

What is Mutual Poverty?

We usually think of poverty as a lack of material wealth; a lack of money. The most common measures of 'poverty' look at people's daily income – but poverty is a much broader issue. Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school; not knowing how to read. Poverty is losing a child to illness because of unclean water.

Poverty also extends beyond what can be earned or bought – poverty exists in other areas of life, wherever our well-being is diminished. Poverty is powerlessness, being deprived of choice and freedom. Poverty exists when people are lonely; not knowing their neighbour or being known by their neighbours. Poverty exists when people have no sense of purpose or meaning for their life, low self-esteem, depression or disillusionment. Poverty exists when we have no spiritual significance.

Within the light of a broader definition of poverty, we can see that poverty exists within both *developed* and *developing* communities around the world. It is in fact a 'mutual poverty' and not just a simplistic material gulf between the so-called 'rich' and 'poor'.

Mirrored Worlds

At the risk of oversimplifying the differences between *developed* and *developing* communities the diagram below shows the types of poverty and the generalised levels that are most often found in *developed* and *developing* communities, on a scale from 'Poverty' (red) to 'Well-being' (gold).



This of course is a simplistic generalisation, as every community is totally unique with different physical, economic, social and environmental conditions, not to mention indigenous or common religious beliefs or faiths. Also the five types of poverty shown here are, in reality, all closely integrated with each other with no such clear division between them. However the diagram is useful to demonstrate that seemingly a mirrored effect is apparent: a *developed* community appears to show a level of well-being in the very same area that a *developing* community appears to show a level of poverty in, and vice-versa.

Typically, if one was to ask what someone from a *developed* country experienced as being most positively memorable on a trip to a *developing* nation, they might say something like "friendliness, generosity and community spirit". When asking the same person what they believe to be *most lacking* in our *developed* world, they might well say the very same thing! We are seemingly poor in what they are rich in and vice-versa.