

"A compelling reminder that if we are to create a 21st century of shared prosperity, we cannot turn a blind eye to the violence that threatens our common humanity."

—PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

GARY A. HAUGEN

AND VICTOR BOUTROS

THE
**LOCUST
EFFECT**



**WHY THE END OF POVERTY
REQUIRES THE END OF VIOLENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

It was my first massacre site. Today the skulls are all neatly stacked on shelves, but when I first encountered them, they definitely were not. They were attached to bodies—mostly skeletal remains—in a massive mess of rotting human corpses in a small brick church in Rwanda. As the director of the tiny United Nations “Special Investigations Unit” in Rwanda immediately following the genocide in 1994, I was given a list of 100 mass graves and massacre sites across an impoverished, mountainous country where nearly a million people had been slaughtered—mostly by machete—in a span of about 10 weeks. When I stepped off the military transport plane to join the small international team of criminal investigators and prosecutors that were assembling in the Rwandan capital in the early weeks after the genocide, the country carried an eerie, post-apocalyptic emptiness. I didn’t even realize, until I was loading into a van outside the airport, that I had entered Rwanda without passing through customs and immigration—because there was no customs and immigration. The usual and powerfully subconscious markers of order and civilization—and security—had been utterly swept away in an engulfing orgy of genocidal war. And it didn’t feel good.

In those early days, my task was to help the UN’s Commission of Experts make a gross accounting of what had taken place and to begin gathering evidence against the leaders of the genocide (it would be more than a year before any international tribunal would be set up). But with hundreds of thousands of murders, where were we to start?

We ended up starting in Ntarama, a small town south of Kigali, in a small church compound where all the bodies remained just as their killers had left them—strewn wall to wall in a knee-high mass of corpses, rotting clothes

and the desperate personal effects of very poor people hoping to survive a siege.

But they did not survive.

And now four Spanish forensic experts were working with me in picking through the remains and lifting out each skull for a simple accounting: “Woman—machete. Woman—machete. Child—machete. Woman—machete. Child—machete. Child—blunt trauma. Man—machete. Woman—machete...” On and on it went for hours.

Our task was to assemble from survivor testimony and the horrible mess of physical evidence a very precise picture of how mass murder actually happens. And over time, the question began to take a fierce hold on me. I couldn’t stop trying to picture it in my mind. What is it like, exactly, to be pressed up against the back wall of this church with panic on every side from your terrified family as the steel, blood-soaked machetes hack their way to you through your screaming and slaughtered neighbors?

What eventually emerged for me, and changed me, was a point of simple clarity about the nature of violence and the poor. What was so clear to me was the way these very impoverished Rwandans at their point of most desperate need, huddled against those advancing machetes in that church, did not need someone to bring them a sermon, or food, or a doctor, or a teacher, or a micro-loan. They needed someone to restrain the hand with the machete—and nothing else would do.

None of the other things that people of good will had sought to share with these impoverished Rwandans over the years was going to matter if those good people could not stop the machetes from hacking them to death. Moreover, none of those good things (the food, the medicine, the education, the shelter, the fresh water, the micro-loan) was going to stop the hacking machetes. The locusts of predatory violence had descended—and they would lay waste to all that the vulnerable poor had otherwise struggled to scrape together to secure their lives. Indeed, not only would the locusts be undeterred by the poor’s efforts to make a living, they would be fattened and empowered by the plunder.

* * *

Just as shocking to me, however, was what I found following the Rwanda genocide as I spent the next two decades in and out of the poorest communities in the developing world: a silent catastrophe of violence quietly

destroying the lives of billions of poor people, well beyond the headlines of episodic mass atrocities and genocide in our world.

Without the world noticing, the locusts of common, criminal violence are right now ravaging the lives and dreams of billions of our poorest neighbors. We have come to call the unique pestilence of violence and the punishing impact it has on efforts to lift the global poor out of poverty *the locust effect*. This plague of predatory violence is different from other problems facing the poor; and so, the remedy to the locust effect must also be different. In the lives of the poor, violence has the power to destroy everything—and is unstoppable by our other responses to their poverty. This makes sense because it can also be said of other acute needs of the poor. Severe hunger and disease can also destroy everything for a poor person—and the things that stop hunger don't necessarily stop disease, and the things that stop disease don't necessarily address hunger. The difference is that the world *knows* that poor people suffer from hunger and disease—and the world gets busy trying to meet those needs.

But, the world overwhelmingly does not know that *endemic to being poor* is a vulnerability to violence, or the way violence is, right now, catastrophically crushing the global poor. As a result, the world is not getting busy trying to stop it. And, in a perfect tragedy, the failure to address that violence is actually devastating much of the other things good people are seeking to do to assist them.

For reasons that are fairly obvious, if you are reading this book, I'm pretty sure you are not among the very poorest in our world—the billions of people who are trying to live off a few dollars a day. As a result, I also know that you are probably not chronically hungry, you are not likely to die of a perfectly treatable disease, you have reasonable access to fresh water, you are literate, and you have reasonable shelter over your head. But there is something else I know about you. I bet you pass your days in reasonable safety from violence. You are probably not regularly being threatened with being enslaved, imprisoned, beaten, raped, or robbed.

But if you were among the world's poorest billions, you would be. That is what the world does not understand about the global poor—and that is what this book is about. Together, we will make the difficult journey into the vast, hidden underworld of violence where the common poor pass their days out of sight from the rest of us. My colleagues at International Justice Mission (IJM) spend all their days walking through this subterranean reality with

the poorest neighbors in their own communities in the developing world; in this volume, their intimate stories allow the data and statistical reality to take on flesh and a human heart that matters to us.

