

Contemporary Global Issues, 1989-Present

THE STORY MATTERS...

The world faces a daunting array of challenges in the twenty-first century. Some of these, such as nuclear proliferation and cyberterrorism, are relatively new. Other problems, such as war, poverty, hunger, and disease, have a long history. Creative solutions are needed to address these problems. Microcredit loans are one example. Microcredit banks make small loans to individual entrepreneurs, the majority of them women, enabling them to start small businesses and to escape from poverty.

Lesson 35-2

Social Challenges in the Modern World

READING HELPDISK

Academic Vocabulary

projection migration

Content Vocabulary

pandemic human rights
nongovernmental organization

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What influences global political and economic relationships?
- How do social and environmental issues affect countries differently?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

More and more people are becoming aware of the global nature of our contemporary problems. Those problems include world hunger, global health pandemics, the struggle for human rights and equality for women, and population and migration trends. At the same time, new transnational grassroots social movements have arisen to address these problems.

Global Poverty

GUIDING QUESTION *What is the social impact of poverty, hunger, and health pandemics in developing nations?*

Developing nations confront many serious problems, not the least of which is extreme poverty. While global poverty has been decreasing, the number of people living below the international poverty line is staggering. Around 900 million people, mostly in developing nations, live on less than \$1.90 per day, which can cause poor health, illness, and even death. Poverty is a complex problem that creates many other challenges for developing nations. It can keep children from attending school, limit access to clean water and sanitation, and cause people to live in unsafe housing and is a primary cause of worldwide hunger.

World Hunger

Growing or purchasing enough food for more and more people creates a severe problem in many developing countries. An estimated 795 million people worldwide suffer from hunger. This is slightly more than 1 in 9 people. In developing regions, approximately 13 percent of the population is undernourished.

The effects of hunger and malnutrition are devastating. Every year, more than 10 million people die of hunger and hunger-related diseases. More than 3 million children under age 5 die from poor nutrition annually. The long-term health problems caused by malnutrition are severe. Undernourished infants and children suffer from blindness, intellectual disability and increased susceptibility to disease.

Among the many causes of worldwide hunger, poverty and economic factors are by far the major ones. The poor do not have enough money to produce or buy an adequate amount of food. For those living in poverty, food is costly.

Natural disasters can also bring about hunger. Droughts, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and tsunamis cause many to go without food, at least on a short-term basis. Poor farming practices, deforestation, and overgrazing can also lead to hunger if land becomes depleted and can no longer produce as much food.

Food shortages can also result from civil war. War disrupts normal farming, and warring groups often try to limit their enemies' access to food. For example, in South Sudan in 2015, some 2.5 million people were facing crisis levels of hunger when conflict led to internal displacement and interrupted the food supply.

Global Health Pandemics

The fear of a global swine flu pandemic in 2009 made people aware that in a global age, infectious diseases can easily spread as a result of international interactions. Global infectious diseases, such as HIV / AIDS, have raised concerns in recent decades. In 2015 approximately 1.2 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses, and Africa has been especially devastated. According to the UN, more than two-thirds of the nearly 37 million people living with HIV are in Africa south of the Sahara. AIDS has had a serious impact on children and families in Africa. Many children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Often, relatives are too poor to care for these children. Many orphans thus become heads of households filled with younger siblings.

Still, there has been some good news: Global AIDS deaths have declined and the percentage of the world's population living with HIV has stabilized. The decline of

AIDS deaths is due in part to the increased availability of antiretroviral therapy (ARV) that has allowed people living with HIV to live longer, productive lives. Organizations, such as UNAIDS, continue to sponsor initiatives to educate the public, to prevent HIV infection, to provide AIDS treatment, and to search for a cure.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Making Connections How are problems of poverty and world hunger related?

Human Rights and Equality for Women

GUIDING QUESTION *How have problems involving human rights and gender inequality been addressed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries?*

The United Nations took the lead in affirming the basic human rights of all people. On December 10, 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This declaration is a set of basic human rights and standards for government that has been agreed to by almost every country in the world. It affirms everyone's right to life, liberty, and security of person as well as the right to freedom of movement and the freedom of opinion and expression.

Since the adoption of the UDHR, the human rights movement has achieved much success in freeing political prisoners and bringing economic and political change around the world. Nevertheless, human rights violations still occur worldwide.

State-Sponsored Violence

Governments themselves often carry on the violence. Dictators and military regimes punish people who disagree with their views. In Cuba, Chile, Myanmar, Iraq, Iran, and other countries, people have been persecuted for opposing repressive governments. In other countries, such as Bosnia and Rwanda, ethnic, religious, and racial hatreds have led to the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of people.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking, illegal movement of people most often for the purposes of forced labor, is a human rights violation that has grown in recent decades and has become an increased concern of the international community and the UN. Those who traffic in human beings use threats, force, deception, and an abuse of power to exploit individuals. Millions of people are trafficked across international borders each year.

