



A GLOBAL PORTRAIT FROM SIERRA LEONE

My name is Mariama and I live in rural Sierra Leone in West Africa. Our river and most of our wells have run dry, and it takes three hours return trip to walk to the closest source of clean water. Our dirty village pond gets used for everything -- toilet, bathing, laundry, cleaning dishes, animal care, and water for cooking and drinking. Many children drink dirty water and now they are sick with diarrhoea, including my little sister and brother. In fact, many young children have died from this and other diseases, especially malaria and cholera.



I am the oldest of eight children -- another four have died from hunger or disease before reaching the age of five years ... and three were killed during the civil war. My parents cannot afford to send us kids to school, especially the five girls. Besides, we need to find any work we can to help support the family, as there is little steady work for my father and mother. Eventually it will be up to us to look after our parents in their old age.

Facilitator Questions (for ‘Mariama’ and other participants)

1. What are the basic solutions to the health problems this village faces?
2. Do you think it is possible to immunize every child on earth? What is stopping us?
4. How can children die of such a harmless condition as diarrhoea?
5. Why doesn't the Sierra Leone government provide Mariama and the other children in her village with access to immunization programs, clean water, malaria bed nets and adequate sanitation?
6. If the family had a larger, more stable income, do you think they would have as many children?
What if none of the first few children had died?
7. What are the main reasons for having so many children?
Are people poor because they have a lot of children? ... or do they have a lot of children because they are poor?
[In other words, does overpopulation lead to poverty? ... or poverty to overpopulation?
8. What happens when we deny education to children? ... especially to girls?
9. How can war make life more difficult for children?

...See next page for Facilitator / Teacher “Points to Consider”

BREAKING THE POVERTY DISEASE CYCLE



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Points to Consider for Facilitators and Teachers

Water / Health

- Lack of clean water and inadequate sanitation are major factors in most of the 12 million deaths of children worldwide each year.
- Half the children of Africa already suffer from illnesses caused by unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, and a degraded environment.
- Despite significant improvements, one third of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water.
- Infectious diseases are the world's leading cause of death -- 17 million each year.
- Existing and new vaccines could save the lives of over 10 million children each year.
- Malaria kills more children than AIDS, TB, or any other disease— every 30 seconds one child in Africa dies from malaria.
- Sierra Leone is listed last, or 179th, on the 2008 UN Human Development Index. It has one of the world's highest infant mortality rate and one of the lowest life expectancy rates – 42.4 years^a -- of any country in the world.
- It has only 3 doctors for every 100,000 people (Canada has 192).

International Debt

- Sierra Leone is classified as a Highly Indebted Poor Country with its debt being over 60% of GDP.
- There are about 41 nations 'crippled' by debt. But of the 22 nations receiving debt relief^b, three-quarters will be spending over ten per cent of government revenue on debt this year. Sixteen countries will be spending more on debt than on the health of their citizens, and ten will be spending more on debt than on primary education and health combined.
- These repayments are "crowding out" vital public investments in health, education and other areas.

Population

- Lack of social and health services means that parents in many parts of the world rely on their children as a kind of 'social security' or 'pension' in their old age.
- Experience shows that couple will choose to have smaller families when they can be sure that their children will survive and that they, as parents, will have a reliable income, and an assured food supply, for many years to come. The result is better nutrition, education, and health for all family members.
- When countries succeed in reducing the number of child deaths, there is a decline in the birth rate within one generation.
- The World Health Organization estimates that for each year of schooling that a girl receives, the under-five mortality rate of her children is reduced by up to 10 %^c, as more educated mothers benefit from their greater understanding of health, sanitation and nutrition.

^a www.unicef.org www.hdrstats.undp.org

^b www.oxfamamerica.org

^c www.who.int

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- One quarter of children in developing countries who start school cannot stay long enough to ensure lasting literacy. Worldwide, 130 million children of primary school age -- **mostly girls** -- are not in the classroom, and thus denied the chance of a better future. In Sierra Leone, only 18% of females are literate (as compared to 45% for males)

Civil War

- Sierra Leone was shattered by a devastating civil war which raged from 1991 to 2002. During this conflict over 80,000 civilians were killed, and 8,000 more were left maimed, often by brutal amputation. Over 10,000 children were abducted; some were used as sex slaves, while others were forcibly recruited as soldiers and used to commit human rights abuses and atrocities. The civil conflict caused the displacement of two-thirds of the Sierra Leonean population.