IJM is an international human rights agency that supports the world's largest corps of local, indigenous advocates providing direct service to impoverished victims of violent abuse and oppression in the developing world. In poor communities in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, IJM supports teams of local lawyers, investigators, social workers, and community activists who work full-time to help poor neighbors who have been enslaved, imprisoned, beaten, sexually assaulted, or thrown off their land. These teams work with local authorities to rescue the victims from the abuse and to bring the perpetrators to justice—and then they work with local social service partners to walk with the survivors on the long road to healing, restoration, and resilience for the long haul. And after thousands of individual cases, their stories have brought a different reality of poverty to the surface.

When we think of global poverty we readily think of hunger, disease, homelessness, illiteracy, dirty water, and a lack of education, but very few of us immediately think of the global poor's chronic vulnerability to violence—the massive epidemic of sexual violence, forced labor, illegal detention, land theft, assault, police abuse, and oppression that lies hidden underneath the more visible deprivations of the poor.

Indeed, I am not even speaking of the large-scale spasmodic events of violence like the Rwandan genocide, or wars and civil conflicts which occasionally engulf the poor and generate headlines. Rather, I am speaking of the reality my IJM colleagues introduced to me in the years that followed my time in Rwanda—the reality of common, criminal violence in otherwise stable developing countries that afflicts far more of the global poor on a much larger and more persistent scale—and consistently frustrates and blocks their climb out of poverty.

But we simply do not think of poverty this way—even among the experts. Perhaps the highest profile statement of the world's most fundamental priorities for addressing global poverty were set forth by the UN in its Millennium Development Goals—eight economic development goals endorsed by 193 nations at the UN's Millennium Summit in 2000 as *the* framework for galvanizing the world to attack global poverty. And yet, in that monumental document, addressing the problem of violence against the poor is not even mentioned.

This is particularly tragic because, as we shall see, the data is now emerging to confirm the common-sense understanding that violence has a devastating impact on a poor person's struggle out of poverty, seriously undermines economic development in poor countries, and directly reduces the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts. It turns out that you can provide all manner of goods and services to the poor, as good people have been doing for decades, but if you are not restraining the bullies in the community from violence and theft—as we have been failing to do for decades—then we are going to find the outcomes of our efforts quite disappointing.

This is not to say, of course, that poverty alleviation efforts haven't met with some impressive results—especially in reducing the most extreme forms of poverty, i.e. those who live off \$1.25 a day. But as we shall see, the number of people forced to live off \$2.00 a day (more than 2 billion) has barely budged in thirty years, and the studies are now accumulating to make a nexus to common violence undeniable. No one will find in this volume any argument for reducing our traditional efforts to fight poverty. On the contrary, the billions still mired in fierce poverty cry out for us to redouble our best efforts. But one will find in these pages an urgent call to make sure that we are safeguarding the fruits of those efforts from being laid waste by the locusts of predatory violence.

In fact, as you encounter these intimate stories of how common poor people are relentlessly ambushed by violence in the developing world, have an eye for the brutal real-life implications of these terrifying events for the individuals who endure them—the productive capabilities lost, the earning potential stolen, the confidence and well-being devastated by trauma, the resources ripped away from those on the edge of survival and poured instead into the pockets of predators. Then, as you consider the statistical data that multiplies these devastating individual tragedies by the millions across the developing world, you will sense the scandalous implications of this failure to address the massive sinkhole of violence that is swallowing up the hope of the poor.

But perhaps even more surprising than the failure to prioritize the problem of violence against the poor is the way that those who do appreciate the problem ignore the most basic solution—and the solution they rely upon most in their own communities: law enforcement. As we shall see together, the poor in the developing world endure such extraordinary levels of violence because they live in a state of de facto lawlessness. That is to say, basic

law enforcement systems in the developing world are so broken that global studies now confirm that most poor people live outside the protection of law. Indeed, the justice systems in the developing world make the poor poorer and less secure. It's as if the world woke up to find that hospitals in the developing world actually made poor people sicker—or the water systems actually contaminated the drinking water of the poor.

One would hope that if the world woke up to such a reality, it would swiftly acknowledge and respond to the disaster—but tragically, the world has neither woken up to the reality nor responded in a way that offers meaningful hope for the poor. It has mostly said and done nothing. And as we shall see, the failure to respond to such a basic need—to prioritize criminal justice systems that can protect poor people from common violence—has had a devastating impact on two great struggles that made heroic progress in the last century but have stalled out for the poorest in the twenty-first century: namely, the struggle to end severe poverty and the fight to secure the most basic human rights.

Indeed, for the global poor in this century, there is no higher-priority need with deeper and broader implications than the provision of basic justice systems that can protect them from the devastating ruin of common violence. Because as anyone who has tasted it knows, if you are *not safe*, nothing else matters.

The Locust Effect then is the surprising story of how a plague of lawless violence is destroying two dreams that the world deeply cherishes: the dream to end global poverty and to secure the most fundamental human rights for the poor. But the book also reveals several surprising stories about why basic justice systems in the developing world came to be so dysfunctional. It turns out that when the colonial powers left the developing world a half a century ago, many of the laws changed but the law *enforcement* systems did not—systems that were never designed to protect the common people from violence but to protect the regime from the common people. These systems, it turns out, were never re-engineered.

Secondly, given the brokenness of the *public* justice system, forces of wealth and power in the developing world have carried out one of the most fundamental and unremarked social revolutions of the modern era in building a completely parallel system of *private* justice, with private security forces and alternative dispute resolution systems that leave the poor stuck with useless *public* systems that are only getting worse.

