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## The World divided in two

The silent miracle of human progress. Unspoken, unpublicised and unexpected. You will be pleased to know that the world is improving and we live in a better world today than we ever imagined. Less than 10% of people know that the proportion of the global population living in extreme poverty has halved. It's time to celebrate, but the media has other plans...

It's a journalist's professional duty to make any given event, fact or number sound more important than it is. This creates an overdramatic world view. Stories about gradual improvements rarely make the front page even though they occur on massive scales and impact millions of people. We assume the world is getting worse because of the increasing press freedom and improving technology allowing us to hear about more disasters than ever. Yes, terrorism, overfishing and deterioration of seas, species extinction and sea levels are rising and there are pressing issues we need to deal with, before we reach tipping point. However, there are many more positives that are rarely brought to light. Ozone depletion, child labour, oil spills, illegal slavery and hunger some of the negatives that have been decreasing and women's rights to vote, literacy, democracy, girls in school, water and child cancer survival are just some of the positives that have been increasing.

We have a misconception that the world is divided in two. The human brain is a product of millions of years of evolution meaning we are hardwired with instincts that helped our ancestors to survive. In the past, the only source of news and useful information was gossip and dramatic stories and our life-saving energy source was sugar and fat. These are instincts that we still see today but the world has changed dramatically.

Everyone automatically categorises - no matter how prejudiced or enlightened. Categories are necessary for us to function so the media appeals to our instincts and creates stereotypes to quickly communicate. Many use African countries or African problems to make a comparative point but Africa is a huge continent of 54 countries and one billion people living at different levels of development. It is like talking about ebola in Liberia when it is 100-hours to drive from Liberia to Sierra Leone. Africa is, on average, lagging behind other continents as the average lifespan of a newborn baby is 65 years but in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt the life expectancy is above the world average of 72 years. This shows that gap stories can reflect reality but there are still differences both between and within categories.

We often use the terms developing and developed, the poor and the rich and the west and the rest but what do they actually mean? Many people think the average of people living in low-income countries is 59%. The real figure is 9%. 75% of humans now live in middle income countries where this so called 'gap' is supposed to be. In 2017, 40% were classed as living in the West and 60% were classed as living in the rest. By 2040, 60% will be living in the rest and 40% will be living in the rest meaning that the rest will actually be the majority.

A developed country is classed by the Cambridge dictionary as "a country with a lot of industrial activity and where people generally have high incomes". A developing country is classed as "a country with little industrial and economic activity and where people generally have low incomes". This seems to suggest that developed countries are no longer developing

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and counterexamples are easily found. Look no further than England. England is classed as a developed country but 80% of our GDP is from the service sector, not from secondary industry. Similarly, the World Bank classifies Argentina as a 'developing country' but also as a 'high income country'. Either the terms, or definitions seem outdated.

The world's least developed countries are far more modernised than they were in the past. Plastic bags are used to store and transport food, plastic buckets are used to carry water and soap to kill germs and most children are vaccinated. The titles of developing and developed countries actually no longer exist due to the astonishing improvements in the world. The World Bank has reviewed them and determined them to have no meaning for use in many of their statistics and programmes. Measures such as infant mortality, life expectancy, educational standards and public health there is little difference between the two categories.

We need to stop being ignorant about the world and stop using terms like developing and developed. It seems that the more educated we are the more we wrongly categorise and negatively assume the worst. We need to start celebrating the positives and continue to improve the issues that are still pressing the headlines. Wouldn't it be nice to wake up in a world where everyone shares one category and the headline of the day is 'At last! Cancer is cured!'

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