



vineyardjustice

TENDING CREATION

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION CREATES POVERTY AND MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO BEING SOLD

RECONCILING CREATION IN CHRIST

In Christ, all things hold together, just as we can be confident that Christ died to reconcile all of creation to God (Col. 1:17 -20). Thus as followers of Jesus Christ, the interconnectivity of the justice of the Kingdom of God should not surprise us, as it does not surprise us that our biblical faith is essential to the solution of our underlying problems of injustice. Many of us know firsthand, creation is in desperate need of care. Both land and sky, earth and ocean, are stressed by over-fishing, agricultural run-off, environmental degradation and pollution. Pollution hurts the poor the most—they are always the first victims of its worst effects—Christians are called to care for the poor and the less powerful (Matthew 25:37-40).

HAITI: A CASE STUDY

A further look at the interconnectivity can be witnessed in the work of experts in migration crises from countries like Haiti to the U.S. typically look at “triggers” (i.e. natural disasters – such as hurricanes – and civil unrest) that cause people to make difficult choices to leave their homes and land. Yet things like natural disasters and civil unrest are only factors because there are other issues positioning people in desperate situations.

The fact is, most victims of human trafficking from Haiti were *already* living with the consequences of the environmental and economic crisis when lured into that life. With little or no economic hope for even subsistence farming due to de-forestation and soil erosion (those are interrelated, especially in a place like Haiti), farming communities cannot eke out a living. Compounding the environmental degradation is the loss of generational-knowledge of good farming techniques due to decimation from HIV/AIDS or the push of “advanced agricultural techniques” wanted or unwanted on the farming communities from “advanced countries.”

These factors contribute to increased poverty as people leave the countryside—the place of their relational community core, family and support—for the overpopulated urban environs. Poverty, both urban and rural, and the risk of disease place people in desperate situations, even to the point of believing (whether they really believe it in their heart) that their children are better off having a chance elsewhere. They are more susceptible to being blinded by the lies and false promises of a better life, a way out of their present life, for themselves or their children.

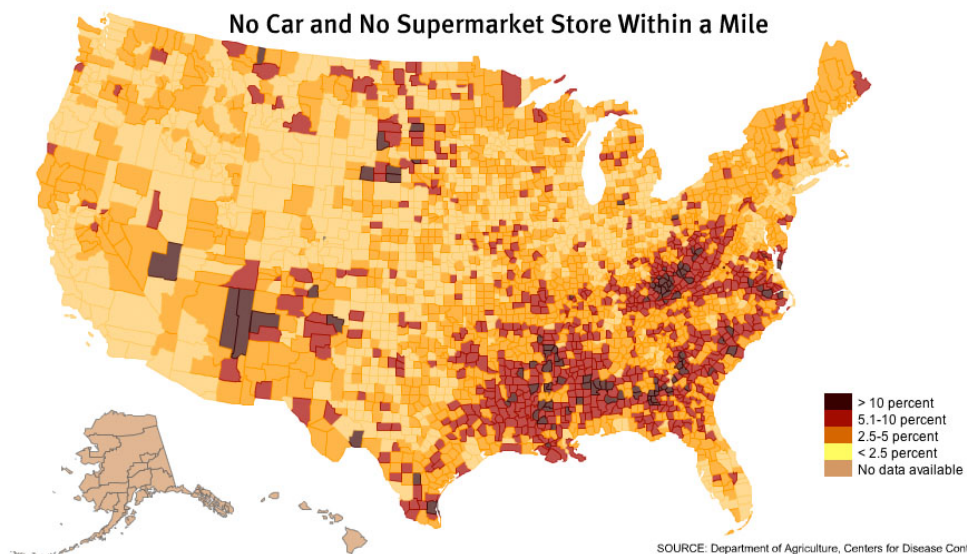
This vulnerable situation is preyed upon by human traffickers. Desperate people sell themselves or their children into labor trafficking slavery (they call them *restaveks* in Haiti) and as indentured servants of the urban and suburban wealthy. From such a situation, they might be sold into sexual slavery or more labor trafficking slavery and brought into the U.S. or other wealthy nations. This is just one example of what can happen when we don't think



about mindful environmental stewardship.

WHAT IS A FOOD DESERT?

The interconnectivity of the environment and poverty doesn't just happen in places like Haiti either. It happens in places more familiar to us, like Baltimore, Maryland or Buffalo, New York. In those urban centers, there are often vast tracts of the city that are known as 'food deserts'. What is a food desert? A food desert is a district with little or no access to large grocery stores that offer fresh and affordable foods needed to maintain a healthy diet.



Food deserts not only contribute to malnutrition in general, but particularly affect children. In turn, without a healthy diet, children often have trouble engaging in education and health programs that are available.

According to Global Issues research (www.globalissues.org), environmental degradation and poverty alleviation are urgent interconnected issues that are often treated separately. Consider the following:

- The United Nations 1998 Human Development Report reveals that, “Globally, the 20% of the world’s people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures—the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%.”
- To highlight this inequality further, consider that approximately 1 billion people suffer from hunger and some 2 to 3.5 billion people have a deficiency of vitamins and minerals.
- Yet, at the same time, some 1.2 billion suffer from obesity
- One billion people live on less than a dollar a day, the official measure of poverty
- However, half the world – nearly three billion people – lives on less than two dollars a day.
- Yet, just a few hundred millionaires now own as much wealth as the world’s poorest 2.5 billion people.

Solutions, such as food pantries and banks, Fair Trade certification, and more environmentally friendly technologies are extremely important, yet they do not always address the deeper interconnectivity of issues like tending creation, ending poverty and freeing slaves. Just as medical professionals highlight the need for preventative care that has a holistic orientation, so too do we need to understand these deeper issues in a more holistic manner in how we do ministry. This interconnectedness needs more recognition if environmental degradation, poverty and other global problems are to be addressed.