Finally, for surprising historical reasons (and to tragic effect), the great agencies of poverty alleviation, economic development, and human rights have purposely avoided participating in the strengthening of law enforcement systems in the developing world.

From a realistic confrontation with the challenge, *The Locust Effect* pivots toward the great hope for change that comes from history and current projects of transformation quietly going forth in the world. It turns out that just about every reasonably functioning public justice system in the world today was, at one time in history, utterly dysfunctional, corrupt, and abusive. *The Locust Effect* seeks to recover the lost and inspiring story of how, in relatively recent history, justice systems were transformed to provide reasonable protection for even their weakest citizens. Moreover, great signs of hope are profiled in a variety of demonstration projects being carried out by IJM and other agencies around the world that demonstrate it is possible to transform broken public justice systems in the developing world so they effectively protect the poor from violence.

To secure meaningful hope, however, we must be standing on the solid rock of reality. A breezy wishful thinking that has not seriously confronted the depth of the problem will not do. Before the world could begin to turn the corner on the AIDS epidemic, as it has now begun to do, millions of perfectly healthy people around the world had to stomach an honest look at what was happening to millions of other people in the world who were dying in horrific ways on an apocalyptic scale. From that brave refusal to look away—a decision made by millions of common people around the globe who could have turned the page, changed the channel, or clicked away—a hope grounded on hard reality was found, and a steady march out of the darkness has begun.

Likewise, a better day for the poorest in our world will only come as we are willing to walk with them into the secret terror that lies beneath the surface of their poverty. Accordingly, we would ask you to *decide* to persevere through these first chapters as they take you, with some authentic trauma, through that darkness—because there is real hope on the other side. Later, not only will we discover together a fresh and tangible reminder from history of how diverse developing societies reversed spirals of chaotic violence and established levels of safety and order once considered unimaginable, but we will also explore a number of concrete examples of real hope emerging today, including projects from IJM, other non-governmental organizations

and government agencies, that have measurably reduced the poor's vulnerability to some of the worst forms of violence—including sex trafficking, slavery, sexual abuse, torture, and illegal detention.

Before jumping in, however, a few clarifying notes seem critical.

This volume is not meant to be the last word on anything. It is meant primarily as a conversation-starter about an immense problem that is not being addressed with anything like the urgency, thoughtfulness, and resources it deserves. The book introduces a number of massive topics of tremendous complexity: levels and categories of criminal violence against the poor; the impact of violence on economic development, poverty alleviation, and the modern human rights struggle; the legacy of colonial justice systems in the developing world; the privatization of justice systems; the story of justice systems in aid programs; the political economy of criminal justice systems in the developing world; the history of law enforcement development; current experiments in justice system reform; and more. Each of these topics touches on a vast field of intellectual endeavor that features diverse experts, scholarly literature, treatises, and the latest academic article just posted to the Internet. What follows, therefore, is not exhaustive in any area but is hopefully a coherent and provocative weaving of credible arguments that makes the case for urgent and energetic engagement with the woefully neglected global crisis of violence against the poor.

It is also critical to note at the outset that while my co-author and I think access to law enforcement that protects the poor from common criminal violence is critical to their advancement and well-being, we emphatically *do not* think law enforcement is the only thing that protects people from violence. Criminal violence is a highly complex social phenomenon with many contributing factors that have to be addressed. Our simple argument is that if one tries to stop criminal violence by addressing these other contributing factors *in the absence of a credible law enforcement deterrent*, such an approach will fail (and *is* failing in the developing world). Secondly, while we appreciate and hope to learn from the successes of Western forms of law enforcement, as civil rights lawyers, we are deeply familiar with the failings of our own criminal justice systems. Having spent our early careers addressing systematic law enforcement abuses in the United States, we can affirm that there are no acts of abuse, brutality, or corruption occurring overseas that we have not seen within systems in our own country. Nor

do we believe that Western systems of criminal justice offer cookie-cutter solutions for other countries. The best solution will come from a combination of home-grown, highly-contextualized remedies with the best of what might fit from external sources. What we want is for the poorest in our world to have whatever criminal justice systems will work best in their context to protect them from violence—whatever that might be.

This volume is simply the story of that long journey of terrible discovery from the piled carnage inside the church in Ntarama to the deeply hidden plague of everyday violence that is the terror of global poverty in our day. In either case, the challenge is to see violence for what it is and to end the impunity that allows it to happen again. In Ntarama, the remains we pulled out in 1994 are all neatly stacked on shelves in a genocide memorial now constructed at the site. If the stark reminder of what we are capable of doing *to* each other, and what we are capable of failing to do *for* each other provokes to action the better—and more courageous—angels of our nature, that would be a worthy memorial.

THE LOCUST EFFECT

It would prove to be one of the saddest and most truly tragic tales of rural poverty in the American Midwest in the nineteenth century. For a family of six in St. Clair County, Missouri in 1875, it would end with a simple wooden tombstone that read, “Starved to Death.” Like so many of the anonymous poor, historical accounts from the era don’t identify their names but only that the “six died within six days of each other from the want of food to keep body and soul together.”¹

Like most families of the Midwest in their era, that forgotten family was accustomed to great hardship. There weren’t enough trees on the Great Plains of the United States for proper houses, so many families began by living in holes in the ground and shelters made of sod. They scraped at the earth, first with a human- and then with a horse-drawn plow to grow enough food so they and their livestock wouldn’t starve during the harsh winter. If they lasted five years, the government would give them some land, and they could bet it all on putting the land up as collateral to buy more horses for plowing, some seeds for planting, and some lumber for a house.

