

Lesson 4

TOPIC 2

My Responsibility for World Poverty

Introduction

In year 9, we thought about how we must be responsible for ourselves, for our families and for our communities.

But we are also part of the whole world. In Vanuatu, not many people are really hungry and poor; but in other countries, millions of people are dying from starvation.

The Problem

1. Show some pictures and tell some stories about people in other countries who are starving. (for example see The story of Ameerul, and Profiles on Poverty from Food Matters).

On a map show which countries suffer most from lack of food.

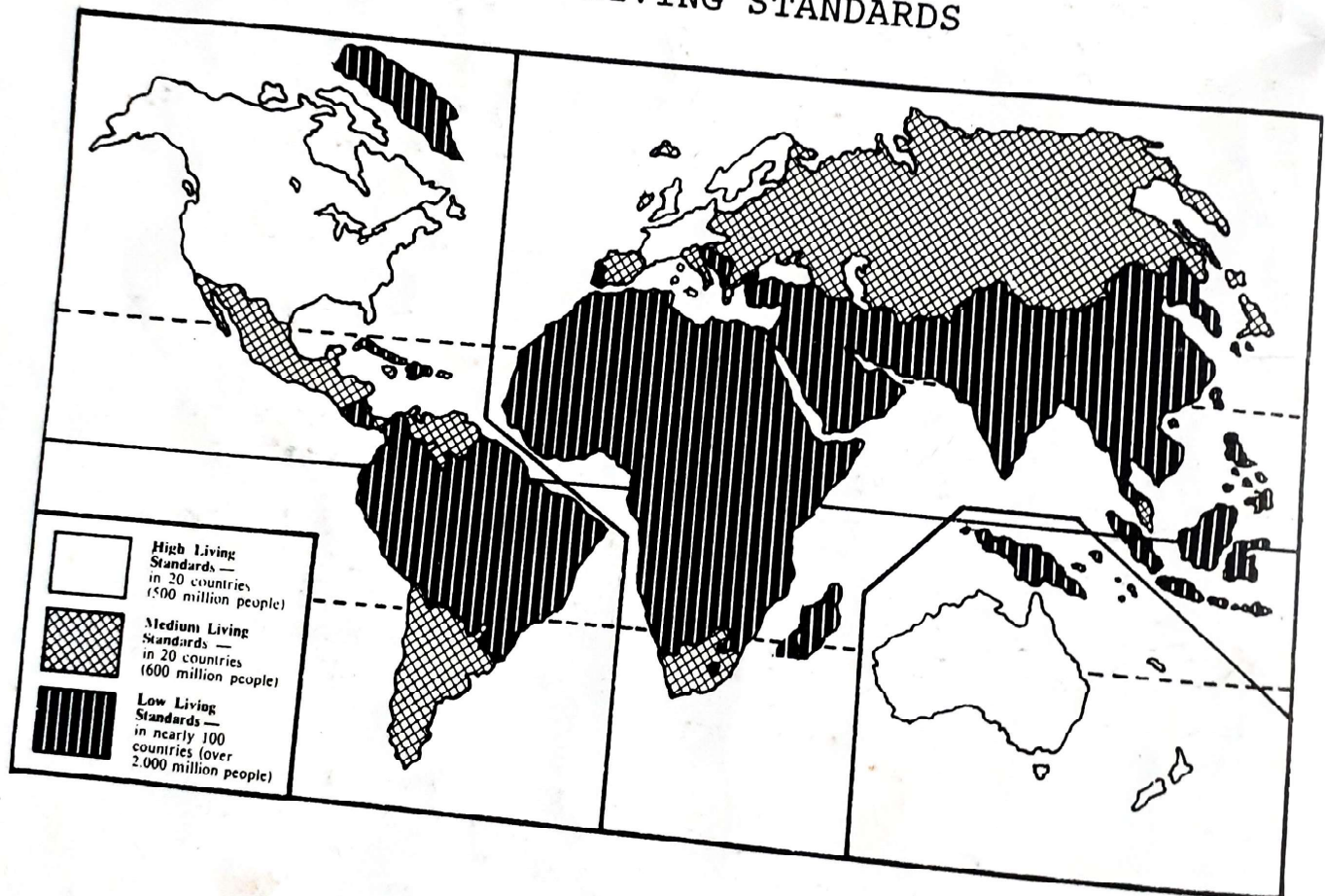
2. Talk about the food we eat - the need for a balanced diet (carbohydrates, protein and health foods). An average adult needs 2,400 calories each day. Many countries like Africa, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, etc. do not have this amount of food.

