles once again lit up their faces, this time not because they were looking at me or playing a fun game, but because they had found clean water to drink. Because of something I always had at home; because of something they rarely had here.

In the face of so much despair, these kids looked at life with such a fresh and bright perspective that in that one moment they taught me more than I had ever learned back home.

It was here I found the answer to the question I had asked myself only the day before: The beauty of Kenya exists despite the hunger and the poverty, because the beauty exists not only in the landscape, but also in the smiles and the hearts of the people, and in the laughter and hope of the children.

**WORKSHEET #G4:**

# Surviving Poverty, Surviving War

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By Hellen Kamara (as told to Lloyd Hanoman, Community Development Worker)

Hellen Kamara is 17 years old. She lives in Moyamba, Sierra Leone. During the country's 11-year civil war, Hellen lost her school, her home and many of her friends. The poverty already so prevalent in her country became even more widespread—the rebels looted, burned and destroyed, leaving communities like Hellen's with nothing.

"My family and I were living here since the starting of the war," Hellen says today. "We later had to leave for the capital city Freetown because of the bad things we faced from the rebels in the township."

There were many bad things. Hellen's family home was burned to the ground and the only secondary school in the area was destroyed, the structure burned and the furniture stolen for firewood. She watched as rebels tortured her parents. Boys were forced to become soldiers and girls were assaulted and terrorized. Hellen was one of these girls.

To escape the violence, Hellen and her family fled and hid in the nearby bush. Poverty here took an even greater hold: without a home to live in or proper food to eat, Hellen and her family were always on the move and were forced to eat whatever they could find. "We slept in the bush and [had to eat] all sorts of food in the bush. We walked by foot...and I came across so many dead bodies."

Hellen's story is shared by thousands of children in her country. Today, they and their families are still struggling to recover after the destruction of the war. Many schools, homes and health care facilities are still unusable, thousands of children are unable to pursue their education and poverty is widespread. In fact, Sierra Leone is ranked the poorest country in the entire world.

With the help of friends around the world, things in Sierra Leone are improving. In Hellen's community, St. Joseph's, the all-girls secondary school, was rebuilt in partnership with the local community and with funds raised by North American youth. Today, it provides a safe place for young women to develop new skills and become empowered to make a difference in their communities.

Despite all that she has been through, Hellen is confident in her future and the future of her country. "With all the experiences I have faced in life, from war to peace, after much struggle, I hope to see a brighter future," says Hellen. "My thinking is to become a professional lawyer, to help see that Sierra Leone continues to be a peaceful and straight-forward country."

## WORKSHEET #G5:

# Sharing Small Gifts of Big Change

By Charlotte Sobolewski, International Volunteer Trips Facilitator

As the kids worked on a set of questions to hand in at the end of class, I looked out the window and off into the distance.

Across the horizon I could see a group of Maasai mamas walking with large barrels strapped to their backs, probably returning from getting water. Every day, access to water begins with a journey to the Maasai “ocean”—a waterhole a 1/2 kilometer (about 1/4 mile) walk from the school and the village.

Eventually my attention returned to the class. One by one the students approached me with their answers, except one boy at the back of the room who still hadn’t come forward.

The boy’s name was Benet. He was no taller than 150 centimeters (4’11”), with a chiseled worn face, dimly lit eyes and legs like spindles. His clothes were tattered, his sweater worn and stretched. Crouching beside him I heard his terrible cough and saw the phlegm and blood he’d coughed up onto the classroom floor. I’d met Benet many times before during my trip to volunteer in this community, but this was the first time I’d seen him so sick.

Before I could react, older students in the class proceeded to move a desk over to the “infected” area and demand that we continue with the lesson, while encouraging Benet to sit outside the classroom. Sickness was part of daily life for students in Kenya’s Maasai Mara.

I let the other volunteer take over the class and sat outside with Benet to see what was going on. His eyes were wide and deep with stories and thoughts. He told me a little bit more about his life—that he was 15 years old, had four brothers, three sisters and a mother who was a kind and big woman.

I asked him how long he had been coughing up blood. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled sheepishly without giving a direct response. He removed his maroon school sweater and sat beside me in his school dress shirt trying to pick the dried blood from his clothes. He was so skinny I could see the knobs of his ribcage and spine, and his stomach was bloated from not getting enough healthy food to eat. It was clear how sick Benet was. For one of the few times in my life, I found myself at a loss for words.

In an attempt to break the silence, Benet pulled out his small water bottle and took a swig of water, boasting that it had come from the Maasai ocean. I pulled out my water bottle and also took a fresh swig. Benet stared at me with curiosity and asked what type of liquid I was drinking. Puzzled, I told him it was water. He looked at both of our bottles and started to laugh, then accused me of drinking soda—he was convinced it was 7-Up. I poured some of my water into the cap of his bottle and let him try for himself. He drank cautiously, then told me that mine tasted funny. He asked which ocean I had gotten it from—was it the Maasai ocean?

As I’d seen before, the Maasai ocean was no more than a small waterhole shared by everyone in the community. Human waste, animal waste and other pollutants like pesticides from privately owned commercial farms in the area are partly to blame for the brown murky composition of the water that Benet and others in the village were drinking. People bathed, washed clothes, answered the call of nature and watered their cattle all from the same source. Maybe this was why Benet was so sick.

I asked Benet what he wanted to be when he grew up. He said his dream is to be a tour guide so he can show people around his beautiful country. He said he wants to show the world how much he loves his school and how thankful he is for it.

I left the school that evening, but two and a half weeks later I returned with the other volunteers to give health kits to the children. As each grade lined up in single file, pushing and shoving, like mini volcanoes of excitement ready to explode, I scanned the crowd for Benet, hoping he would be there. He wasn't. I asked around and found out that he hadn't been at school for the past few weeks. Knowing how sick he had been, I feared the worst.

Then, just before leaving, a senior student at the school named David rushed out to greet me and to send warm wishes to all of my friends in Canada. I hugged him goodbye and wished him luck with his studies. David asked if I'd had a chance to buy some Maasai beadwork, and when I told him I hadn't, he slid a double-sided and intricately woven beaded bracelet onto my wrist.

It was from Benet.

"He told me to give it to you to remember him," David said, "to remember how important it is that we make change in our lives, even so small that you can't really see with your naked eye."

I smiled and asked David to send my sincere gratitude to Benet for the gift and to make sure he received a health kit. Then I slipped one of my own bangles from my wrist. I handed it to David and asked him to give it to Benet. A reminder, I said, that we're united to make a difference in this world.

**WORKSHEET #G6:**

# Stories about Poverty

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## Questions

1. Using specific examples, describe how these stories helped you understand poverty in Kenya and Sierra Leone.
2. How are these stories different than the ones we see in the media (e.g., textbooks, newspapers, magazines)? Does the age of the writer make a difference to you?
3. What struck you as similar about Benet in Kenya and Hellen in Sierra Leone?
4. What “needs” were not being met in these stories? If we had the chance to ask them, what do you think these children would “want?”
5. In Jason and Charlotte’s stories, how did the writers make a connection with the Kenyan children despite differences in language and culture?
6. What questions would you like to ask about these children?
7. How will these stories change the way you think about poverty?
8. What do you still want to know about poverty? (Note: Transcribe these questions onto one piece of chart paper and share them with your students.)

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