

# 1.4 Billion Reasons to End Poverty

By Henrietta Champion de Crespigny

The Global Poverty Project is approaching the issue of putting an end to the 1.4 Billion people currently living in extreme poverty with a re-energised and encouraging message. It uses a compelling multimedia presentation, *1.4 Billion Reasons*, to educate and inspire the global community into action. The Project's message is one of general optimism provided by concrete examples of the significant progress achieved thus far, such as a halving in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty in the last 30 years. The refreshingly positive approach to this confronting problem is helping people realise the world's potential to be without extreme poverty within one generation.

*1.4 Billion Reasons* was presented to a keen audience in May 2012 at the Monash University Law Chambers by Paul Mason. Mr Mason's commitment to social justice is evident from his career thus far; he has served for four years as the State Director of the Oaktree Foundation's Western Australian branch, spent a year managing the Oaktree Foundation's Schools 4 Schools education program in his native South Africa before moving on to join the Global Poverty Project. Mr Mason's passion and his experience in the field complemented the project's inspirational message and encouraged the audience to respond with excited questions about the program and its success.

Mr Mason painted a picture of the lack of choice and rights facing 1.4 Billion people. However, the project's re-energized approach did not dwell on this aspect and focused mainly on positive examples such as progress made eradicating polio which has been reduced by 99% in the last 25 years. These successes demonstrate how the developing world can and is changing.

These examples helped the audience identify several common approaches used by the developing world to rise above the poverty line. Along with the broader economic factors that encumber developing nations, the emphasis was placed on the five fundamental resources that a nation needs to break the poverty cycle: food, water, healthcare, primary education and employment.

As is often the case, the investment of foreign aid plays a significant factor in catalysing the collective existence of these fundamentals. South Korea provided a fitting example of the importance of targeted foreign aid. An injection of American funds into primary needs such as education, infrastructure and hospitals following World War II saw one of the world's poorest nations evolve into an export orientated country, and a donor of aid as opposed to a recipient.

Similarly, Ghana exemplified the effectiveness that targeting foreign aid on primary education can have. It promulgated an increase in literacy levels, life expectancy and employment, following an increase from 70% to 100% in the rate of primary education.

Specific examples gave perspective to the broader goal of eradicating extreme poverty entirely, while providing audience members with the tools to understand the attainability of such change. *The Girl Effect* showed how promoting gender equality in the developing world by starting small can have most profound



Paul Mason gets the audience excited about ending poverty.

effects on a global scale. The movement, sponsored by the Nike Foundation and the NoVO Foundation, is premised on the idea that adolescent girls are the most likely agents of change in the developing world. By providing girls with a better education, they have the opportunity to marry freely and later, delay childbearing, and as a consequence earn an income that will benefit themselves, their families and their communities, and ultimately their countries.

Despite an unmistakably optimistic overtone, Mr Mason also highlighted significant hurdles, such as a lack of government and corporate transparency. However, discussion focused on areas of progress in this area, such as the *Publish What You Pay* campaign. The campaign is comprised of civil society organisations campaigning for wealthy corporations engaged in natural resource extraction in developing nations to transparently publish records of payments made to governments. Providing accounts of how this money is being spent allows citizens to hold their leaders to account and ensure revenue is spent in a socially beneficial manner, such as ensuring clean water facilities, adequate health care and education infrastructure.

Mr Mason championed the importance of individual choices and action and provided the audience with realistic ways to support the Global Poverty Project. Initially, generating discussion about how to lift a nation above the poverty line is vital. More directly, by choosing ethical consumption by ensuring coffee we drink and the chocolate we eat is Fair Trade certified we can help foster an environment where primary producers in developing nations can break out of the poverty cycle.

The presentation brought home the fact that the 1.4 Billion people living on just \$1.25 a day are people just like us, with fear, hopes and aspirations. Most importantly, it provided the audience with concrete steps towards eradicating extreme poverty.

**For more information visit [www.globalpovertyproject.com](http://www.globalpovertyproject.com) to join the movement.**