And lo and behold, with non-stop struggle, some government help, some neighborly cooperation, and fierce perseverance, by April of 1875, things had been looking up for families across the rugged homesteads of Missouri.

The rains had been good, the wheat fields were bursting with promise, the vegetable gardens were abundant, and the livestock ready to be off their winter rations. With a strong harvest, the massive gamble could pay off, and the teetering weight of debt could be thrown off. At long last, they might provide a future beyond poverty for their children.

But, in a matter of hours, it was all swept away. An enormous dark cloud rolled into St. Clair County, blocked out the sun, descended upon the land, and destroyed every last square inch of crops and vegetation. As farm families crouched helplessly behind their shelters, the greatest plague of locusts in human history laid waste to all they had toiled so hard to build. “Every spear of wheat, oats, flax, and corn were eaten close to the ground. Potatoes and all vegetables received the same treatment, and on the line of their march, ruin stared the farmer in the face, and starvation knocked loudly at his door.”²

In 1875, trillions of locusts weighing 27 million tons swarmed over nearly 200,000 square miles across the American Midwest (an area greater than California) and ate everything— *every day* consuming the equivalent of what 2.5 million men would eat. Lush gardens and massive fields of bumper crops were reduced to barren deserts within a matter of hours. Crops needed to sustain families and their farm animals were destroyed, leaving no means of support during the coming winter. The locusts ate fence posts and the paint and siding from houses. They ate the wool off the backs of live sheep and the clothes left outside on clothes lines. When families hurriedly threw blankets over their gardens, the locusts devoured the blankets and then gorged themselves on the plants.³ Settlers watched their cows and other livestock die without grain or feed to provide them, and were forced to subsist on bread and water alone. A contemporary newspaper reported: “The owners having paid out all their money... now are left with nothing to eat, their stock has starved to death, and they have no money.”⁴

The locusts had come and destroyed it all. All the hard work, sacrifice and effort of these impoverished families didn’t matter. All the government grants of free land didn’t matter. The assistance of neighbors and well-wishers from the other side of the country didn’t matter. Indeed, to those who saw “the labor and loving of years gone within ten days” through the onslaught of the devouring locusts, talk of assistance from outsiders “seemed but a mocking.”⁵

WAKING UP TO THE LOCUSTS

Likewise in our era, efforts to spur economic development and to alleviate poverty among the poor in the developing world without addressing the forces of violence that destroy and rob them can “seem like a mocking.” To provide Laura and Yuri with the promise of schools without addressing the forces of sexual violence that make it too dangerous to walk to or attend school seems like a mocking. To give Caleb job training or Bruno a micro-loan for his belt business without protecting them from being arbitrarily thrown into prison where Caleb loses his job and Bruno loses his business seems like a mocking. To provide Susan with tools, seeds, and training to multiply crop yields on her land without protecting her from being violently thrown off that land seems like a mocking. To provide Laura and Mariamma with AIDS education and training on making safe sexual choices without addressing the violence in the slums and brick factories where women don’t get to *make* choices seems like a mocking. To establish a rural medical clinic in the area where Gopinath is held as a slave without addressing the violent forces that refuse to allow him to leave the quarry and take his dying kid to a doctor seems like a mocking.

Indeed, for the rural poor of the American Midwest in the 1870s, it just didn’t matter what they did for themselves or what others contributed in terms of land, or seeds, or plows, or training, or education, or irrigation, or livestock, or capital. If the locusts were coming to swarm and lay waste to it all, then the impoverished and vulnerable farmers on those Plains were not going to thrive—ever. All the other efforts were important, life-giving, and vital, but the usefulness of those efforts just could not withstand the devastating impact of the devouring locusts—*and* those other efforts could not stop the locusts.

Likewise, it seems that we are approaching a pivotal moment in history where agreement is beginning to emerge that if we do not decisively address the plague of everyday violence that swarms over the common poor in the developing world, the poor will not be able to thrive and achieve their dreams—ever. Indeed, the Harvard scholar Christopher Stone, now the head of the Open Society Foundations, summed it all up in his report to the World Bank: “In terms of social and economic development, high levels of crime and violence threaten to undermine the best-laid plans to reduce poverty, improve governance, and relieve human misery.”⁶

For those who care about poverty alleviation and economic development for the global poor, the facts and data will no longer allow us to carry on as if the locusts of violence are not laying waste to our efforts. Slowly but surely, deep experience and significant data is accumulating to clarify the way common lawless violence is devastating the efforts of the poor to carve out a better future in the developing world.

While the broader world is still paying attention to other things in the fight against poverty, experts are coalescing to confirm the devastating reality of “the locust effect”—the crushing impact of the plague of violence on the poor—and that addressing violence against the poor is a “precondition” for achieving economic development that is actually meaningful for the poor in the developing world.⁷ It is not a precondition in the sense that other poverty alleviation and development efforts must wait until the violence has stopped. Rather, it is just a recognition of the simple fact that as hard you should work on the plowing, and the planting and the fertilizing, if you don’t deal with the locusts of violence you are still in big trouble—and you may have wasted a lot of effort.

Indeed, for nearly a decade, the World Bank has been reiterating its finding that “crime and violence have emerged in recent years as major obstacles to the realization of development objectives.”⁸ The Bank has stated flatly, “In many developing countries, high levels of crime and violence not only undermine people’s safety on an everyday level, they also undermine broader development efforts to improve governance and reduce poverty.”⁹ Multiple studies by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have concluded that restraining violence is a precondition to poverty alleviation and economic development, plainly stating that “a foundational level of order must be established before development objectives can be realized.”¹⁰ Leaders of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) have concluded, “Poor people want to feel safe and secure just as much as they need food to eat, clean water to drink and a job to give them an income. Without security there cannot be development.”¹¹ When it comes to violence, researchers are increasingly concerned that development experts are missing Amartya Sen’s insight that “development [is] a process of expanding the real freedoms people enjoy,” and are failing to appreciate the idea “that freedom from crime and violence are key components of development. Freedom from fear is as important as freedom from want. It is impossible to truly enjoy one of these rights without the other.”¹²

Of course, this is what poor people tell us when they speak for themselves—that all their hard work and hopeful progress can be utterly devoured by violence. They know the locust effect all too well.

