



Discuss the view that too much reliance is placed on governments to solve the world's problems.

The recent victory of Iraq over the Islamic State from reclaiming control of Mosul offers hopeful optimism that even the most intractable of world problems can be ameliorated. Undoubtedly, governmental forces played a remarkable role in this development. Even as confidence in governments increase, can this be said about all other world problems — are governments truly the panacea? It seems reasonable to depend on governments to eliminate multi-faceted problems of environmental degradation, human rights violations, depleting resources, and economic inequities etc. They have to be the main force to combat the inexorable onslaught of world problems. However, to think that the masses is absolved from contributing to this effort would be over-reliance, allowing the government to become a crutch that prevents positive actions stemming from the grassroots level. Due to complex nature of world problems, many other parties should be involved; such convoluted and entrenched problems demand a concerted effort from different parties to be properly eradicated, or at least alleviated. Thankfully, the world does realise that although governments possess the resources and influence to make an impact, governmental actions are not the only ingredient required. Individuals and corporations are actively stepping up to contribute to and reinforce this effort.

Realists claim that world problems often demand the expertise and position of the government to tackle these issues. Hence, there are individuals who would point at the gravity of the problem and lament at their picayune role in making a difference. They end up heavily relying on the government to solve the problems. A case in point would be how the fight against climate change is significantly enhanced by the Paris Agreement in 2016, when 153 countries committed to curtailing global warming. Global warming could only be reduced when governments actively decrease carbon footprints in their countries. For instance, Brazil's Atlantic Forest could restore over 30 percent of its area after years of deforestation only because the government intervened in 1999 to propel conservation and restoration efforts. Similarly, England was heavily polluted by industrial chemicals less than 30 years ago but the air quality dramatically improved in the last two decades thanks to well-enforced governmental regulations that saw reduced industrial output, closure of coal-fired power stations and the venturing into alternative clean energy sources. It is evident that large-scaled efforts targeting a nationwide problem can only materialise with the backing of governments because they can resort to binding policies and laws. Realists suggest that terrorism is another area in which solutions can only be fuelled by governments due to the military force needed to exterminate terrorist groups. Al-Shabaab's decline was perpetrated by resistance from Somalia's Transitional Federal Government which slowly pressed back south and west from Mogadishu, together with a major offensive from Kenya and Ethiopian forces and air support from US counterterrorism forces. Only the cooperation of governments could have stamped out this systemic, widespread threat. Realists point at these examples to



show that the gravity of problem warrants governmental intervention because the impact created by governments is indispensable and even irreplaceable, thereby putting them at the forefront of combating world problems. Albeit this is true, for the individual to exclude himself from the solutions simply based on this mentality is putting excessive reliance upon the government.

The nuance here is that apart from these realists, many individuals are not simply waiting for the government to act. Insofar as it is reasonable to task governments with fixing world problems given how they possess the required resources and immense influence to make a real impact, individuals do recognise their own role. More accurately, they are complementing governmental efforts via their own actions; individuals alleviate world issues in their own capacities. Hence, instead of a case of over-reliance and non-action on the part of the individuals, it is more accurate to say they are working concurrently with the government to spark positive change. In the aspect of environmental conservation, many non-governmental organisations and activists have surfaced to support the green movement. Madhav Subrmanian, a 12-year-old Indian Boy, goes around Mumbai collecting money for tiger conservation and has set up Kids For Tigers to raise awareness about this issue. Conservation awareness is heightened in middle-class India because of fervent voices and young activists like him. Other more prominent individuals took the effort to create documentaries that have seminal impact upon environmental consciousness. Al Gore created 'An Inconvenient Truth' to underscore the growing concerns of climate change while Richard O'Barry, through 'The Cove' exposed callous Japanese dolphin hunting. These individuals' efforts have ripple effects among the population, thereby acting as strong supports to reinforce governmental efforts. In the same vein, in Japan, consumers, upon realising the impacts of global warming, are cutting down their electricity consumption. They buy goods which have green stickers labelled, indicating that they are environment friendly. Moreover, corporations are also stepping up to further the efforts. Bob Hertzberg, founder of venture capital firm Renewable Capital, is one of a new breed of financier piling unprecedented amounts of money into renewable technologies. These are heart-warming examples of how people actively work to solve problems rather than attribute it to the government's responsibility. Far from relying on the government, these people act to create positive change.

