

THINKING
BIG

An Educator's Guide to The 19th Annual
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Robert Irwin *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue* ©2006. Linear polyurethane paint on 6 aircraft honeycomb aluminum rectangles, overall installed: 10'-1/2" x 54' x 22'; aluminum rectangles: 16' x 22' each. Photo by: Genevieve Hanson / Courtesy PaceWildenstein

2008 Franke Lecture in Economics: Jeffery Sachs

Jeffery Sachs, Economist



Jeffery Sachs is an American economist best known for his work as an economic advisor to governments in Latin America, Eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Asia, and Africa. Sachs has been at the forefront of the

challenges of poverty reduction, debt cancellation, and disease control, especially for the developing world. He is a leading voice for combining economic development with environmental sustainability. Sachs has been repeatedly ranked among the world's most influential people by *Time Magazine*.

Sachs is the director the Earth Institute, President and Co-Founder of Millennium Promise, and Research Associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. From 2002 to 2006, Sachs was special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Director of the UN Millennium Project.

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Getting to the Core: Report

The End of Poverty: An Interview with Jeffery Sachs

News: One of the world's top economists offers a blueprint for transforming the developing world.

Interviewed By Onnesha Roychoudhuri
May 6, 2005

Shortly after the release of the UN report came the publication of Sachs' book, *The End of Poverty*, in which he laid out his own strategies for eradicating poverty by 2025. Sachs, who gained renown for advising Latin American and Asian governments on economic reform, has gained popularity as "can-do" economist amidst a cacophony of naysayers on development. But his optimistic attitude has also attracted quite a bit of skepticism. Why is it that decades

of development economics haven't achieved the elimination of poverty? What makes Sachs' proposals so special? Is eradicating poverty a feasible goal to achieve in our lifetime? Sachs recently sat down with Mother Jones to discuss these issues.

Mother Jones: What makes your plan to end poverty so different from the development efforts that were tried in the 1950s and 60s? Why hasn't five decades worth of development work been very successful thus far?

Jeffrey Sachs: I think so far there's been a lack of appropriate effort, which includes many things. For development to work, rich countries need to help poor countries make certain practical investments that are often really very basic. Once you get your head around development

issues and realize how solvable many of them are, there are tremendous things that can be done. But for decades we just haven't tried to do many of these basic things. For instance, one issue that has been tragically neglected for decades now is malaria. That's a disease that kills up to 3 million people every year. It's a disease that could be controlled quite dramatically and easily if we just put in the effort. It's truly hard for me to understand why we aren't.

MJ: What do you say to critics who argue that it's a waste to put more money into a development system that hasn't used that money very effectively thus far?

JS: Well, we have to be smart about whatever we're doing. But I'm quite convinced that, broadly speaking,

economic development works. The main arguments of the Millennium Project Report, and the main argument of my book is that there are certain places on the planet that, because of various circumstances—geographical isolation, burden of disease, climate, or soil—these countries just can't quite get started. So it's a matter of helping them get started, whether to grow more food or to fight malaria or to handle recurring droughts. Then, once they're on the first rung of the ladder of development, they'll start climbing just like the rest of the world.

MJ: So do you believe that past efforts, to get these less-developed countries on the “first rung,” haven't been pragmatic enough?

JS: Part of it is that many of these countries are invisible places, neglected by us politically, neglected by our business firms, by international markets, and by trade. We tend to focus on these countries only when they're in such extraordinary crises that they get shown on CNN because they're in a deep drought or a massive war, which is something that impoverished countries are much more prone to falling to. There haven't been too many stories in our press about Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi, or Ethiopia, other than when the disasters hit. And yet these are places that are in very deep trouble all of the time, but with largely solvable problems. And those are the kinds of the places that I'm talking about as being stuck in extreme poverty.

MJ: Some critics have expressed concern that the Millennium Goals may set unrealistic targets for certain countries. What if those countries fail to meet the specified level of development and then disillusioned donors decide to lower their funding?

