

6570 Days to Make a Difference

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When I was asked to contribute this article to *Philanthropy Impact*, I was delighted to share my thoughts but rather daunted by the enormity of the question. I am no philosopher, academic or social scientist but someone who has experienced a number of cultures, countries, social backgrounds and, as a philanthropist have worked with scores of selfless heroes within extraordinary small charities and social projects. Kind people consider me a driven philanthropist and this is because I believe that if I am fortunate enough to live to 80 years old, that would give me some 6,570 days on this earth in which to do the best for my children and for those who come after us.



Gina Miller

It is undeniable that the world has experienced unparalleled transformation and progress over the last 100 years. We have seen population explosion and astounding developments in science, technology and communications but we have also seen the rise of short-termism, blatant capitalism, an erosion of values and principles and, more recently, urban and religious tribalism, all of which are creating major problems, inequalities and imbalance.

The result is that we, mankind, have become the greatest threat and challenge of our time. Visit the world population clock website and it is alarming to see how quickly it clicks through to another birth. We have a global population of some 7.3 billion people all seeking instant gratification, depleting the resources of our planet and losing sight of the global social cost of behaviours. The resulting growth in poverty and inequality are symptoms of more fundamental challenges and are problems that are almost incomprehensible. We are experiencing global poverty, with over a billion people suffering each day and an estimated seven million children under the age of five dying each year. We have festering inequality feeding terrorism, social unrest and waves of national conflicts that threaten to drown out stable societies. And the common thread that runs through all these ills is that they take no account of national borders.

In my view, the biggest challenge is society itself. If you look at society as the ground we walk on, the foundations of modern society have been eroding as much as they have been advancing. The result is sinkhole societies where people disappear through the resulting symptoms of poverty, inequality, lack of social mobility, isolation and social injustice. Humanity has been resilient because it has exercised its two most powerful muscles – our brains and our hearts. But as society progresses and we have become spoon feed, materialistic and focussed on the short-term. The resilient strong foundations of ideas, virtues, values and responsibility – both individual and collective - are crumbling as we increasingly cease to exercise these muscles.

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We have to rebuild these foundations, stabilise society and have a collective goal of achieving a true and fair society that tackles all the pathways that lead to the challenges we face. We are a very self-interested species, yet in times of crisis, we have shown resilience. We are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us.

But are our children learning about resilience, a balance between want and need? Are we evolving into a society of 'hand outs' instead of 'hand ups' where the once innate hunger for survival has been so dissipated that people no longer know how to be strong?

Without resilient, strong societies, future generations will be unable to face the challenges of ever increasing demands on ever decreasing supplies of finite resources of food, water, land, energy and even air. Add to this the problems of a global aging population, where by 2050, approximately two billion people on the planet will be aged over 65 (one fifth of the global population) and these issues become even more exigent.

Without the fostering of a collective consciousness and humanity, and a realisation, then acceptance, that those with the broadest shoulders and the deepest pockets, the top say 30%, may well be responsible for the remaining 70%, we may well see the markers of success or failure of our societies in the form of poverty and inequality become even more extreme.

The Language of Poverty and Inequality

To narrow my thoughts to the theme of the magazine, poverty and inequality discussions tend to be within a 'third world' context. But poverty and inequality are found in all societies, although the levels of visibility tends to vary. Charles Dickens wrote of a *Tale of Two Cities* in 1859, which depicts the plight of the demoralised. As a champion of social justice, his novels are underpinned with stories of poverty, inequality and injustice but these are not issues that only live in historic novels – they exist in all contemporary societies.

The relative versus the absolute conception of poverty is worthwhile touching on. The elimination of absolute poverty, where people have food, water, shelter and clothes are achievable to some degree.

But basic needs evolve over time and tend not to be the same across countries. Relative poverty tends not to be defined by basic needs but as a fixed proportion of the mean income of the population. A person's absolute standard of living is determined by income. In first world societies such as the UK, poverty tends to be determined by the rate of growth of the mean income of the population and the change in the distribution of income. It could be argued that we have forgotten what poverty is.

