



Oxfam
America

Global Grab Bag

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This exercise was created and written by Kevin Connors.

Global Grab Bag Instructions

Today, an estimated 800 million people – one out of four – suffer from chronic hunger, and more than 1.3 billion people live on less than a dollar a day. Yet, the world produces more than enough to provide for everyone. It is the unequal distribution of global resources that lies at the root of world poverty and hunger.

All of us know something about these issues whether we realize it or not. Participation in the Global Grab Bag helps realize how much we already know and how much we can learn from the experiences of others in our community. Common, everyday items are used to provoke thought and analysis. In the process, we realize that we don't need to rely on outside experts to address these problems. We find that we can take action ourselves.

Format

Individual or small-group analysis of an issued followed by larger group discussion. This activity may be used in a classroom or staged as an event. The Global Grab Bag is appropriate for middle school to adult audiences. It works well with as few 10 to as many as several hundred participants.

Objectives

The Global Grab Bag enables participants to pool their knowledge and teach each other about global hunger and poverty. Participants examine the connections between poor nations of the global South and our own nation, as well as those between affluent and disenfranchised communities here in the United States.

Procedure

1. Collect items for the Global Grab Bag and place them in a large opaque bag or box. You should be able to find most of these items around your home or in your community. You do not need to use all of these items; pick and choose according to the size of your group and their familiarity with the issues. Feel free to add or subtract items. Remember, originality counts, and, for larger group, the bigger the prop the better.

Aspirin bottle
Bag of dirt
Bag of rice
Book
Bottle of water

Coffee
Credit card
Dollar bill
Frying pan
Passport

Photo of the U.S. Capitol building
Photo of hungry people

Stuffed animal
Toy gun
Tree branch

2. Have each participant or small group draw an item from the bag. Use these guidelines to organize participants:
 - 10-15 participants: Each participant draws an item.
 - 16-60 participants: participants form groups of 2-5.
 - More than 60 participants: Randomly choose as many participants as you have items; invite the rest of the audience to form small groups to work with each selected participant. Each group selects one member to share their group's comments with large group.
 - In a dining hall setting, place a grab bag item on each table and have each table function as a small group.
3. Have each participant or small group spend a few minutes thinking about the item and what it has to do with development in the global South, with disenfranchised communities in industrialized countries, or with the interconnectedness between industrialized and developing countries.
4. Have participants present their comments to the large group. The facilitator may introduce other concepts from the ideas section starting on page 6.
5. Afterward, you may leave time for an open-ended discussion. Or, try one of these variations:

Global Grab Bag Pairings: To allow participants to explore issues in more depth, try this: After each participant or small group has shared their commentary with the large group, but before the conclusion of the activity, have the participants form pairs or groups of three according to their grab bag items. For example, pair the person or group with the credit card with the person/group with the coffee to discuss how the issues represented by their items affect each other. Their discussion may take them in any number of directions. For example, they may talk about international commerce or access to credit and how the interplay of these issues affects access to the best land. Or, they may talk about growing crops for export instead of food for the local population. Then have each pair present their comments to the larger group before concluding the activity.

Weaving the Web of Life: This variation works best with small to medium-sized groups (10-25 people). You will need a large ball of string or yarn. After each participant has chosen their Global Grab Bag item but before they have made their comments, have the participant stand in a circle and hold their item up for the whole group to see. Give one participant the ball of string and ask him/her to give their comments. The facilitator and/or others add comments based on the attached commentaries. The first participant decides which of the

other items has a connection to their item and, while holding the end of the string, tosses the ball to the person holding that item. The first participant should explain what the connection is and why she/he chose that item. For example, Robert, who has the bag of rice, tosses the ball to Maria who has the bag of dirt. He explains that some people don't have enough rice because they lack access to land. After Maria explains her grab bag item, she keeps hold of the string and tosses the ball to someone else. She then explains the connection of her item to the next item and so on. Continues this process until everyone is connected by a giant web – a visual representation of our global interconnectedness.

Create an Awareness- and Fund-raising Event

Consider staging the Global Grab Bag in a public area, such as a cafeteria, community hall or lobby of a student union. Invite faculty, students, parents, local businesses or community organizations. Charge admission or simply ask for donations. Get groups to buy tables or co-sponsor the event to help defray expenses, and ask local merchants to donate refreshments. Let those who donate food or funds know you will credit them in any promotional material you may produce (posters, flyers, press releases). Consider having a speaker of local food bank or shelter. Hands out educational information (available free from Oxfam) at the conclusion of your events. Call Oxfam America's Fast Team (800/597-FAST) for ideas and materials.