JS: First, it should be understood that the goals in most cases are set proportionate to a given country's situation. So we'll reduce by 2/3 the child mortality rate, or by 3/4 the maternal mortality rate. We're not aiming at the same absolute standard in every country. I think that the other thing that is really important to

understand is that as I have been working with the UN on this for the last 3 years and meeting leaders all over the world. What I've found is that their concern isn't that the goals are too high. Exactly the opposite: They actually want these UN goals, they want them to be ambitious, and they want to be held to account. And they want their development partners, the developed world, to be held to account on following through on commitments. Again, this all goes towards pressuring rich nations to set aside 0.7 percent of GNP for development aid. That is not a goal that I set, or that the UN set, this is a goal that was adopted 35 years ago by the world community and the goal that was set again in the Monterrey consensus signed by the U.S. in 2002.

MJ: What about aid being sent to countries that have a serious problem with corruption? Some have argued that large amounts of aid will merely prop up those regimes. Can poverty be eradicated while corrupt politicians are in office?

JS: My experience is that there's corruption everywhere: in the U.S., in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa. It's a bit like infectious disease—you can control it, but it's very hard to eradicate it. And yes, there are some cases where the corruption is so massive that unless you are really, really clever and come up with some radically new approach to the issue, you're going to have a hard time accomplishing many development goals. It's quite hard in a place like Zimbabwe, now, where the current government, in a quite despicable way, clings to power. Or, in a country where there is absolutely no transparency or where you have a family ruling violently to stay in power. It's very hard to do a lot of the things that really need to be done to build an effective school system, a health system, and so on. I don't have any magic solution for those situations.

But, let me note that the world successfully eradicated small pox, and not just in countries that scored high on a governance index but in all parts of the world. This was an international effort which targeted a specific outcome undertaken by professionals using a proven technol-

ogy and a very extensive monitoring system. And that's the general model for our aid proposals. Nothing is done on trust. Everything should be done on a basis of measurement and monitoring. When you really focus, there are so many ways to be clever about how to do this to make it work better. Don't just send money; send bed nets, send in auditors, make targets quantitative. There are a lot of tricks, a lot of ways, that if one is practical about this, one can get results.

But what happens is that everyone's wringing their hands about corruption without trying to solve practical problems. And right now, we're not even helping the well-governed places, the places where we are capable of finding absolutely practical and effective approaches to turning help into real success on the ground. The basic issue is not to lecture about morality and governance. The basic issue is, is there a way for us to help to fight AIDS, TB, malaria, and other killers which are taking an incredible number of lives? I've seen these children dying, each time I visit these clinics. And these are absolutely preventable deaths.

MJ: Now you suggest in your book that we need to assess ailing economies just as doctors assess patients. You call it “clinical economics.” Does the current academic curriculum for development economics provide a sufficient framework for educating people to ensure that the MDGs will be achieved by future economists?

JS: No it doesn't. I realized 10 or 15 years ago that the students in economics departments write dissertations about countries that they never stepped foot in because their advisor gives them a database from Nigeria or Kenya or some place else, and they do their thesis that way. That's like becoming a doctor without ever seeing a patient. We don't do case studies. We don't train students to understand the differences across countries. There are a tremendous number of loose generalizations made all the time. Similarly, people aren't trained in the practical experiences of being operational. Sometimes people say, “We teach aca-

demographic things, we don't teach operational things." But, frankly, to do development right, you have to do something that's more like going through medical school and having a clinical hospital where you actually learn about different cases, and do case analyses. When something goes wrong, you study it. There are what are

called "M&M rounds" in hospitals— morbidity and mortality rounds. When something doesn't work, when a patient dies or doesn't get better, the doctors get together to discuss the case. We don't do that in academic economics. For me, the field is not properly organized right now to really take on these challenges ad-

equately and I'm hoping that the field will become more like a clinical science.

motherjones.com. 2005. The Foundation for National Progress. 29 April. 2008 <http://www.motherjones.com/news/qa/2005/05/jeffrey_sachs.html>

REFLECTION: Facts

Worldwide, more than one billion people live on less than one dollar a day. In total, 2.7 billion struggle to survive on less than two dollars per day. Poverty in the developing world, however, goes far beyond income poverty. It means having to walk more than one mile everyday simply to collect water and firewood and suffering diseases that were eradicated from rich countries decades ago.

Following are basic facts outlining the roots and manifestations of the poverty affecting more than one third of our world.

