

WAR AND POVERTY

Wars and conflict are major causes of poverty and suffering. They kill and injure thousands and leave many orphaned and homeless. They destabilise economies, traumatised communities and make the poorest people even poorer. Schools, hospitals and roads are destroyed.

Conflict is also more likely to happen in poor countries, partly because people are desperate for land, rights, water or even food. Of the 150 or more major conflicts since World War II, 130 of these were in poor countries.

Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent by governments every year on military forces. Yet far less is spent on proactive peace building and community development. The sums involved are so huge that even a modest reduction in global military spending could be redirected to significantly reduce worldwide poverty.

Table I shows how minor reductions in the 'tools for war' (based on US Government military spending) could bring massive improvements to the lives of the world's poorest people.

Table I: Tools for Life and War

TOOLS FOR LIFE	COST	TOOLS FOR WAR
Stock 204,500 clinics around the world for a year	US\$275 million	Three tests of missile defence system
Build wells to provide water in Africa for 65 million people	US\$350 million	Cost of six Trident II missiles
Immunise over 134 million children worldwide against deadly diseases such as measles, typhoid and tuberculosis	US\$2.1 billion	Price of one stealth bomber

In 2006-7, the Australian Federal Government budgeted to spend \$220 billion. This included \$39 billion on health, \$17 billion on defence, \$16 billion on education and \$3 billion on foreign aid.

Why do wars happen?

Most conflicts are complex and can be about a range of issues. However, war is more likely to occur when certain groups within a country or region don't have equal rights or representation. If people have very little, there is more incentive to fight for resources or land.

If the government of a poor country is unable to deliver basic services like healthcare and employment, its people have more reasons to feel resentful. This in turn can boil over into armed uprisings.

Innocent victims

In modern conflicts, 90 percent of victims are civilians, not soldiers. Women and children are particularly vulnerable.



An Afghan child playing on the barrel of an abandoned tank.

Conflict tears apart the very fabric of a society, destroying homes, health systems, schools and leaves behind landmines and trauma. People may be forced to flee their homes, leaving behind all their possessions. These people become refugees or displaced people within their own country.

Often they will end up in refugee camps where disease and illness spread quickly in overcrowded conditions. In fact, usually more people die from malnutrition or disease as a result of a war, than directly from the fighting.

Children are especially affected by conflict. Ongoing wars can disrupt their education for years at a time, so as adults they are less likely to get a well-paid job and are more likely to become poor. Also, children may be orphaned by war or become separated from their families while fleeing a conflict. Many become vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Building peace

Peace is not just the absence of war. It means having healthy communities where people can recover from past hurts and solve disagreements without violence. World Vision and other development organisations work with communities around the world on peace-building activities.

For example, World Vision runs counselling, rehabilitation and healing programs in countries affected by war, including Rwanda, Uganda and Cambodia. This helps those physically and emotionally damaged by war to overcome their trauma. Just as importantly, it helps victims achieve forgiveness and reconciliation so that any remaining tensions are resolved.

For you to do

1. Create a mind map showing the relationships between war and poverty.
2. List some of the consequences of war for civilians – especially women and children.
3. Create a collage or artwork showing the impact of war. See the famous painting 'Guernica' by Pablo Picasso.