Siddhi in South India weeps when she recalls how hard her father worked to try and give her a good life out of poverty and the way that was all stolen away once she was abducted into the brothel and forcibly infected with HIV. Shanthi is proud that her country has put schools in her rural area but it also wounds her to know that those schools are useless to her three children who are held as slaves in a rice mill every day. Likewise, Venus was proud of her capacity to provide for her family at the market stall until bullies stole her property away and malnutrition began to devour her children.

In the end, outsiders can seek to provide all kinds of assistance to the poor in the developing world—to the tune of more than \$3 trillion over the last half century—but if there is no restraint of the bullies who are prepared to steal every sprig of prosperity away from those who are weak, then the outcome of our assistance is going to be disappointing (as in many ways it has already proven to be).

As we shall see, the economists and social scientists are beginning to measure and count the costs of the complex ways violence undermines economic development and poverty alleviation efforts in the developing world, but simply listening to poor people gets you much of what you need to know about the locust effect. As one African villager summed it up for interviewers in the World Bank's landmark study, *Voices of the Poor*: "Where there is no security, there is no life."¹³ Of course this makes perfect common sense if we pause to think about it. If you were part of a poor family in the developing world trying to increase your standard of living through higher income and better education and health services—how could it *not* make things more difficult if you were enslaved, imprisoned, beaten, raped, or robbed? Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find any credible authority to argue that a poor person's struggle out of poverty is not undermined by these categories of massive predatory violence that poor people tell us about. Every credible development economist from Amartya Sen to William Easterly readily appreciates the way market-driven economic development depends upon people being protected in their person and property.¹⁴ Likewise, in *Why Nations Fail*, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson emphasize the importance of legal institutions (and other state institutions) that are "inclusive" through rights and incentives equally available to all people rather than

“extractive” (that is, designed to extract resources from the many for the few) if countries are to experience sustained economic growth.¹⁵ Soros and Abed warn that recent gains in poverty alleviation may “come undone if we fail to strengthen the rule of law in developing countries.”¹⁶ But as we shall see in subsequent chapters, just because it is intuitively and experientially obvious doesn’t mean that it is widely discussed or appreciated.

Perhaps if the locusts of violence laid waste to everything all at once like they did in the Midwest in 1875 it would get the world’s attention—but all the daily slavery, rape, extortion, and dispossession gnaws its way through hundreds of millions of poor people one assault at a time, and the cumulative disaster of the locust effect is hard to see. Slowly but surely, however, the experts are starting to add it up, and the price tag is staggering.

COUNTING THE COST

In 2011, the World Bank devoted its annual World Development Report to examining the impact of violence on development. The report was primarily focused on the impact of war and conflict violence, but it could not ignore the facts emerging about the impact of common criminal violence as well. The truth is, very high rates of common criminal violence can have the same devastating impact on economic development as a civil war, economic shocks, or the worst natural disasters. Very high levels of criminal violence reduce a nation’s economic productivity by 2 to 3 full percentage points of GDP—and as the Report noted, “These estimates are conservative: other studies estimate the costs of crime to range from 3.1% to 7.8% of GDP.”¹⁷

In 2005, surveying the human and economic destruction wrought by Hurricane Stan’s torrential rains and mudslides, Guatemala’s vice president described the damage as “colossal”¹⁸—but a subsequent report found that common criminal violence in Guatemala cost an estimated US\$2.4 billion, or 7.3 percent of GDP, *more than twice* the damage of Hurricane Stan that year.¹⁹ But there would be no headline as the locusts of violence gradually did their worst—and no headline as crime and violence reduced economic growth by 25 percent in El Salvador, 25 percent in Columbia, or 11 percent in Brazil.²⁰

Admittedly, these attempts to estimate the “overall costs” of criminal violence on developing countries as a percentage of GDP are still quite crude, but another World Bank study put it this way: If other countries in

the region could match Costa Rica's reduced level of criminal violence, then they could boost their rate of annual economic growth by between 1.7 and 5.4 percentage points of GDP—and that would mean billions of dollars in desperately needed economic growth.²¹ Globally, another study estimated that the aggregate costs of crime and violence in low-income countries equal 14 percent of their GDPs.²² As economists have sought to explain:

Violence generates a number of significant multiplier effects on the economy such as lower accumulation of human capital, a lower rate of participation in the labor market, lower on-the-job productivity, higher rates of absenteeism from work, lower incomes and an impact on the future productivity of children, as well as—at the macroeconomic level—lower rates of savings and investment.²³

To make it more concrete, one of the ways economists measure the costs of violence is by counting the aggregate years of productive life that violence takes away through disability. They call this measure the Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY). Now, try to fathom the fact that 9 million years of disability adjusted life years are lost *each year* worldwide as a result of rape and domestic violence against women.²⁴ Now think about food production in Africa and the fact that women do almost all the work (80 percent). Imagine the impact on food production and on the tenuous economy of the poor as millions of Disability Adjusted Life Years are lost every year by women in Africa because of violence. Likewise, in India, a survey of women in Nagpur found that 13 percent of women had missed paid work because they were being beaten and abused in the home—that, on average, they had to miss a week and a half of work per incident.²⁵ In Nicaragua, researchers found that women who were abused earned *about half* of what other women earned in wages.²⁶