Add Entertainment!

You might want to show an Oxfam America video or slide show, or arrange music or dance performances from other cultures.

Sample Global Grab Bag Script

Welcome to the [name of group] Global Grab Bag to benefit Oxfam America.

I'd like to share a few facts with you:

- The world grow more than enough food to feed everyone, yet
- More people are hungry today that ever before: and estimated 840 million people, or one-fourth to the population.
- One out of every three children is chronically malnourished -- too hungry to lead children – go hungry.
- Every day in the United States, 30 million people – more than half of them children – go hungry.
- Every 2.5 seconds, a child dies from hunger or related causes.

So why are so many people hungry? The roots of hunger lie in poverty, war and the unequal distribution of global resources, the wealthiest countries, which contain one-fourth of the world's population, consume three-fourth of the resources produced worldwide.

Introducing the Global Grab Bag:

We don't have any expert here to teach use about global poverty, so today we are going to teach ourselves. All of us know more than we realize. With the knowledge we already have, we don't need any experts to shale the discussion.

We're going to start by exploring the interconnections between us. We can see these interconnections just by looking around our homes or opening our wallets. Many of the objects in our homes came from other countries or regions of t he world – just read the labels on the cans of food in your kitchen or on the collar of your shirt. Even though we encounter these goods every day, their dark-flung origins often remain invisible to us, obscuring our connections to the people who make or use them.

By taking time to explain a few items, we will bring these connections to light. We will increase our understanding and appreciation of how other people's actions affect us and how our actions affect the rest of the world.

I would like each of you to pick an item from the grab bag. Once you have chosen an item, try to relate the object to issues of hunger and poverty in the global South and here in the United States. Try to determine the uses and origins of the item because these aspects shed light on the interconnections between the global South and the industrialized world.

After reflection/discussion item:

Now, I would like to ask each person [or group] to show us his or her item and explain what it says about hunger, poverty and our interconnections.

[After each participant or group shares their comments, the facilitator affirms the comments and may add additional points from the following Grab Bag Ideas section. Depending on item constraints, you may also invite other participants or the audience to comments on each item.]

Conclusion:

I hope you have learned something from this Global Grab Bag. We all need to keep fighting against hunger and poverty. Though these problems may seem overwhelming, every one of us can make a difference. By coming here today and learning more, you've already begun.

There is plenty of reason for hope. Since 1970, Oxfam America has enabled hundreds of thousand of people to break free of the grip of hunger and poverty through self-help initiatives in more than 30 countries, including the United States.

We welcome you to our national network of concerned people who help advance the fight against global hunger and poverty by attending events like this and by promoting practical aid that works.

Join us. Together we can make a difference. Thank you for coming,

Grab Bag Item Ideas

Use the ideas on the following pages as guides to comment after each participant has spoken about these grab bag items. There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise, and you should not feel that you need to present every idea on every item. The objective is to stimulate thought and discussion to enable participants to form their own conclusions.

Book
Coffee
Credit Card
Dollar Bill
Frying Pan
Land
Medical Bottle
Passport
Photo of U.S. Capitol
Photos of Third World People
Rice
Stuffed Animal
Toy Gun
Tree Branch
Water

Sources:

Much of the information included on the Global Grab bag Ideas section comes from interviews with Oxfam America program staff and the following resources and publications:

Global Connections Initiative/Inter Action
Krebs, A.V., *The Corporate Reapers: The book of agribusiness.*
New Internationalist magazine
Oxfam America, *Natural Allies: People and Their Environment. 1997*
United Nations Development program, *Human Development Report 1997.*
United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 1997.*
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, *Introductory Guide to Africa*
U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Agriculture Fact Book 1996.*
U.S. Censes Bureau, 1996.

Grab bag Item: BOOK (or pen or pencil)

Illiteracy continues to be a serious problem in many nations around the world. In many cases, illiteracy rates of women exceed those of men.

Many Oxfam America project partners in many countries engaged in literacy projects. For example, MAM (Melinda Anaya Montes Women's Movement) in El Salvador supports literary training to enable women to participate more fully in civil society.

Country	Adult Literacy rate	
	Female	Male
United States	99.0%	99.0%
Cuba	94.8%	95.9%
Vietnam	89.9%	95.7%
El Salvador	68.7%	72.8%
Guatemala	48.3%	62.2%
Mali	20.2%	36.7%

Grab Bag Item: COFFEE

Only a small fraction of the price we pay for a cup of coffee ends up in the hands of the growers. Farm workers receive meager wages, and small farmers typically have no choice but to accept low prices from middlemen who earn high profits. Most of what we pay for coffee ends up on the hands of wealthy individuals and international conglomerates which control the marketing.