Global Challenges Demand Global Actions

My despair is that the challenges and threats to our society are so big that politicians and leaders



should consider it their principal duty to confront and minimise them. This is unfortunately not the case for a number of reasons including insufficient understanding of the risks amongst both the general public and politicians, short-term thinking, which does not consider catastrophes which might well occur after the lifetime of present generations. And last but not least, we have politicians who are passionate about being leaders but not passionate and principled about leading people and their countries. Very few, if any, politicians consider themselves responsible for the future of humanity. Short-term national interests are what govern international negotiations concerning global risks.

The *United Nations* was established some seventy years ago to promote international cooperation but this had become a weak, celebrity adoring organisation that is in need of reform. Effective forms of global decision-making need the bringing together of great thinkers, philosophers, researchers, politicians, conscious capitalists and social justice leaders, to collate and evolve new ideas and models relating to the issues

and challenges we face. We need to accelerate the establishment of an effective global governance system with the power to combat the global, catastrophic risks facing our future. We need global solutions, fairly and ethically executed nationally.

Historically, many ancient cultures have seen the sense of collaboration and collective problem solving, and operated with councils of elders and wise men. In more modern times, many have argued that such organisations are essential. The two incredible World Wars forced the world's statesmen to try, yet neither the *League of Nations* nor the *United Nations* has lived up to expectations.

In recent years, the debate has picked up again, particularly in academic circles. In particular, the climate threat means that new forms of global interaction are happening in order to bring about sufficiently effective decisions. Many conferences, negotiations and summit meetings are held, yet all fail to achieve acceptable results. Greenhouse gas emissions are on the rise, rainforest destruction and overfishing are continuing, and more and more countries now have weapons of mass destruction at their disposal.

Although the risks facing mankind as a result of current developments are increasing day by day, there are still no concrete political proposals as to how we can meet the need for effective global decision-making.

Rays of Hope

I recently came across a ray of hope from Edward de Bono, the father of lateral thinking, who is trying to urge such reform through education. His *Institute for the Design and Development of Thinking* at the *University of Malta*, is seeking to work with parents, teacher, schools communities and children to promote thinking, creativity and innovation. His view is that "In a system that is preparing children for jobs that do not yet exist or that may be obsolete by the time they finish school, what they really need is to learn how to think, adapt, and recognise opportunities".

My work with charities and the extraordinary people I have met throughout my life, who work tirelessly for the good of others, makes me believe we are at our best when we use our heads and our hearts together. I believe we can live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. But we need to recalibrate society to be a true and fair one that places human welfare and happiness at the centre of more ethical ideas, decision making, values and principles.

Gina is founder of Miller Philanthropy, the SCM Group – including SCMDirect.com and MoneyShe.com and the True and Fair Campaign. She is respected for her lateral thinking, feisty views and principled, integrity driven approach to business and success. Gina is a passionate and vocal advocate for smarter giving and a more strategic business-like approach to charity and the third sector. She offers a free service to other philanthropists and donors who may be time poor but want to give in a smart efficient and transparent manner.

Gina's philanthropic work takes many forms and infuses everything she does. She is not just a donor, but an actively engaged, conscious capitalist and philanthropist. Her work in philanthropy includes:

- *Working with a portfolio of dynamic small community charities or projects which numbers 12 - 14 at any time, so they can become more sustainable and widen their reach.*
- *Working with a number of special needs charities, projects and academic research to achieve better understanding, best practices and collaboration between stakeholder.*
- *Ongoing work with Professor Adam Ockelford at Roehampton University and the Amber Trust Charity – seeking to understanding how music can unlock the world for autistic and children on the special needs spectrum, as well as raising funds and giving general support so the charity can provide music therapy and instruments to families from disadvantaged backgrounds.*
- *September 2013 - December 2014; Development Board Member of The Center for Social Justice, one of the funder for their work on Modern day Slavery, and co-author of two state of the nation reports including the 'State of the Social Sector' report published in September 2014.*
- *Improving consumer protection across Europe through the True and Fair Campaign and founder of the 'not-for-profit' True and Fair Calculator that is the first tool of its kind which gives users a true likely Total Cost of Investing in one figure.*