

Utopia: I've Got 99 Problems but A Solution Ain't One

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[In "The Utopian Nightmare", William Easterly proposes](#) that perhaps utopian ambitions hurt efforts to help the poor-world majority.

Is it true that efforts made towards a more utopian world actually have the opposite effect? Could it be that efforts made to help the world poor actually hurt them?

[Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) aim to dramatically reduce poverty, child mortality, illiteracy, environmental degradation, AIDs, tuberculosis, malaria, unsafe drinking water, and discrimination against women.

[Professor Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia University published a book called "The End of Poverty"](#), in which he called for a big effort to meet these various MDGs. Sachs proposes everything from nitrogen-fixing leguminous trees to replenish soil fertility to antiretroviral AIDS therapy. In sum, his U.N. Millennium Project proposed a total of 449 interventions. Those are a lot of interventions.

Easterly argues that having a lot of solutions can pose a problem. The solutions begin to clash and begin to lose their effectiveness.

Easterly also argues that having too many different goals weakens the accountability and probability of meeting any one goal. Easterly presented a great analogy to capture his point: having too many goals is like having too many bosses. The bosses each try to get you to work on their goal, and not the other boss's goal. Workers get overworked, overwhelmed and demoralized, and goals are less likely to be met.

Easterly proposes we are more likely to see real progress towards a better world if we focus on fewer problems. But to propose the world concentrates on tackling fewer problems in order to more efficiently progress towards a better world is unfair. Who are we to prioritize one problem over another?

For instance, let's say there was Person A and Person B. Person A struggles to make ends meet and is having a hard time feeding his family. Person A probably thinks poverty is the worst problem in the world and should be prioritized as the most serious problem. Person B, who's dealing with HIV, would beg to differ and think health is the more important problem in need of a solution. It wouldn't be fair to say, "Person B, we are only going to focus on solving poverty right now, so sorry, but we can't help you" or "Sorry, Person A. We're going to focus on HIV right now so poverty's going to have to wait."

It may be true that if we all work on solving global poverty, then we'll do a better job at accomplishing the goal. But what about all the other problems? Do we tell the rest of the world suffering from different problems to wait their turn? Tough luck? Maybe next time?

Prioritizing the alleviation of global poverty would be unfair to people suffering from HIV/AIDs, the polar bears on the brink of extinction due to climate change, and the children on the brink of death due to diarrhea caused by unsafe drinking water.

If you think about how many things are wrong in this world, the problem isn't that we have too many solutions. Rather, we don't have enough!

Having Many Solutions is NOT a Problem

Life has a lot of problems. And for each problem, there's going to be a different solution because there is no such thing as a "one-size-fits-all" solution. That means, we're going to end up with a lot of solutions.

This isn't as bad as Easterly says it is.

Easterly makes a lot of great points. International development is a crowded field. There are many players and each plays a different role. Sometimes, it gets difficult to have them work together in an efficient way. A major loss in having so many players playing different roles is that not all players are working to meet the same goal and sometimes,

they get in each others way. We are not able to zero-in on one issue and are less likely to solve it as soon as it is possible.

But at the end of the day, it's better to have too many people trying to work together than it is to have too few or none at all. It's better to have many players span across the entire field trying to make a goal because then we're bound to score somewhere. We'll cover more ground and make progress. It might be in small measure, progress can be achieved incrementally across the board.

Globalization and Us: Our Role in International Development

In "The United Nations and Changing World Politics", Weiss, Forsythe, Coate, and Pease suggest that the spread of cooperation in the human rights arena is propelled by globalization. Due to greater internationalization, we've become more interconnected and interdependent. In turn, we each play a greater role in each others' problems around the world. A decision made on one side of the world can have consequences in someone's life on the other side of the world.

It's true – we are held more responsible for world problems due to the greater consequences our actions can have on people around the world and in turn, are more responsible for providing a solution. That isn't a problem. That's great news. We are all capable of being solutions as much as we are capable of creating problems.

We can't have too many solutions. Let's all go be solutions.