In these ways, economists are beginning to calculate the impact of violence on *human capital*—that is the productive wealth embodied in a man's or woman's labor, skills, and knowledge. Experts have found that violence “is a major source of un-freedom in developing societies that directly inhibits the efforts of individuals to better themselves.”²⁷ In fact, researchers found that the “net accumulation of human capital” over a 15-year period in Latin America and the Caribbean was cut *in half* because of violence and crime.²⁸ Similarly, research in Africa found that violence and crime was eroding

human capital and impeding employment, discouraging the accumulation of assets, and hindering entrepreneurial activity.²⁹

Economists have also found that violence devastates the *development* of human capital in poor communities—which is the process by which people actually grow the level of skill and knowledge they are able to bring to their struggle out of poverty. I have met grown adult slaves who not only were never allowed to learn to read, write, or do arithmetic, but in the 21st century, did not know what an ocean was, or what another country was, or what an airplane was because their minds were never permitted an introduction to such ideas. Likewise, girls across the developing world cannot access the empowering miracle of education because of sexual violence. As Erika George of Human Rights Watch put it, “Girls are learning that sexual violence and abuse are an inescapable part of going to school every day—so they don’t go.”³⁰ Sometimes, as a World Bank study found in Zambia, it is the teachers who are afraid to go to school because they are scared of the violence in their poor communities.³¹

And what happens when you add up the costs of all this crushed human capital and reverberating fear in the lives of millions of poor people? As one might imagine, it has massive social costs, which economists refer to as the destruction of *social capital*—the social norms and networks that enable people to work and interact together. Violence destroys the social fabric of communities and has a disruptive impact on community and intra-familial relationships; it erodes social relationships through the trauma of loss but also in restricting physical mobility and increasing levels of tension.³² Why should Bruno take risks in re-starting his leather belt business if the police are going to just come back, steal the money, and abuse him? Mariamma has long since given up on the idea of her children going to school since they are just going to be bonded slaves anyway. Gopinath stops asking for wages because he just gets abused when he does.

In studying the impact of violence on economic development in Africa and Latin America, UNODC researchers found that even the *fear* of violence had the capacity to “paralyze development at the grassroots. If development is the process of building societies that work,” they concluded, then “crime acts as a kind of ‘anti-development,’ destroying the trust relations on which society is based.”³³ There is evidence that people living in fear of violence unproductively divert resources to security measures, and the payment of bribes and protection money; are risk-averse, less entrepreneurial,

and prone to short-term economic decision-making; and are discouraged from accumulating assets or opening a business.³⁴

These are the day-to-day distortions that undermine the productive economic activity of people who live in a world where, any minute, the locusts of violence may swarm and lay waste to all their hard work and effort.

The locusts of violence have a punishing impact on every family and every community they touch—both in the direct monetary losses, and the destruction of human and social capital. But think about those Midwestern families living on the American Great Plains in 1875: All of them were affected by the locusts, but not all of them ended up in shallow graves of starvation. For some families, the locusts were a temporary setback; for others, the locusts were the end of the line, and there would be no coming back.

Likewise, violence is hurtful and costly wherever it strikes, but for the global poor, violence packs a uniquely devastating one-two punch. First of all, unlike the locusts of the Great Plains, who were equal-opportunity destroyers, the locusts of violence in the developing world actually *seek out* the poor—they are easy prey and attractive targets for violence and exploitation. Secondly, because the poor live on a very thin margin of survival, violence hits them and their households with much more devastating effect.

I recall the way an old history professor of mine defined poverty: He said the poor are the ones who can never afford to have any bad luck. They can't get an infection because they don't have access to any medicine. They can't get sick or miss their bus or get injured because they will lose their menial labor job if they don't show up for work. They can't misplace their pocket change because it's actually the only money they have left for food. They can't have their goats get sick because it's the only source of milk they have. On and on it goes. Of course the bad news is, everybody has bad luck. It's just that most of us have margins of resources and access to support that allow us to weather the storm, because we're not trying to live off \$2.00 a day.

Physical injury, disease, and disability from violence are all the more devastating to the poor who lack access to health care and weakened systems of immunity and healing from malnutrition.³⁵ Even relatively small losses of property through violent theft or extortion can be debilitating to poor households—especially if it is one of their few productive assets like a tool, vehicle, or livestock.³⁶ They don't have extras. If a breadwinner is victimized by violence—locked up, enslaved, assaulted—and can't work, the ripple effect is deep and wide. Among the poor, more people are likely to be

dependent upon that breadwinner and more desperately affected by his or her victimization. The loss of livestock, or land, or healthy labor capacity can be utterly devastating in a way that those with greater resource margins could scarcely comprehend.³⁷

THE HIDDEN COST OF TRAUMA

In addition to the massive direct and indirect financial costs of violence, experts are also beginning to count the more profound and personal *non-monetary* costs of violence—the way violence can change a person’s life forever. Violence significantly raises levels of depression, suicides, panic disorders, alcohol and substance abuse/dependence, and post-traumatic stress disorders³⁸—to a point that the poor endure levels of psychological damage comparable to living in a war zone.³⁹ The locusts of violence do not simply destroy your financial prospects—they destroy your life.

This is perhaps the greatest catastrophe of all, for the greatest devastation of violence is *invisible*—it is the destruction of the person *inside*. For victims of slavery, forced prostitution, sexual assault, and other intensely violent forms of oppression, the psychological wounds of trauma are invisible; they receive almost no treatment in poor communities;* and they do *not* simply “heal with time.”

