

"Currently, more than eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. Our generation can choose to end that extreme poverty by the year 2025."

---Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty*

Why We Still Need To Write About African Poverty

Posted By [sarah-stuteville](#) On October 17, 2006 Article from: <http://www.bravenewtraveler.com>

- 1) One of the first pieces of advice I received before leaving on this reporting project was from an Ethiopian diplomat in the States who suggested that he didn't want to see any more stories about African poverty in the news. "Why don't you write about positive things, like investment opportunities," he suggested cheerfully as we toasted with Ethiopian honey wine in his spacious suburban home. Later an American correspondent in Nairobi said she felt that Americans were tired of images and descriptions of African poverty, that they no longer made an impact. Her answer was to focus her reporting on the Kenyan middle class as a way of humanizing African citizens.
- 2) Recently a piece I wrote about water shortages in rural Ethiopia—specifically how one father had lost four children to waterborne diseases—was classified by one reader as just another "guilt trip." Yet most of the reporting our team has done on this trip has centered on the larger environmental and political explanations for water shortages and water-related problems in eastern Africa. African poverty has certainly made appearances, but it hasn't seemed like a crucial focus of our work. That is, it hadn't until I visited Kibera township.
- 3) Life inside Kibera, whether journalists and editors deem it worth repeating or not, is a desperate affair for those that call it home. The Kenyan rainy season has begun and the tiny paths that connect homes and businesses have turned into a slippery clay-like sludge. Open sewers flood with human waste, corroded pipes unload brown water into backyards, tiny kids dressed in ill-fitted and tattered outfits chase each other over mountains of shredded plastic bags and scraps of rotting food.
- 4) Kibera has been growing steadily since it was first settled by Africans brought here to build the country's railroad, and a century later it is home to an estimated million people who still live without basic services. There is no sewer system, no garbage pick-up, no piped water, no regular electricity and no government schools. Residents, most living on less than one U.S. dollar a day, must fend for themselves without any illusions that their government or the rest of the world cares.
- 5) The United Nations Population Fund estimates that 1 billion people live in slums like Kibera. That's one in every six people in the world. In Nairobi it's 60% of the city's population. The UN predicts these numbers will double over the next few decades. Given this perspective, investment opportunities and Africa's "middle class" suddenly don't seem like the most relevant stories to tell here.
- 6) The other day, as I stood in a cloudburst on a muddy hill above Kibera and looked out on a landscape of rusted tin roofs, I couldn't shake the rising fear that I was looking into the future. And I wondered if we, citizens in the rich world, hadn't already steeled ourselves to this cruel reality. If this callous resignation isn't the reason why we've tired of reading about twenty-first century poverty before the magnitude of it is even realized. Because Kibera isn't a story that's already been told—it's a story that's being written.

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has chosen me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

---Jesus, *Luke 4: 18-19*

'I tell you the truth, when you help someone who is viewed as 'the least' in society, you are doing it to me!'

---Jesus, *Matthew 25: 40*

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the author's idea that we **need** to discuss world poverty?
2. In your opinion, is it the government's responsibility or the individual's responsibility to help people in poverty?
3. What should governments or individuals do about poverty in other countries than their own?
4. What can and should you and I do about world poverty? Why?