Oxfam America supports coffee cooperatives in Latin America that have made connections with "fair trade" groups in the United States and Western Europe; now they receive fair prices for the coffee they grow. For example, SOCRA (the Cooperative Society of Agrarian Reform Coffee Producers) in El Salvador built its own coffee processing plant and sells its coffee through Equal Exchange, a U.S. based fair trade organization. You can support Oxfam's partners by buying Café Salvador in bulk through Equal Exchange (617/830-0303).

Grab Bag Item: CREDIT CARD

Many of the nations of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are drowning in foreign debt. In order to qualify for new loans, institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund require borrowing countries to institute "structural adjustment" programs which involve reduced spending on education and health care so more money can go toward paying off loans. In African countries, for every dollar received as a new loan, Africa pays \$2 in interest on old debts.

In many instances, the burden of structural adjustment programs is borne disproportionately by poor people. For example, currency of devaluation may lead to increased prices of basic food items, and cuts in social service limit access to health care and other essential services.

Oxfam America supports many projects to ameliorate the increased deprivation that often follows adjustment programs and urges the World Bank, the IMF and the major industrialized nations must constitute significant and timely debt reduction programs so that poor countries do not spend needed development funds on interest payments.

Country	Total External Debt		Debt Service as 5% of Exports)	
	In U.S. \$ Billions	As % of GNP	1980	1984
Bangladesh	\$16.6	63%	26%	16%
Burkina Faso	\$1.1	61%	6%	-
Mozambique	\$5.5	450%	-	23%
Nicaragua	\$11.0	801%	23%	38%
Peru	\$22.6	46%	46%	18%
Philippines	\$39.3	60%	29%	22%

On the other side of the credit issue, Oxfam America supports the micro credit funds of the Vietnam Women's Union, the Philippines Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, and others to help poor people buy the resources they need (such as seeds, tools and livestock) to increase their income.

Grab Bag Item: DOLLAR BILL

The relationship between the U.S. economy and poverty has many aspects:

- Many people mistakenly think that foreign aid is a huge chunk of our federal budget; in reality, foreign aid accounts for less than half of one percent of the federal budgets and it has been shrinking.
- Because of huge foreign debts and requirements of the multilateral institutions which issued the loans, many poor countries are forced to devote more and more of their budgets and resources to earn foreign currency, such as U.S. dollars, with which to repay their loans.
- Due to failing economies or political strife, tens of millions of people from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have migrated to industrialized countries. The money these people send home to their families plays a crucial role in supporting their home countries' economies. In El Salvador, for example, remittances from Salvadorans in the United States account for the largest share of foreign exchange in the country and keep their national economy afloat.
- Here in the United States, even though the economy is generating new wealth and the unemployment rate remains low, poverty is holding steady and the real value of wages has declined. More than 40 percent of the poor in this country work or come from a family with an employed head of household.

Grab Bag Item: FRYING PAN

(or other item representing traditional women's work in the home)

Seventy percent of the world's poor are female. Worldwide, women own less than one percent of all property, receive only 10 percent of all income, hold only 10 percent of all parliamentary seats and are world, it is primarily women who perform the bulk of the work needed to maintain the home, this is true whether women work outside the home or not. In Africa, women grow the majority of the food, which is often unpaid work. Throughout the world, women, on average, earn less than men doing comparable work.

Many projects sponsored by Oxfam America help women generate more income for their families and reduce the burdens of maintaining a home. Oxfam also supports grassroots organizations raising public consciousness about women's rights and advocating for change at local, national and international levels.

Grab Bag Item: LAND

(represented by jar of dirt or piece of sod)

In much of the world, access to land is a major issue. In many low-income nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, a minority of the population owns a large proportion of the arable land. The increasingly integrated world economy rewards those countries that give precedence to export-crop of concentrating land ownership in the hands of the larger producers, whether they are multinational corporations or wealthy individuals. As a result, more and more small producers who need land to survive are either pushed onto less productive land, relegated to plots too small to feed their families or lose their land altogether.

Disputes over land have sparked many conflicts; including the recent wars in Central America where, even years after peace accords have been signed, land remains a major cause of title to land they have farmed for years or to land from which they have been forcibly displaced.

