

HOW GLOBAL PROBLEMS THAT FEEL OVERWHELMING COULD ACTUALLY BE SOLVABLE

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The world today faces some daunting challenges: climate change, gender inequality, food scarcity. And the problems are so widespread, what can one individual honestly do about them?

One person thinks he might have the answer.

In a **TED Talk** released on Monday, Hugh Evans, the creator of Global Citizen, called for people who care about the world to stop feeling like they are on the sidelines and to start engaging with the issues.

“I’m convinced that if we had more active global citizens, the problems we face — poverty, gender equality — could become solvable,” Evans said in the talk.

For Evans, the problem is not that people don’t want to act, it’s that they don’t know how — and they’re not convinced their actions will have an effect.

“No-one gives a f*** about foreign aid,” said Alexander Downer, the former Australian foreign minister, to Evans, according to the talk. “We have to look after our own backyard first.”

This is precisely the line of thinking Evans wants to debunk.

“It pits the poor in one country against the poor in another; it pretends we can isolate ourselves from one another,” Evans said. “The whole world is our backyard, and we ignore it at our peril.”

Evans wants to push back against the idea that a person in one country can’t help make change for others a world over.

That’s why he started Global Citizen in 2012. The annual music festival raises awareness of global issues, and has its attendees earn tickets by taking action online. For instance, people can take a pledge to drink tap water instead of using bottles, or tweet a video to raise awareness about sanitation issues, and after they take enough actions, they become eligible to win a ticket to the show.



Taylor Hill via Getty Images Olivia Wilde and Jeffrey Sachs speak during the 2015 Global Citizen Festival at Central Park on September 26, 2015.

However, the concert-for-change model does have its critics, including some that say it allows government and corporate leaders to show-off philanthropic efforts without accounting for their role in perpetuating the root causes of poverty, such as income inequality, tax evasion or free market policies imposed on poor nations.

But others say that mass awareness of global challenges alone is already a kind of success, and in that regard Global Citizen has already made a mark: so far more than 5 million actions have been taken through the platform.

“A global citizen is someone who self-identifies first and foremost not as a member of a state, tribe or nation, but as a member of the human race,” Evans said in the talk. “[It’s] someone prepared to tackle our world’s greatest challenges.”

While Evans states there is still a long way to go before all of the world’s problems are solved, he doesn’t let that discourage him.

“Imagine an army of millions, connected, informed, engaged, and unwilling to take no for an answer,” Evans concludes. “I’m a global citizen. Are you?”

By Sarah Grossman