Often, governments act in accordance with the wishes of the populace, adopting the position that has strong social support. Hence, individuals are powerful engines to make the first move for positive change, thereby steering their countries and leaders towards this change. The masses' actions and attitudes form an invisible force that give traction to governmental policies. Rather than wait for the government, individuals proactively take the lead to pave the way for solutions. In the history of resisting racial discrimination, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was the very first narrative that acknowledged slavery as a problem. It unveiled the iniquity and brutality of slavery through the eyes of two slaves being sold and encountering different people along the way. From there, it gave rise to



the early anti-slavery movement. His efforts was what began the changing mindsets of the population and even the government. More recently, in the events to preclude discrimination against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual (LGBT) community, many applaud the US and Taiwan for taking the revolutionary step to legalise gay marriage. Prima facie, governmental decision to pass favourable laws is the reason for this enlightened move. However, we need to realise that this decision would not even be possible if status quo remained and the population were anti-LGBT. Governmental decisions are in fact products of the substantial efforts of activism on a grassroots level. Individuals and organisations tirelessly helping to raise awareness and illuminate the plight of the LGBT community over the course of many decades is the impetus inducing the gradual shifting of public sentiment. The changing of attitudes and increasing support for the LGBT community is the real, concrete force pushing governments to act. Activists sow the seeds of change and binding governmental policies act as the catalyst to germinate these seeds. From these case studies, it is striking who is the true driver of solutions — the masses. Therefore, the government is not the main driver of positive change and it is unfair to suggest that too much reliance is placed on them.

Moreover, the efforts and potency of individuals are even more pronounced and prominent in situations where the government is unreliable. Individuals have the discernment to step in and fill this void. This is a strong testament to the fact that individuals are directing the solutions and actively influencing it, even above the government. Pakistani child activist Malala Yousafzai is the quintessential pinnacle of such efforts. She leveraged on the social media and used her blog to reveal the otherwise concealed horrors of life under the Taliban in Swat. She illuminated the tormenting and callous rule that the Taliban enforced and the tenebrous bleak state of education deprivation for girls. This greatly amplified awareness about the situation, beyond Pakistan. The situation conveyed was filled with human struggles and raw poignant emotions, hence stirring pathos; this sow the seeds of change because people are impelled to do a part and help in whatever way possible. This was a country where the government was the one perpetrating the oppression, and could obviously not be depended upon to solve problems. The government was the problem and individuals were the only solution, and people like Malala has risen up to the occasion to become a beacon of hope and change. This inspiring example reminds us that individuals do not simply rely on the government, they do what is best for the people and for the country. Similarly, Zhan Haite, became a crusader against China's draconian residence registration system, hukou, a system discriminating against rural residents and rendering them devoid of many social benefits. She organised a protest in front of Shanghai's education bureau, and posted a flurry of dissenting messages online. Despite the governmental backlash including evicting her family and incarcerating her father, she pressed on and finally there was a huge reform on the system and even state-run media outlets gave attention to this problem. From these individuals, it is striking how individuals, far from depending on the government, can even step up to replace the government's role in solving problems. Especially in situations where the government is



either the problem or oblivious to the problem, individuals are the paramount pillars of change.

In conclusion, there will always be people who wait for the government to solve problems. Yet, there will be many more passionate individuals who step up to circumvent problems in the world, refusing to conform to the idea that individuals lack what the government has. The many stories of individuals liberating societies from enervating problems is a resounding answer that there is no excessive reliance placed on governments; governments are merely another party in this task of eradicating problems, alongside individuals. At the end of the day, problems require a solution. It does not matter who does it so long as there are those who are willing to. With this belief, any problem in the world has its solutions, over and above what governments are capable of.