

Ending World HUNGER

The solution to the problem of poverty and hunger lies in the willingness of the world's affluent nations to get involved.

▪ *By Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director, The Earth Institute, Columbia University*

A large part of the human population lives hungry and is getting hungrier. Although most of the world's hungry live in Africa and South Asia, hunger in Latin America cannot be ignored – 19% of children under 5 were malnourished on the continent in 2001. Societies afflicted by hunger are more vulnerable to disease, political instability, economic paralysis, and environmental degradation. Most of these societies live in what economists have been describing since 1956 as a “poverty trap,” wherein poor countries lacking the basic investments necessary for economic growth are too poor to afford them, and thus cannot break out of poverty without resources from abroad.

The key challenges to achieving economic growth and fighting hunger in these societies are solvable. There are proven investments that can improve child and maternal health, stem the outbreak of epidemic disease, and increase food productivity. The UN Millennium Project, which I have the honor to direct on behalf of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, includes experts from dozens of fields working to determine the package of interventions that the poorest countries in the world require to break out of the poverty trap, thus helping set today's unstable societies—Afghanistan, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Haiti, and dozens like them—on their way to self-sustaining economic growth. By helping these countries work their way out of extreme poverty, we would also enable them to become good neighbors and trading partners instead of havens of terror, disease, unwanted mass migration, and drug trafficking.

One of the chief causes of troubles in countries mired in extreme poverty, particularly in Africa, can be found in the fact that they were bypassed by the Green Revolution of the 1970s and 1980s. The big push in agriculture that allowed India, China and other parts of the developing world to escape the trap of extreme poverty, disease and

▪ Africans are affected by malnutrition mainly because the Green Revolution bypassed that continent.



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famine for the most part did not happen in Africa.

Three numbers tell the story. First, food production per person in Africa in 2000 was down by 7 percent compared with 1980. This is in contrast with India, where food production increased by 28 percent over this period, and China, where it was 82 percent higher. Second, fertilizer use in Africa averaged 23 kilograms per hectare in 2002, compared with 100 kg in India and 278 kg in China. Third, as a result, grain yields last year averaged 1.6 tons of maize per hectare in Africa, compared with 3.8 tons in Asia.

This situation can be remedied. To lift troubled regions out of their misery, rich countries must help them invest in schools, roads, power, water, sanitation and more. Governments and the donors that support them must also address basic agricultural facts of life. Instead of only shipping food aid, donors should be helping farmers increase their productivity using interventions that are modern, ecologically-sound agricultural science, backed by investments in rural infrastructure.

First, farmers need soil nutrients, whether by mineral fertilizers or “green fertilizers” in the form of manure, nitrogen-fixing trees, and cover crops. They also need reliable water sources, especially in places where the rains often fail. This must be accomplished through small-scale irrigation and water-harvesting schemes, not giant dam projects that disrupt ecosystems. Additionally, farmers need improved germplasm—seeds of crop and tree varieties and livestock breeds—all highly productive and well adapted to local climate and pest constraints. More broadly, developing countries need more effective agricultural extension services that help farmers adopt cutting edge technologies generated by partnerships between farming communities and agricultural research systems. Finally, vulnerable groups (like pregnant and nursing mothers, children younger than 2 years, and schoolchildren) should receive supplementary feeding, preferably with locally produced foods to benefit farmers in the area.

After farmers increase their basic food crop production, they often dedicate part of their farm to higher value crops and trees. Many have dairy cows for the first time, generate cash income, and take the first steps out of absolute poverty. Unfortunately, when farmers have products to sell, they often encounter no functioning markets. Rural markets need storage facilities, market information systems, guaranteed floor prices, credit programs, and transportation infrastructure to connect with larger markets. Then, prices will not collapse during good harvests, and farmers will have the ability to transport surplus grain to deficit areas. Value-added processing facilities for high-value products, including fruits and medicines from newly domesticated plants, can go a long way in reducing the hunger of the rural landless and the urban poor

only could developing nations survive, but they could thrive. Hot spots would cease to be terror havens, and they could become respectable players in a world economy that would be much more effective at spreading prosperity.

In terms of public health crises, the rich world, at a tiny cost to itself, could save about 8 million people, according to the work of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. About \$25 billion annually from the rich world could pay for a massive attack on AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, vaccine-preventable diseases, and unsafe childbirth, among other killer conditions. Many of those 8 million whom we could save are children under the age of 5. Importantly, saving these lives would actually slow the world's population growth, because poor families choose to have fewer children in response to higher survival rates.

THE U.N. MILLENNIUM PROJECT IS EXPLORING POLICIES THAT COULD FREE 1 BILLION PEOPLE FROM POVERTY.

by generating off-farm employment. Removal of perverse agricultural subsidies and other barriers to trade will help the transition from subsistence to commercial farming. The private sector, in partnership with governments, must play a large role.

A rise in crop yields will be revolutionary even beyond ending hunger. A Green Revolution in Africa, for example, will make it possible for more girls to attend school and more women to seek off-farm employment. History has shown that women's empowerment leads to lower population growth and more investment in children's health and education.

The UN Millennium Project is exploring the broad range of policies and investments necessary to help free about 1 billion people from extreme poverty. The end of abject poverty is within reach. It's not a crazy dream—it's a hardheaded financial concept. If poor countries exercise responsible leadership, and the rich world pitches in, not

The Millennium Project has found that in addition to \$25 billion or so for investments in health, we would probably need another \$50 billion or so from rich countries to address the interconnected challenges of education, social services and infrastructure, for a total of about \$75 billion per year. Perhaps half that, roughly \$35 billion, would come from the United States. To put it in context, \$35 billion amounts to 35 cents for every \$100 of U.S. Gross National Product. \$75 billion seems like a lot until one realizes that the rich world—the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand—has an annual income of about \$25 trillion. We are talking about three thousandths of our annual income. Modern science and technology can fight disease and hunger. We can obviously afford to help pay for it—how can we in good conscience refuse to accept this duty, especially given that the misery afflicting the poor is now washing up on our own shores in so many ways?♦