Most victims of human trafficking are women. These women are subject to sexual and other forms of exploitation. This includes being forced into prostitution, forced into marriage, forced to work without pay, and forced to have their organs harvested.

UN.GIFT, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, works to combat the problem. There are many non-profit organizations globally that are also working to prevent human trafficking and provide care to victims.

Gender Gap

In the social and economic spheres of the Western world, the gap that once separated men and women has been steadily narrowing. More and more women are joining the workforce, and they make up half the university graduates in Western countries. Many countries have laws that require equal pay for women and men doing the same work, and some laws prohibit promotions based on gender. Nevertheless, women in many Western countries still do not hold many top positions in business or government.

Gender inequality is more pronounced in developing nations. Women in developing nations face considerable difficulties. They are often unable to obtain education, property rights, or decent jobs. Indeed, one of the UN Millennium Development Goals was to "promote gender equality and empower women." Still, some women in developing nations have become leaders of their countries, such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who became president of Liberia in 2006, and Joyce Hilda Banda, who became Malawi's first female vice president in 2009.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights... Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person Everyone has the right to freedom of movement ... Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression."

-from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*,
adopted by the UN General Assembly
on December 10, 1948

PARAPHRASING

Describe the human rights listed above in your own words.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Evaluating What effect has the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had on the movement for human rights around the world?

Population and Migration Trends

GUIDING QUESTION *How have population and migration trends affected developed and developing nations?*

Estimates by the Population Reference Bureau put the 2015 world population at about 7.3 billion. Their projections estimate that the global population could reach 9.5 billion by 2050. The world population is expected to increase approximately one-third over the next four decades.

Almost all population growth is from the developing nations. The most populous have taken steps to decrease growth. By 2050, India will have surpassed China in population and will likely remain the most populous country in the world thereafter.

Meanwhile, many wealthy regions, such as Western Europe, are declining in population. In fact, by 2050, the United States is expected to be the only wealthy nation with a growing population. The developed nations are also “graying” – a larger percentage of the population is reaching retirement age. In the more developed regions, more than one-fifth of the population is aged 60 or over. By 2050, it is expected to reach one-third.

The global age distribution is shifting toward older people because of increases in life expectancies, lower birthrates, and lower death rates. The number of people aged 80 and over and those who live beyond 100 is rising, placing increased demands on the economies of developed nations.

Developing countries face different problems. Between 2015 and 2050, the population in developing countries is expected to grow from 6.1 billion to 8.1 billion. Also, the trend of increased urbanization is expected to continue. Because many cities lack the infrastructure to support larger populations, concerns are rising about future international health and environmental problems, especially in developing nations.

The issue of global migration is connected to population growth. Globally, there are an estimated 232 million international migrants and another 740 million internal migrants. Since most migrants move to urban areas, international migration is also closely tied to urbanization.

There are several reasons people migrate. Persecution for political reasons and brutal civil wars in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe has led millions of refugees to seek safety in neighboring countries. Many have migrated for economic reasons. For example, guest workers from Turkey, India, Pakistan, and North Africa entered more prosperous European countries. But foreign workers often become scapegoats when countries face economic problems. Political parties in France and Norway in the 1990s, for example, called for the removal of blacks and Arabs to protect the ethnic purity of their nations.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Contrasting How do population issues affect developed and developing countries differently?

Transnational Organizations

GUIDING QUESTION *What role do transnational and nongovernmental organizations play in the international arena?*

Global awareness has led to new social movements that focus on problems that nations share. These problems include areas such as the environment, gender inequality, child labor, the appropriate use of technology, and the promotion of peace.

Groups such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement draw their membership from different countries. Other groups have members in one country. Many individuals act at the grassroots level, that is, in their own community. A favorite slogan of grassroots groups is “Think globally, act locally.”

Another movement that addresses world problems is the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are often represented at the United Nations. They include professional, business, and cooperative organizations, as well as foundations. Also included are religious, peace, and disarmament groups that work to limit the size of military forces and weapons stocks. Other NGOs protect the welfare of women and children and include environmental and human rights groups.

American educator Elise Boulding promoted NGOs. She believed they can educate people to consider problems globally. She said that all NGOs are expected “to define problems in global terms, to take account of human interests and needs as they are found in all parts of the planet.” The number of international NGOs increased from 176 in 1910 to nearly 37,000 in 2000.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing How are grassroots organizations related to NGOs?

LESSON 35-2 VOCABULARY

pandemic a widespread outbreak of a disease

human rights rights regarded as belonging fundamentally to all persons

nongovernmental organization (NGO) an organization that has no government ties and works to address world problems