My colleagues Benson, Delmi, and Pranitha, or the on-the-ground medical teams of groups like Doctors Without Borders, or anyone else who works directly for and with survivors of prolonged, repeated trauma in the developing world, recognize the way these victims of violence can develop an “insidious, progressive form of post-traumatic stress disorder that invades and erodes the personality.”⁴⁰ Social workers and therapists working in the developing world see how trauma victims are forced to live in a debilitating psychological state of denial, disavowal, or fragmentation as they suppress or avoid the memories of their victimization. Victims frequently continue to experience “intrusive memories of the past [that] are intense and clear,” keeping them disengaged from the present and unable to take initiative.⁴¹

* People in poor communities do have their own traditional sources of support, comfort and recovery from trauma that should be appreciated. These should not be regarded, however, as anywhere adequate to meet the serious psychological damage of trauma—it simply is untreated, and no human beings are immune to the mental health implications of trauma.

“These staggering psychological losses,” writes psychiatrist Judith Herman in her groundbreaking *Trauma and Recovery*, “can result in a tenacious state of depression” infused with deep rage.⁴²

Again, if we have dreams of providing meaningful assistance to the hundreds of millions of the world’s poorest citizens in their struggle against poverty, we must also have our eyes wide open to the countless millions of the world’s poorest suffering under conditions of such acute traumatic stress—with access to virtually none of the mental health resources we would consider indispensable for recovery and return to a healthy, productive life. If they were in our affluent communities they would be hospitalized or otherwise under very earnest psychological care, just so they could be reasonably healthy and functional. This is important to understand not for purposes of setting unrealistic expectations for providing high-end psychological services in communities that barely have enough to eat. Rather, it is important to understand so we are more realistic about the effectiveness of our efforts to help poor people develop and thrive economically if we do not address the violence. We may seek to provide all manner of programs of personal and community empowerment—but if violence is unrestrained in the community, it will be generating levels of personal trauma that may severely undermine the capacities of community members to make meaningful use of the assistance we seek to provide.

WE KNOW ENOUGH TO SOUND THE ALARM

For those who care about the struggle against global poverty, the time of reckoning has come. We must be willing to speak openly and honestly about the locust effect—the way lawless violence uniquely lays waste to economic development and the human and social capital upon which increased standards of living are built. It is bracing, for example, to inventory what diverse experts actually now know about the way specific forms of violence directly thrust vulnerable populations into poverty or keep them there.

For example, we now know that gender violence and land grabbing throw women and girls out of stable homes and communities and force them into urban slums where they are even more insecure and find it even more difficult to overcome poverty. Studies show that many women migrate to the urban slums “not so much in search of something as to escape from

something which threatens to harm them.”⁴³ We now know that education for girls in the developing world has a spectacular rate of return in helping girls and their communities escape from poverty. But we also now know—but rarely discuss—that violence against girls in the developing world has a devastating impact on their school attendance, their educational performance, their achievement levels, their self-esteem, and their physical and psychological health.⁴⁴ We now know that sexual violence is one of the most powerful drivers of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its devastatingly disproportionate assault upon women and girls in the developing world (especially in Africa) and the epidemic’s unparalleled economic destruction in poor communities.⁴⁵

We now know from sophisticated studies from the developing world that forced labor directly causes poverty and extreme poverty—locking poor people “in a cycle of poverty from which they cannot extricate themselves.”⁴⁶ In economic terms, experts find that forced labor adversely impacts “efficiency and equity” and undermines economic development through low or no wages, withholding of wages, lack of cash wages, denying children access to education, and denying laborers the very means to invest in their livelihoods, their human capital, or in their children’s future.⁴⁷

We now know from recent, ground-breaking research that abusive detention practices in the developing world have a devastating economic impact on the poor through lost income (billions lost to the poor), lost employment, lost education, lost harvest, lost market space; devastating costs for fees, bribes, travel visits; and increased risks of bankruptcy, property theft, family disintegration, and destitution for poor families living on the edge of survival.⁴⁸

We certainly know that lawless violence undermines economic development and makes it harder for poor people to improve their standard of living through increased income, medical services, and education. But the algorithms of economic growth and development are exceedingly complex and our capacity to isolate and measure the precise impact that lawless violence has on rates of economic growth, or income generation, or poverty alleviation, can prove elusive. So, even as we sound the alarm about the locust effect, we don’t need to pretend like we know *everything* yet.

To begin with, securing highly accurate data on incidents, rates, and levels of violence and crime is very difficult because violence and crime are intentionally hidden. Researchers are forced to use official statistics of reported

crime, or victim surveys, or proxy measures (like homicide as a proxy for violence in general) or other data sources that are notoriously unreliable and imprecise. The scholarly disquisitions on the difficulties of measuring violence and crime (especially across different countries and communities) could, and do, fill vast social science libraries.

And even if you could get great data on the amount of violence, isolating the causal link of that particular violence from all the other factors impacting economic growth or poverty in a given community or nation is extremely challenging. Moreover, some of the very specific causal connections between violence and poverty that seem intuitively obvious fail to be validated under the microscope of intense empirical study. For example, the idea that violence against poor women in the home reduces their capacity to get productive work outside the home has not been validated by careful studies that examined the proposition.⁴⁹ So sometimes the causal links between violence and poverty that make sense simply have not been proven or are too complicated for experts to clearly isolate.