Grab Bag Item: MEDICINE BOTTLE

Since 1960, childhood mortality has been but in held and life expectancy has risen from 46 to 63 years. In the last 10 years, childhood immunizations have soared from 15 percent to 80 percent, saving the lives of three million children a year. But much remains to be done:

- 1.2 billion people have no choice but to use unclean water – the cause of 15,000 deaths every day.
- In the United States, millions lack adequate health insurance.
- In Africa, Asia and Latin America, economic "structural adjustment" programs and spending cuts of the last decades have profoundly and negatively impacted access to health care. Cuts in national budgets mandated by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions have meant closed hospitals and health clinics. Lack of resources means that more and more people die of preventable and treatable diseases.
- Poverty itself leaves people physically weakened and thus more susceptible to common illnesses. Measles, for example, claims the lives of tens of thousands of children in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- HIV and AIDS are epidemics in all parts of the world, although 90 percent of those infected with HIV are in the developing world. The new medicines we read about in the newspapers are expensive and out of reach of the world's poor. Moreover, they cannot cure the disease, only treat its symptoms.

Oxfam America supports its partner organizations' projects to alleviate poverty, promote better health conditions and provide health education.

Grab Bag Item: PASSPORT

We live in a nation composed primarily of immigrants. (If we are not Native American or from an indigenous group, we are immigrant.) Yet the most recent immigrants have always been targets of discrimination and at an economic disadvantage.

Many people believe, without any foundation, that immigrants contribute nothing to the economy, and that they receive massive amounts of welfare and other social service support. In fact, immigrants strengthen the economy, pay taxes and contribute to maintaining the stability of communities. Furthermore, immigrants perform a number of unpopular tasks, including the harvesting of the fruits and vegetables that Americans consume in large quantities.

Anti-immigrant campaigns drive immigrants underground and push down real wages for all. They also lead to discrimination against legal immigrants and citizens of certain ethnic and racial groups, for example Mexican-Americans in California, and Central Americans in Florida.

In Florida, Oxfam America supports the Farm workers Association of Florida, composed primarily of Central American and Caribbean immigrants. FWA organizes farm workers to obtain higher wages and better working conditions.

Grab Bag Item: PHOTO OF U.S. CAPITOL

U.S. government policies on foreign aid and trade, weapons sales and international relations carry life and death consequences for people around the globe. Our domestic laws and policies profoundly affect the millions of poor people in our midst.

Recognizing that fighting poverty takes more than just seeds and tools, Oxfam America seeks to change policies of the U.S. government and international financial institutions that hinder, rather than support, sustainable development. Oxfam expresses its views in Washington and, through the *Fast for a World Harvest* campaign, educates U.S. citizens about policy and poverty issues.

Grab Bag Item: PHOTOS OF THIRD WORLD PEOPLE

The images we see of poor people around the world affect our thinking about them. For decades, the images used by many development and aid agencies were like the example below to the left: a nameless, emaciated child waiting passively to be helped by a well-off person from the industrialized world. This kind of image helps organizations and governments to raise funds, but in the long run they create a sense of hopelessness. Such images have contributed to perceptions of people in developing nations, particularly Africa, as helpless souls waiting to be rescued.

The photo on the right, on the other hand, inspired hope and portrays the African continent more realistically. In this photo, a young girl in Tanzania is hard at work studying with her classmates. She is not waiting passively; she is actively working for better future.

Only with positive, realistic images can we convey how poor communities are creating a better future for themselves, thus creating a sense of hope for positive change.

Oxfam America seeks to promote more positive images of poor people through its publications, web site and its work with the media.

Grab Bag Item: RICE

(or beans, corn or other staple food)

Rice, beans, corn and wheat form the basic diet for the overwhelming majority of the world's population.

The world produces more than enough food for every person to receive sufficient quantities of necessary nutrients, yet the majority of the world's population remains impoverished. Lack of access to land and other resources, and unequal distribution of the world's resources keeps the majority of the world in poverty. In the United States, 13.7 million people live in poverty, and 40 percent of the poor are children.

In some 30 countries around the world, Oxfam America supports projects that enhance impoverished peoples' ability to provide food for themselves, their families and their communities.

Grab Bag Item: STUFFED ANIMAL

(or other child's toy)

In the past decade, great strides have been made to improve the lives of children, but much remains to be done:

- Millions of children will live in poverty.
- Each year, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 12.5 million children under the age of five die, most of them of easily preventable causes.
- In the United States, 20.5 percent of children under the age of 18 are poor; they represent 40 percent of our country's poor. The poverty rate is even higher for children under six. In female-headed households, over 50 percent of children under six are poor.
- Millions of children around the world continue to work, often items in unsafe conditions.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, dispels four myths about child labor:

Myth 1: Child labor only happens in the poor world.

