



The Poverty Of Distribution

setting
the stage



“Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe”

– Frederick Douglass

Susan George, in her book “How the Other Half Dies- the Real Reasons for World Hunger”, argues that world hunger is not a matter of having too little food to feed everyone, but is rather the consequence of unequal distribution of the world’s food. She suggests that the business of agriculture, called **agribusiness**, is focused on maximizing **profit**, which in many cases is a barrier to sharing food more equally.

Agribusiness is carefully controlled by a small number of companies in the United States. Wealthy businesses spend money to develop new technology and chemicals to improve **crop output** (things like herbicides, pesticides, and insecticides). If developing countries want to compete in global **markets**, they need the new technology. But the multinationals control the process: they decide the amount of help that they give out, the direction of the projects and the methods used, in ways that will be first and foremost beneficial to the multinational.³²³

³²³ George, Susan. *How the Other Half Dies- the Real Reasons for World Hunger*. Pelican Books.

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The States is also known for its destruction of hundreds of tons of food. This is called “**intervention buying**”, where the government steps in and buys up large quantities of food so that it doesn’t go onto the world markets. If too much food goes onto the world markets, it will drive the prices down and mean less profit. Maximizing profit ends up causing world hunger.³²⁴

Sometimes when expensive new technology is introduced into developing countries it doesn’t provide lasting benefits. Can you think of any reasons why this could be the case?

Relationship between time and the number of people who die from hunger:

# of hours	6	18	12	24
# of people who die from hunger	2400	7200	4800	9600

1. Explain the relationship between the number of hours and the number of people who die from hunger. You might want to start by saying “For each one hour, (this many people) die from hunger.”
2. Write an algebraic equation to describe the relationship. First select two **variables** (letters), one to represent each of the categories. Then use your last answer to create an algebraic equation to show the pattern.
3. How many people die worldwide from hunger each month? Use your equation and show your work. Make a comparison of your answer to something similar For example, the number is like the Sky Dome (now called the Rogers Centre – Why do you think the name Sky Dome – which was chosen by the public – got changed to the name of a corporation?) in Toronto being filled with spectators three full times.
4. The **World Food Programme** has done more current research and suggests that the number of **kids** who die each year from hunger-related diseases is 14 million.³²⁵ Calculate how many kids that means per day, per hour and per minute. Show your work.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ From the “World Food Programme Hunger Map Guide”.

5. Create a picture of one of those three answers in question four as a comparison to something that you can understand. For example, perhaps the number per hour is the same as the number of people who can fit in a five-story apartment building. If this was the case, draw the apartment building. (Find your own visual comparison...)

6. Why do you think that there isn't huge global outcry at the number of people dying of hunger? Think of the number who died on September 11th and the outrage that it caused.

Number of children who die each day of hunger:	35,615
Minutes of silence:	None
Plans for international response:	None
Plans for saturated network coverage:	None
Stock exchanges:	No effect
Alarm level:	Low
Primetime news reports on possible perpetrators of the crime:	None ³²⁶

7. Sometimes people argue that the problem is overpopulation of developing countries: "if they didn't have so many babies, they wouldn't have poverty and hunger."

a. If you and your family live in abject poverty, why is it possibly in your interest to have larger families? Isn't this counterintuitive?

b. Use the following table³²⁷ to make a convincing counter argument to the idea that poverty and hunger is a problem caused by having too many babies.

	Birthrate per thousand Prior to social reforms*	Birthrate per thousand after social reforms*
Taiwan	41	26
Korea	45	30

(*social reforms including better healthcare, better education, higher wages and fairer distribution of land)

Food for thought...

"In the 1980s hunger declined in general throughout the entire world, with two exceptions: sub-Saharan Africa and the United States— the poorest part of the world and the richest part of the world— there hunger increased."³²⁸



- Organize a hunger strike at your school where students pledge not to eat for 24 hours (juice and water is encouraged). Have people sponsor the students and send the money that you raise to the World Food Programme (www.wfp.org). The hunger site (www.thehungersite.com) has useful resources and facts to help with the strike.



³²⁶ *Adbusters*, Jan/Feb 2002 #39

³²⁷ George, Susan. *How the Other Half Dies- the Real Reasons for World Hunger*. Pelican Books, 1976.

³²⁸ Chomsky, Noam. *Understanding Power*. Random House, 2006p. 365.