

71% of the world holds only 3% of global wealth. Indeed, the ten richest billionaires, combined, hold more wealth than hundreds of nations including Nigeria, Cambodia and Iran. This disparity of wealth across our global society translates to extremely poor standards of living and situations for nearly half of the world's population. Over 3 billion people are living on less than 2 dollars fifty a day; more than 65 million people are crammed within the slums of India.

In response to these problems there are countless humanitarian organisations and individuals acts of charity that tirelessly work at improving these standards of living and bridging the gap of inequality. For instance, in 2015 there was an approximate total of 373 billion dollars given to charitable organisations, a 4% increase from the previous year.

Yet regardless of this, there remains a major disconnect between these people and those, like you and I, who can make a difference, because of the distance between us, often due to an inability to even comprehend such an alternate life. This can, perhaps, be linked to the beginning of my speech.

Whilst containing important information, it was not, was it, anything too surprising nor, more importantly, did it elicit a strong empathetic and outraged interest. I believe it's clear that it had the potential to stimulate insight for deeper need for change but lacked the ability.

This is because it was a list of facts and figures. A discussion of money, numbers and statistics to which we, in our modern society, have become immune, essentially numbing the weight of the message behind them.

In our consumeristic and materialistic world, charity, in many cases, has begun to move away from finding the common humanity between two people in paradoxical situations.

This attitude to charity and the value of true empathy was something that I discovered in 2015 when I participated in a Cambodian school cycle challenge alongside 14 other girls and their mothers to raise money for Project Futures. Project Futures raises funds to educate and empower people to take action against human trafficking and exploitation. It particularly supports the Somaly Mam foundation, Somaly herself having escaped sex trafficking in Cambodia.

We each needed to raise two and a half thousand dollars for Project Futures so this fundraising was a major focus prior to leaving. Fundraising was also something that I could comprehend, unlike the situation of girls younger than me being sold into human trafficking. However, whilst I was proud of the money that I raised and the positive impact it would have, it was just a figure, often completely disengaged from the actual girls whose life it would improve.

My rather naïve attitude was completely altered when our group visited a shelter for girls who had been rescued. I could not have comprehended the significant impact this afternoon would have on both my life and the lives of the Cambodian girls.

We sat in two groups. The Australian visitors sitting directly across from a group of Cambodian girls. We sat so that my friends and I were looking into the faces of girls our age, our mothers looking into the faces of girls the same age as their daughters. In that moment there was already a powerful connection between us.

The Cambodian girls then began to tell us their stories. These were horrifying, heartbreaking and emotional but all held an ending of hope. For them though, these were not just stories, this was their past and for thousands of other women, girls and boys being sold into sex slavery ... their

reality. The reality of such a life hit me in that moment. It hit all of us as our mothers held us a little closer and the distance between the groups was readily bridged in offerings of tissues and tear stained smiles.

I particularly remember one girl. I don't know her name or her story but to me she symbolises the value and the need of engaging with our common humanity when we reach out to those in need, rather than remaining distant behind a veil of money and circumstance.

When she stood the Cambodians grew even more sombre. She began to speak in Khmer but was crying so strongly that she struggled to continue even as she was desperately held and protected in the arms of Somaly Mam. While her actual words were not translated for us, Somaly later told us that she had been rescued just one week earlier. This was the first time that she had ever shared her past. The significance of this girl feeling safe enough and finding the courage to share her story while we were there, was not lost on any of us.

In sharing the experience with her and showing her, and all the girls, the human capacity for compassion and kindness we had made a greater difference to her life because we brought our common humanity into moment.

Though this moment, I learnt the deep impact that people can have on others through sharing our experiences. When we learn to step beyond the confines of a society separated into developed and developing where everything is determined by money and figures we can make the most progression for society and for individuals.

Ultimately, there has been a switch in the focus of charity in favour of money over empathy but I truly believe for the sake of others and of ourselves that it is vital that we flip this switch back.