Agriculture

- More than 40 percent of Africans do not even have the ability to obtain sufficient food on a daily basis.
- Over 80 percent of African farmers are women.
- More than 40 percent of African women do not have access to basic education.
- AIDS spreads twice as quickly among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling.

Education

- In some deeply impoverished nations less than half of the children are in primary school and fewer than 20 percent go to secondary school.

- Around the world, a total of 114 million children do not get even a basic education.
- 584 million women worldwide are illiterate.

Health

- Every year six million children die from malnutrition before their fifth birthday.
- More than 50 percent of Africans suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea.
- Everyday HIV/AIDS kills 6,000 people and another 8,200 people are infected with this deadly virus.
- Every 30 seconds an African child dies of malaria—more than one million child deaths a year.

Hunger

- More than 800 million people go to bed hungry every day...300 million are children.
- Of these 300 million children, only eight percent are victims of famine or other emergency situations; 90 percent are suffering long-term malnourishment and micronutrient deficiency.
- More than 2.6 billion people—over 40 percent of the world's population—do not have basic sanitation, and more than one billion people still use unsafe sources of drinking water.

unmillenniumproject.org. 2006. Millennium Project. 29 April. 2008 <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/resources/fastfacts_e.htm>

As noted in his biography, **Jeffrey Sachs** is an educator and economist with global influence—he has advised governments all over the world, from Latin America to Asia to Africa.

Lesson Plan: Global Problems: Raising Your Awareness, Raising Your Voice

Essential Question: How can students become educated about world problems, and how can students become active about these problems in effective ways, while at the same time, be participating members of our democracy?

Goals

This lesson is suitable for English/Language Arts and Social Science classes. It addresses web research, collaboration, presentation, and formal writing skills.

Objectives

Using Columbia University's Earth Institute web site, students will research some issues facing those in developing countries and societies around the world. They will learn about specific problems and potential solutions to these problems, which they will then share with their classmates. Finally, they will engage in a letter writing campaign urging their government representatives to focus their attention on these problems.

Materials & Resources

Columbia University's Earth Institute Home Page: <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/sections/view/9>

- YouTube Video "Learn About the Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/1795>
- Learn About the Issues: <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/1795>
- Getting Involved: Five Quick Actions: <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/1793>

Timeframe

This activity will take three to five days to complete.

Process and Procedure

1. On Day 1, the class will read the *Mother Jones* interview in Getting to the Core together. After discussing Sachs' major points (with the understanding that most of these issues are going to be pretty abstract for middle and high school students), the class will then visit Columbia University's Earth Institute web site together, under the guidance of the teacher and preferably together. The teacher will connect to and play the YouTube video, "Learn About the Millennium Development Goals." When finished, the teacher will lead the class in a discussion to make connections between the Sachs interview and the video.
2. On the second day, students will organize into research teams of two to four, and they will continue to investigate the Earth Institute web site, this time with the goal of learning more about specific problems around the world. Each team should be responsible for one of the three issues on the web site, "Extreme Poverty," "Climate Change," and "Sustainable Development."
3. When they get to the web page devoted to their topic, the first thing they should do is take the quiz. Once they get their results, have them react in a short journal. Did they score well? Poorly? If so, why? And what did they learn in the course of taking the quiz?
4. Students should then turn their attention to the "Introduction" to their issue. They should take notes on the situation with the goal of sharing their findings; students should focus on the nature and scale of the problem as well as what is currently being done about it, at least through Earth Institute initiatives. Once student groups have become well-informed about the issue, they should prepare a short, fact-based presentation for the class.
5. Finally, all students should connect to the "Getting Involved: Five Quick Actions" web page. There are many things they might do to address their problem, and a discussion of these options alone would make for a valuable teaching moment. For the purposes of this lesson, however, we'll focus on the "Let Your Voice Be Heard" option. After reading the description of this "Quick Action," have students research the names and contact information for their state senators and congressional representative. With the help of the teacher, students should write (and properly format) a letter in which they summarize the problem as they see it, as informed by their research on the Millennium Project website, urging their senator/congressperson to take legislative action on it.

Assessment

Quiz reaction journal; problem area presentation materials; formal, issue-oriented letter to senator or congressperson.

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