

The Good News on Poverty (Yes, There's Good News)

Part 1

[. . .] So I thought, forget the rock opera, forget the bombast, my usual tricks. The only thing singing today would be the facts, for I have truly embraced my inner nerd.

So exit the rock star. Enter the evidence-based activist, the factivist.

Because what the facts are telling us is that the long, slow journey, humanity's long, slow journey of equality, is actually speeding up. Look at what's been achieved. Look at the pictures these data sets print. Since the year 2000, since the turn of the millennium, there are eight million more AIDS patients getting life-saving antiretroviral drugs. Malaria: There are eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have their death rates cut by 75 percent. For kids under five, child mortality, kids under five, it's down by 2.65 million a year. That's a rate of 7,256 children's lives saved each day. Wow. Wow.

Let's just stop for a second, actually, and think about that. Have you read anything anywhere in the last week that is remotely as important as that number? Wow. Great news. It drives me nuts that most people don't seem to know this news. Seven thousand kids a day. Here's two of them. This is Michael and Benedicta, and they're alive thanks in large part to **Dr. Patricia Asamoah**¹—she's amazing—and **the Global Fund**², which all of you financially support, whether you know it or not. And the Global Fund provides antiretroviral

drugs that stop mothers from passing HIV to their kids. This fantastic news didn't happen by itself. It was fought for, it was campaigned for, it was innovated for. And this great news gives birth to even more great news, because the historic trend is this. The number of people living in back-breaking, **soul-crushing**³ extreme poverty has declined from 43 percent of the world's population in 1990 to 33 percent by 2000 and then to 21 percent by 2010. **Give it up**⁴ for that. Halved. Halved.

Now, the rate is still too high—still too many people unnecessarily losing their lives. There's still work to do. But it's heart-stopping. It's **mind-blowing**⁵ stuff. And if you live on less than \$1.25 a day, if you live in that kind of poverty, this is not just data. This is everything. If you're a parent who wants the best for your kids—and I am—this rapid transition is a route out of despair and into hope. And guess what! If the trajectory continues, look where the amount of people living on \$1.25 a day gets to by 2030. Can't be true, can it? That's what the data is telling us. If the trajectory continues, we get to, wow, the zero zone.

[. . .]

Part 2

So why aren't we jumping up and down about this? Well, the opportunity is real, but so is the jeopardy. We can't get this done until we really accept that we can get this done. Look at

¹ Dr. Patricia Nkansah-Asamoah is a Ghanaian doctor and activist known for her work with HIV-positive mothers in Accra. She is involved with Bono's organization ONE.

² The Global Fund invests millions of dollars every year in programs that aim to solve problems caused by malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS. Learn more at globalfund.org.

³ Something that is "soul-crushing" makes you feel that there is no hope.

⁴ The expression "give it up" is used to encourage an audience to applaud.

⁵ Something that is "mind-blowing" is amazing.

this graph. It's called inertia. It's how we **screw it up**⁶. And the next one is really beautiful. It's called momentum. And it's how we can **bend the arc of history**⁷ down towards zero, just doing the things that we know work.

So inertia versus momentum. There is jeopardy, and of course, the closer you get, it gets harder. We know the obstacles that are in our way right now, in difficult times. In fact, today in your capital, in difficult times, **some who mind the nation's purse**⁸ want to cut life-saving programs like the Global Fund. But you can do something about that. You can tell politicians that these cuts [can cost] lives.

Right now today, in Oslo as it happens, oil companies are fighting to keep secret their payments to governments for extracting oil in developing countries. You can do something about that, too. You can join the One Campaign, and leaders like **Mo Ibrahim**⁹, the telecom entrepreneur. We're pushing for laws that make sure that at least some of the wealth under the ground ends up in the hands of the people living above it.

And right now, we know that the biggest disease of all is not a disease. It's corruption. But there's a vaccine for that, too. It's called transparency, open data sets, something the TED community is really on it. Daylight, you could call it, transparency. And technology is really **turbocharging**¹⁰ this. It's getting harder to hide if you're doing bad stuff.

So let me tell you about the U-report, which I'm really excited about. It's 150,000 **millennials**¹¹ all across Uganda, young

people armed with 2G phones, an SMS social network exposing government corruption and demanding to know what's in the budget and how their money is being spent. This is exciting stuff.

Look, once you have these tools, you can't not use them. Once you have this knowledge, you can't un-know it. You can't delete this data from your brain, but you can delete the clichéd image of supplicant, impoverished peoples not taking control of their own lives. You can erase that, you really can, because it's not true anymore.

It's transformational. 2030? By 2030, robots, not just serving us Guinness, but drinking it. By the time we get there, every place with a rough semblance of governance might actually be on their way.

So I'm here to—I guess we're here to try and infect you with this virtuous, data-based virus, the one we call factivism. It's not going to kill you. In fact, it could save countless lives. I guess we in the One Campaign would love you to be contagious, spread it, share it, pass it on. By doing so, you will join us and countless others in what I truly believe is the greatest adventure ever taken, the ever-demanding journey of equality.

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*This is an edited version of Bono's 2013 TED Talk.
To watch the full talk, visit TED.com.*

⁶ To “screw something up” means to ruin the chance for success.

⁷ An event or happening that “bends the arc of history,” has a far-reaching effect that changes the course of the human race.

⁸ To “mind a purse” means to be in control of the money. In this case, Bono is referring to federal budgets.

⁹ Mo Ibrahim gained financial success as a telecom entrepreneur, and then set up the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to encourage more responsibility in governments in Africa.

¹⁰ A synonym for “turbocharge” is “accelerate.”

¹¹ The term “millennials” is usually considered to apply to individuals who reached adulthood around the turn of the 21st century.