Finally, we also do not have nearly enough data on the impact lawless violence has on specific poverty alleviation programs in the developing world. As we've seen, we have a good bit of empirical data, for example, on the way sexual violence undermines education programs and health programs among poor girls in the developing world. But what exactly is the impact of land grabbing on programs to increase the food production of women in Africa? What is the impact of bonded slavery on rural health programs targeting the poor in South Asia? What is the impact of gender violence on access to the new clean water sources? What is the impact on child sponsorship programs of child sexual violence? What is the impact on micro-loan programs of police extortion against families in poor communities?

Practitioners who run these various programs in the field will tell us candidly that lawless violence has a painful impact on their work and on the poor communities where they work; but outside the high-profile contexts of war and civil conflict, they rarely see systematic studies that calculate the true cost of the violence on their poverty alleviation efforts in the more stable settings where *the vast majority* of the world's poor live. Since few traditional poverty alleviation programs in the developing world claim to include a component that measurably reduces the poor's vulnerability to violence, some practitioners say there is little incentive to study and discuss

a phenomenon that is undermining the usefulness of their programs, but for which they have no effective response.

But, for the sake of the larger fight against global poverty, denial is never the answer. Nor is the difficulty with data and empirical complexity a reason to turn away in silence from what we *do* know—namely, that the locusts of lawless violence have been allowed to swarm unabated in the developing world and they are laying waste to the hope of the poor. The gaps in data and knowledge are reasons to prioritize and fund research that will help us understand the reality as rigorously as possible, but they are not a reason to falter in sounding the alarm. There remain enormously complex data questions about issues like global warming, the AIDS epidemic, unsustainable entitlement programs, obesity, and other crises of public affairs—but it is only the foolish deniers and irresponsible contrarians who allow data complexity to push these crises off the agenda of urgent public discourse.

In a comfortable, western intellectual culture that can value an easy and clever complexity over the risks of responsible action, this can be a real danger. The truth is, human and social reality is so complex, and our tools of analysis so exquisite that demonstrating unequivocal relationship of cause and effect in human affairs that meet our highly specialized standards for empirical truth has become nearly impossible—in ways that can't help but seem funny to people of common sense.

The latest headline appears above the fold, stating that a rigorous study has established a link between obesity and portion size or sedentary lifestyles. Experts celebrate because demonstrating such linkages to the satisfaction of modern empirical standards is amazingly difficult—indeed, measuring precisely the relationship between weight gain and how much you eat and how much you exercise is full of misunderstandings, falsehoods, rumors, fad theories, and bogus correlations. But the common person probably got the core idea a long time ago.

Likewise, when it comes to lawless violence and the struggle against the worst poverty in the developing world, while we're not done learning, we know enough. Recognized as one of today's most careful scholars, Christopher Stone of Harvard has said after reviewing the state of knowledge in the field:

Whether the aim of development assistance is the growth of national economies, the effective administration of national and local governments, or

simply the relief of those conditions that people in poverty identify as their greatest concerns, reducing crime and violence is important.⁵⁰

Indeed for the millions of poor men, women, and children in the developing world who find that they cannot go to school, or go to the medical clinic, or keep their wages, or keep their land, or keep their job, or start a business, or walk to the water well, or stay in their house, or stay healthy because they are enslaved, imprisoned, beaten, raped, or robbed, “violence is important.” In the same way, the problem of the locusts was “important” to those six family members in the shallow grave in Missouri in 1875.

Fortunately for the hardy survivors of the 1875 plague, the Rocky Mountain grasshoppers never swarmed in such a devastating way again. In fact, mysteriously, they were extinct as a species by the turn of the century. Unfortunately for the vulnerable poor in the developing world, the forces of predatory violence will not simply go away like the locusts of the Great Plains. On the contrary, if the forces of violence are not restrained, it is the hope of the poor that will just keep going away—generation after generation—and there is nothing that our programs for feeding, teaching, housing, employing, and empowering the poor will be able to do about it. If we can’t overcome the locust effect, nothing else good people do to help the poor will be truly sustainable.

So How Do We Make the Violence Stop?

To consider that question, we will need to back up and ask some other questions first—namely, why do the poor suffer such massive and disproportionate levels of violence in the developing world? Why are forces of such brutal violence allowed to swarm and wreak such relentless and brutal havoc among the global poor? These are the questions we turn to next.

“Throughout my life I’ve seen firsthand that while talent, ambition, and hard work are distributed equally among all people around the world, many face challenges each day simply surviving. *The Locust Effect* is a compelling reminder that if we are to create a 21st century of shared prosperity, we cannot turn a blind eye to the violence that threatens our common humanity.” **PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON**

“*The Locust Effect* provides a much-needed argument for reducing violence against the poor and a demonstration—through firsthand stories that are both shocking and true—of why that goal is so vital. By reminding us that basic legal protections are not a privilege, but a universal right, Gary Haugen has issued a moral call to arms that informs the brain and touches the heart.”

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT, Former U.S. Secretary of State

“Why is it that in so many places around the world murder and violence are normal aspects of daily life? This extraordinary book offers surprising and valuable insights about the nature and the drivers of the plague of violence that haunts the global poor, as well as smart ideas about how to tackle it. A must-read.”

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“Some of the biggest ideas are right in front of us but still invisible. *The Locust Effect* brings home, in convincing and powerful detail, the simple but oh-so-important point that poverty results from violence as much as violence results from poverty. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in development, security, and the failure of billions of people to achieve their potential.”

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER, President, New America Foundation and Professor Emeritus of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University

“The rule of law and a well-functioning public justice system are the preconditions for economic development but they are even more essential for social progress. *The Locust Effect* is an appeal to the global community to engage much more in multi-stakeholder action to combat violence, crime, and abuse. This is the only way to secure a humane future for mankind.”

KLAUS SCHWAB, founder and executive chairman, World Economic Forum

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