

HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT & HUMAN RIGHTS

Skepticism about Poverty Traps

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- William Easterly, "The Legend of the Big Push".

Questions

1. Easterly rejects Jeffrey Sachs' claim that the poorest countries are caught in poverty traps that require foreign aid to escape. What evidence does Easterly give suggesting that (A) poverty traps do not seem to actually exist and that (B) foreign aid does not seem to encourage the economic growth of recipient countries?
2. In justifying the existence of poverty traps, Sachs appeals to data from 1985–2001. Why does Sachs believe this data demonstrates that there are poverty traps? What does Easterly believe that this data actually reveals about poorer countries?