The story of Ameerul, from Bangladesh

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"Today I've gone to three villages looking for work," Ameerul, a landless labourer, told us one morning. "I found nothing. No work means no rice. Yesterday I couldn't find work, and I ate nothing all day. Finally in the afternoon I ripped three bamboo poles out of the wall of my house, chopped them up and sold them in town as fire-wood. With the money, I bought three pounds of wheat flour. I had half a taka left over, so I bought a cup of tea and a handful of puffed rice. Last night we ate the flour. I have six mouths to feed. Even when I find work, I only earn two pounds of rice and one taka. Two pounds of rice won't even fill the stomachs of two people - for six it's nothing. And what can you buy today with one taka? Each day I ask myself: How will I live? How will my children live?"

WORLD LIVING STANDARDS



If you study this map carefully by examining the different kinds of shading, you will see where the people live who do not have enough food to eat.

profiles on Proverty

Subsistence Farmer, EL Salvador

Yoland Lopex (27 years) lives with her husband and young family in the countryside. They try to make a living on a plot of rented land.

"I get up at 4.00 a.m., light the fire, make coffee and fetch water from the well. Our nearest well is some 30 minutes away and I make several trips a day.

Then I wash, grind and pat the maize for tortillas (pancakes made from maize). If you're quick you can grind all the maize in about two hours. I prepare about 60 tortillas each day because that is all we have to eat - tortillas and beans. We rent a plot of land and I take a meal to my husband at mid-day. It is an hour and a half away. In the afternoon I stay and help with the work. We grow maize, millet and beans.

At 6 p.m. we return home. Then I prepare the next meal; sometimes we have rice as well as beans. We go to bed about 8 p.m.

I usually leave the washing until Sunday, also the sewing and mending. They say Sunday is a day of rest, for the poor every day is a work day.

Our lives are difficult. We barely survive. It only takes something like bad weather or illness and there may be no food."

Unemployed Woman, United States

Victoria Sharpe (62 years) lost her job some years ago. Her unemployment assistance has run out. She wants to work but nobody will employ her.

"I've had no income and I've paid no rent for many months. My landlord let me stay. He felt sorry for me because I had no money. The Friday before Christmas he gave me ten dollars. For days I had had nothing but water. I knew I needed food; I tried to go out but I was too weak to walk to the store.

I felt as if I was dying. I saw the mailman and told him I thought I was starving. He brought me food and then he made some phone calls and that's when they began delivering lunches. But I had already lost so much weight that five meals a week are not enough to keep me going."

Shantytown Dweller, Kenya

In Nairobi, Kenya, Samuel Rondi (30 years) and his family live in a shantytown area called Mukuru. In Nairobi one in three people live in shantytowns.

"I work for a security company. In Nairobi all of the well off people have security guards and dogs to protect their beautiful homes. They live a very different life from myself and my wife, Marcellina Syombua.

Many poor people, like myself, have come here from the countryside looking for work. The shanty town in which we live has no electricity or sewage system. There are seven taps for 7,000 of us. We rent a one roomed apartment which is made of mud and wood. All of the rooms are very close together and cooking by open fire makes life dangerous. In January 1986 all of Mukuru went up in flames. It has quickly been rebuilt.

We live with our five young children. Life is very expensive when you are poor. I earn 600/= Kenyan shillings a month. (IR£1 = 20 Kenyan shillings; £1 = 23 Kenyan Shillings) Rent takes 150/=, water 30/= and fuel for the fire 20/=. Food is getting more and more expensive but my wage stays the same. We barely survive. If one of our children is ill and needs medicine my wife and I go without food to afford it."

Unemployed Youth, Ireland

Rory McGrath (19 years) is from the country but now living in Dublin. He lost his job over a year ago and has been unable to find work since.

"I went on the dole but nobody told me that there was a rent allowance. I was sharing a flat with another country boy who was also on the dole. Two really cold rooms at £16 each. We used to get up early in the morning and steal bread from outside the shop on the corner, go back to the flat and eat it dry with our tea. In the night we would go through the skips looking for wood for our fire.

When I found out that there was a rent allowance it was a great help. You get the form for this from the Health Board and have to take it to the dole on signing on day every few weeks.

I filled in a form once for a medical card but it was too difficult to get. I never get sick. But, of course, I did - so sick I could not breath. At the Health Centre they said I'd need a medical card. I went to out-patients in the nearest hospital but the queue was so long I couldn't face it. I just went back to the flat and stayed in bed until it went away."

3. Causes of Poverty:

- (a) Environment and Natural Disasters.
 - Floods, droughts, hurricanes etc. spoil food crops
 - Many areas are desert, too dry to grow food.
 - Too many people living in an area can cause the land to be infertile by using it too much, having too many animals, cutting down all the trees for firewood, causing erosion and drought.
- (b) Foreign countries have colonized and taken the best land for cash crops. Or some few rich people own all the land, while most have no land for planting food.
- (c) War causes death and destruction of farm land and uses up a lot of money for weapons and soldiers.
- (d) Trade is not fair - agricultural products like copra, coffee etc earn very small prices; but manufactured goods, imported by poor countries are very expensive.