

## Engineers Without Borders (or budget)

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Nick Werner and Scott Ratter examine the slow process of their low-budget water filter. The braintrust of Ghana glumly gathered around their table. They had \$60 to build a water treatment plant. Looking to the table beside them, they asked, "Who are you?" Came the reply, "We're Ethiopia. We've only got \$20." It's not every day that you operate the foreign aid of a wealthy nation, and it's not every day, thankfully, that you have to clean water with mere sand and gauze. The one-hour lesson provided by Engineers Without Borders was admittedly simplistic, but it drove home its point: most of the world's people are poorer than Canadians, and they need our help.

College students and siblings Jon and Erica Stockdale, themselves only 20 and 22 years old respectively, visited La Ronge area schools in late February to talk about Engineers Without Borders and to demonstrate the need for aid. 1.2 billion people live on less than a dollar per day; 3 billion live on less than \$2. But more telling than the powerpoint show was the hands-on experiment in water treatment. Groups of 4-5 students were assigned nations, given a budget appropriate to the nation and an instruction sheet (which may or may not be comprehensible, depending on the nation's literacy rate). Using money and ingenuity, they were to buy supplies from the Stockdales (originally from Air Ronge) and build a water filter. Poor nations could afford some sand and gravel; rich nations could buy activated charcoal, a far more adept filter for organic materials.

Immediately, poor nations asked the rich ones for a loan or donation. Rejection was met with mock threats of war, but the quick and ready parallel was chilling, and not uncommon. "It's a perfect example of how the world works on a small scale," said Erica afterwards.

The United States had a whopping \$170 to spend. It donated \$5 to one neighbour, but withheld \$10 for repairs and emergencies. "We need to take care of all people," Thomas Sierzycki explained, hamming up the part, "once we take care of our people." Canada, which had \$100 to spend, drew some applause for news that it donated \$15, but Jon Stockdale quickly asked, "Is that realistic?" That's 15 per cent of your Gross Domestic Product, he said.

"What would probably happen is we'd give away 0.3 of a penny. That's what we (Canada) give right now" for every \$100 in Canada's economy, he explained. Third World nations may have millions of people crammed into areas smaller than most provinces. The lousy living conditions contribute to life expectancies of 40 years or less. In those nations, most of the students' parents would be dead by now, noted Jon.

To find out more about Engineers Without Borders, check [www.ewb.ca](http://www.ewb.ca).

Scott Boyes - Staff your work."