Fact: While the vast majority of working children are found in the developing countries, children routinely work in all countries. In every country –rich or poor—it is the **nature** of the work children do that determines whether or not they are harmed by it.

Myth 2: Child labor will never be eliminated until poverty disappears.

Fact: It is true that the poorest, most disadvantaged sectors of society supply the vast majority of child laborers. Child labor can actually perpetuate poverty, as a working child grows into an adult trapped in unskilled and low-paying jobs.

Myth 3: Child labor primarily occurs in export industries.

Fact: Export industries are the most visible sector in which children work, but in fact, only a very small percentage of child workers are employed in export sector industries –probably less than five percent.

Myth 4: The only way to make headway against child labor is for consumers and governments to apply pressure through sanctions and boycotts.

Fact: first, this implies that all the momentum for action on child labor is generated by Western pressure. In fact, activities and organizations in both industrialized and developing countries have been diligently at work for years. Second, international commitment and pressure are undoubtedly important, but sanctions affect only export industries, which employ only a fraction of child laborers.

In 1990, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has since been ratified by all but six countries. Sadly, the United States is one of the few nations that have not ratified the Convention.

Oxfam America supports projects that help families and communities create healthy, stable environments. Offering hope of better life for children and generations to come.

Grab Bag Item: TOY GUN

In 1995, nearly \$800 billion was spent on weapons and military-related expenses. Not only do wars and military activities cause suffering and hardship around the world, but every dollar spent on the military is a dollar that could have been spent on education, health care and other essential services. Less than half a percent of global income is needed to eliminate all poverty – roughly \$80 billion a year for 10 years. The combined net worth of the seven richest people in the world is *more* than \$80 billion.

In many nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America, even after the wars and internal conflicts have ended, the flames of violence are fanned by the many powerful weapons designed for military conflicts that still circulate among the population. An estimated 100 million landmines, for example, remain in the ground, causing tens of thousands of civilian injuries and deaths each year.

Country	National defense budget	Defense budget as % of Gross National Product	Per capita spending on defense
United States	\$277.8 billion	3.8%	\$1,056
Zimbabwe	\$233 million	4.2%	\$21
Senegal	\$74 million	1.9%	\$9
Brazil	\$6.9 billion	1.5%	\$43
Guatemala	\$140 million	1.4%	\$13
Cambodia	\$126 million	4.7%	\$13

Grab Bag Item: TREE BRANCH

(or twig, leaf or sapling)

Deforestation poses a serious problem for much of the world, promoting the erosion of precious topsoil and exacerbating flooding. Logging companies and ranchers denude immense tracks of land; extreme poverty forces many poor people to strip hillsides in a desperate search for fuel.

Many Oxfam America project partners promote deforestation, ecologically sound agricultural techniques and fuel-efficient wood stoves. They also press for government and institutional support for programs aimed at preserving the world's disappearing forests.

For example, an Oxfam America project partner in Vietnam, the Center for Natural Resources Management and Environmental Studies, is training peasant families in the Mekong Delta to restore war-damaged land through sustainable agriculture and restoration of mangrove forests.

Grab Bag Item: WATER (represented by a jar of water)

People throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America are concerned about access to clean, safe water. In the industrialized world, when we hear reports of floods and droughts, we tend to attribute them to the vagaries of nature. But if we take time to examine the issue carefully, we see that, while nature plays a part, poverty and unequal access to resources are the prime culprits.

If we read about a devastating flood, we may assume it was caused simply by heavy rain. But floods do not occur every time it rains heavily. In areas where deforestation has occurred, the ground cannot absorb excess water, so it rushes down hillsides and damages homes. Urban mudslides that kill thousands do not stem from inclement weather. It is often lack of housing that leads poor people to build shanty towns on unsafe hillsides where inadequate sewage drainage systems further weaken the precarious terrain.

When it comes to drought, lack of rain is not the only problem. In many drought-prone areas, farmers traditionally breed drought-resistant seeds or dug wells. But the agricultural revolution has led many farmers to rely on hybrid seeds that need regular watering and chemical inputs. In some cases, nearby agribusinesses have used so much water that the water table has fallen below reach of traditional wells.

Both in the United States and around the world, fast-growing urban areas require more and more water, which is often taken from the earth in non-sustainable ways.

Oxfam America funds project partners working on water resource and availability issues, including of small dams, planting trees on denuded hillsides and promoting organic agriculture.