

The importance of perspective when interpreting global data on the poor and the rich in the 21st Century world.

In the BBC Two programme **'Don't Panic'**, Hans Rosling helps us understand different perspectives on global inequality by explaining the different incomes of the bottom billion, the top billion and the middle billion out of the current 7 billion people estimated to inhabit the world:



From the perspective of citizens of the EU or the USA, as Hans demonstrates, with the average of US\$100 income a day, it is hard to distinguish those in extreme poverty from many of those who are not. For the richest billion, the difference between US\$1-10 a day is negligible: both seem like an impossible amount to live on.

Yet those that look up from the bottom billion know very well how much better life would be if they move from US\$1 to US\$10 a day. Rosling's image below highlights this difference through how income level dictates the capacity for being mobile by enabling people to work for save for shoes followed by bicycles and motorbikes or scooters.



This is demonstrated in 'Don't Panic' through the case study in Mozambique, where hard work and careful savings over a long time in order to purchase a bicycle can transform a family's livelihood. With a bicycle, goods can reach markets more effectively leading to an increase in income and it frees up time for other pursuits. From this perspective, the lives of up to a billion people could be made considerably better just from increasing their incomes towards 10 dollars a day, taking them out of extreme poverty. The movement of so many people out of extreme poverty in recent decades is one of the most significant developments in human history.

However, using the data, there are other stories that could be told about the second and third billion from the top, whose incomes lie between US\$10-100 and who are increasingly able to take advantage of automobile transport and more recently commercial air flights. Their story is one of aspiration and hard work through education and commerce.

With greater security and improvements in health care, this allows for more investment in the lives of fewer children. As a result many individuals have experienced a rapid improvement in life chances and have passed on the benefits of this by creating opportunities for their children.

Take the example of world famous Chef Ian Kittichai, who as a child would help his mother before school to collect the vegetables and other ingredients so she could cook 15 types of curry while he was at school, and among other things was a street vendor in the evenings. In his **own words**:

I came from a big family, and we all had certain roles we had to perform. My dad sold insurance, my sisters sold soy milk outside our grocery stall and I had to go with mom to the market.

After school I used to push a cart selling curry around the streets. Then I had to make belts for my uncle until midnight. We had to work 365 days a year.

While Chef Ian now owns and runs restaurants in many countries, his personal story captures the experience of the rapidly aspiring and growing global middle class, especially in Asia. This form of upward social mobility has also fed back into personal decisions since parents want their children to have more opportunities than themselves.

Many are turning to International Schools as a way to equip their children for the global marketplace as well as to attend universities in Europe or the USA. But the costs of this kind of private education are very high (rising up to over US\$20,000 a year per child) in a context where average incomes are just only beginning to reach the same levels as established in many developed countries.

Parents in these situations often make conscious choices to have at most 2 children. While such developments are more likely to be in the growing Asian cities they point to a future where the birth rate may actually fall to a point where **populations shrink**.

We can also see the implications of increased income in the purchasing habits of individuals such as buying washing machines and other consumer durables.

In China, there are now an estimated 60 million international flights a year and this is increasing rapidly and many of these are for holidays or shopping trips in the large malls around the Asia Pacific. Hans Rosling provides us with a vision of a world that will be fuller but families are likely to be smaller, lifestyles more urban, education more transnational, incomes higher, social mobility up and geographical mobility easier for the **world's projected 11 billion people**.

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