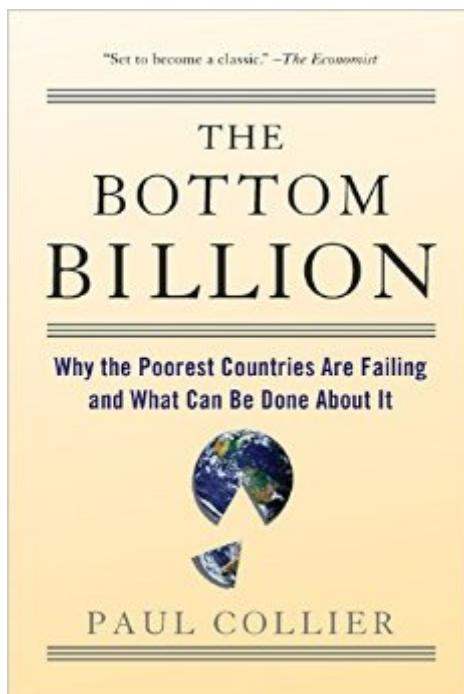


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The Bottom Billion: Why The Poorest Countries Are Failing And What Can Be Done About It



Synopsis

In the universally acclaimed and award-winning *The Bottom Billion*, Paul Collier reveals that fifty failed states--home to the poorest one billion people on Earth--pose the central challenge of the developing world in the twenty-first century. The book shines much-needed light on this group of small nations, largely unnoticed by the industrialized West, that are dropping further and further behind the majority of the world's people, often falling into an absolute decline in living standards. A struggle rages within each of these nations between reformers and corrupt leaders--and the corrupt are winning. Collier analyzes the causes of failure, pointing to a set of traps that ensnare these countries, including civil war, a dependence on the extraction and export of natural resources, and bad governance. Standard solutions do not work, he writes; aid is often ineffective, and globalization can actually make matters worse, driving development to more stable nations. What the bottom billion need, Collier argues, is a bold new plan supported by the Group of Eight industrialized nations. If failed states are ever to be helped, the G8 will have to adopt preferential trade policies, new laws against corruption, new international charters, and even conduct carefully calibrated military interventions. Collier has spent a lifetime working to end global poverty. In *The Bottom Billion*, he offers real hope for solving one of the great humanitarian crises facing the world today."Set to become a classic. Crammed with statistical nuggets and common sense, his book should be compulsory reading."--The Economist"If Sachs seems too saintly and Easterly too cynical, then Collier is the authentic old Africa hand: he knows the terrain and has a keen ear.... If you've ever found yourself on one side or the other of those arguments--and who hasn't?--then you simply must read this book."--Niall Ferguson, The New York Times Book Review"Rich in both analysis and recommendations.... Read this book. You will learn much you do not know. It will also change the way you look at the tragedy of persistent poverty in a world of plenty."--Financial Times

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Customer Reviews

Collier has two recommendations for helping the poor: "narrow the target and broaden the instruments." Narrowing the target means focusing not on the five billion people in the "developing world," for four billion of those people live in countries that are already growing, many of them very quickly. One billion of the world's people (70% of whom are in Africa) are in countries that are going nowhere fast, except - in some cases - down. Broadening the instruments means shifting focus from aid to an array of policy instruments: better delivery of aid, occasional military intervention, international charters, and smarter trade policy. The most frustrating element of recent books on economic development is that they wildly overstate. Jeffrey Sachs, in *The End of Poverty*, promises that we can eradicate poverty with a few simple (if not easy) steps; and William Easterly, in *The White Man's Burden*, tells us aid is a disaster (with some tiny caveats at the end). Collier offers the nuanced voice that has been missing. He draws on decades of his and others' careful research to explain four traps that keep most of the bottom billion in captivity and why globalization as it is currently configured will do little for these poorest nations. He goes on to explore how each of a whole array of policy instruments (including but not limited to aid) can play a key role in helping the bottom billion get on track towards growth.

Developing countries are quite unlike Tolstoi's characterization of happy and unhappy families. Each happy country looks different from the other, and there are vast differences between China, India, Brazil, and other developing success stories, but there is a similarity between unhappy countries--countries that are not only failing to develop, but also going downward and falling apart. Together, these countries have a combined population of about one billion people, and what happens to this bottom billion has important consequences for the whole world. Paul Collier pioneered the burgeoning research on the economic causes of conflicts, and his work on civil wars has proved quite controversial among political science experts. Those experts tend to interpret civil wars in terms of heroic struggles motivated by grievances or ethnic strifes reflecting deeply-rooted hatreds. The author's research shows that rebel groups are usually doing well out of war, and that greed often trumps grievance as the underlying cause of conflict. He proves this by statistical analysis,

showing for instance that there is basically no relationship between political repression and the risk of civil war, or between ethnic fragmentation and conflict (although ethnic polarization does play a part). Conflict is not the only trap. The author also goes through the natural resource trap, the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbors, and the trap of bad governance in a small country. Those traps often reinforce each other, and their combined effects condemn the bottom countries to the slow lane. In each case, Paul Collier not only successfully reviews the existing literature, but also offers original insights drawn from his own research.

Economic growth is a complicated business. Too many people focus on single issues, as though you just have to flip a switch to create wealth. You won't find any single-factor-theories here! No sir, this is my new, improved, patented, unique, four-factor theory! Step right up folks, it won't last long! Cheap sarcasm aside, four is better than one. The four factors Collier alludes to are conflict, resources, geography and governance. A fairly standard list, but he is more careful and nuanced than most in analysing what really matters in each case and the interactions between them.

Briefly: 1. Conflict (both civil war and coups): while low income and growth and dependence on primary exports are good predictors, inequality and repression are not. Ethnic diversity can be a problem, but only in the particular case where there is a clear majority group but still significant minorities. Highly diverse countries are therefore as well off as homogenous ones. There is no special "Africa effect" once other factors are accounted for. In one study from Nigeria, fighters tend to be young, uneducated and with no dependents. Having a sense of grievance does not matter. Conflict areas tend to be those with few oil wells (rather than none or many), with no relationship with the level of government services in the region. Most ominously, there does appear to be a trap: once conflict happens once, it makes future conflict more likely. 2. Resources: The resource curse does operate, through the standard channels of Dutch disease, volatility, and kleptocracy. But it is dependent on bad governance. If a country has a working democracy with checks and balances before resource wealth is discovered, there is no problem.

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