

## **Paths to Peace Through Compassion, Cooperation and Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>**

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There is no “one” person who bends history; we are all going to have to do this job. The good news is that we *can* do it. We do not have to wait for the politicians, or the so-called leaders; we are lucky enough to be living in an age where we have the capacities, technologies and tools to be do absolutely wonderful things as individuals, and as a global community. The world today is interconnected in absolutely fundamental ways. Our connections are becoming more and more immediate and the possibility of a truly global community exists now more than ever before.

Let me give you an example. Earlier this week at Columbia University, I was thrilled to put into motion an idea that I have dreamt about for a while: the global classroom. The technological advances in the past year or two have made this possible and just last Tuesday, I gave the introductory lecture for a semester-long class taught by faculty from about sixteen universities around the world. Simultaneously, in real time on the web, we had Columbia, Emory, and Georgetown University join in the USA. We also had the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, England, Sciences Po in Paris, the Canadian International Development Agency, Ibadan University in Nigeria, Mekelle

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University in Ethiopia, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Tsinghua University in Beijing, University of International Business and Economics in China, Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, the Energy and Resources Institute in India, and Universidad Internacional del Ecuador! There were rooms of students all around the world looking at one another and learning in one common space. It is exciting and wonderful, and I think it should make us sit back and think about the possibilities of all that we really can accomplish right now.

The homework assignments in this global class have students from Columbia working with students in Ethiopia, and the students in Malaya working with the students in Kyoto to discuss climate change. They work as groups and have to understand each other. They see each other around the table, and they brainstorm together. This, I think, is the whole spirit of our time. We have the capacity to do things that were once unimaginable and that are so important.

We also have the capacity to destroy as never before. This is the paradox of technology. We have learned throughout history that technology can do wonderful things, yet it can be equally unimaginably destructive. In the end, it comes back to humanity and choice, and it comes back to values and commitment.

What I think today we have the capacity to use technology to address and end a scourge, that of extreme poverty. We have within our hands, within our time, within this generation, the realistic ability to end extreme poverty.

This shocks a lot of people. It seems utopian and naïve. But the fact is, if we actually spent a little effort on it, the problem would turn out to be vastly easier to solve than we might imagine. The hardest part of all of this is just being focused. It is not the costs, it is not the unimaginable difficulties of certain places, and it is not the harrowing challenges of economics or the environment or finance. The main challenge is really our ability to focus understand what is within our reach right now. That is what I want to tell you a little bit about today.

I want to begin with one of my favorite remarks of John Kennedy. I find that going back to a spirit of an earlier time helps us move forward from the absolutely horrendous period of bad leadership that we have found ourselves in recently. We live in an age of pessimism and cynicism and “can’t do” spirit. Washington goes out of the way to prove that they cannot do things, and I think that is a deliberate ploy because it is *not* that hard. If they cannot do it, they have to move aside, so we can.

I am always reminded of the optimism and the sense of purpose that we have had in great leaders, and in my view, John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy were two of the greatest. At another time of great pessimism about the Cold War and the possibility of spiraling into an outright hot war with the Soviet Union, John Kennedy gave a speech, which I regard as one of the greatest speeches of modern history. I want to read to you from this speech, because I think that it resonates so well for us today.

He said, “First, let us examine our attitude toward peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it unreal, but that is a dangerous defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable, that mankind is doomed, that we are gripped by forces that we cannot control. We need not accept that view. Our problems are manmade, therefore they can be solved by man, and man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable, and we believe they can do it again. I am not referring

to the absolute infinite concept of peace and goodwill, of which some dream. I do not deny the value of hopes and dreams, but we merely invite discouragement and incredulity by making that our only and immediate goal. Let us focus on a practical, attainable peace. It is not a sudden revolution, but a gradual evolution in human institutions, on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements, which are in the interest of all concerned. There is no single simple key to this peace, no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, and the sum of many acts. It must be dynamic, not static; changing to meet the challenge of each new generation, for peace is a process, a way of solving problems.”

What I love about this speech is how he goes on at length to talk only to the Americans about our own views. We were in the middle of the Cold War, in the middle of so much attack and vilification of the other, yet his speech was only about what we believe and how we should be looking inward. It goes on to give massive praise. He says, “As Americans, we find communism profoundly repugnant as a negation of personal freedom, but we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements in science and space and economic and industrial growth and culture and in acts of courage.” He goes on to speak with great praise of the Russian people, and he repeatedly calls on us to think about how we can set a path for others to find peace with us.

The outcome of this particular speech was absolutely startling. Nikita Khrushchev heard it and immediately declared that it was the finest speech of any American leader in modern times. He called the American envoy Averrel Harriman and said, “I want to make peace with this man.” Six weeks later, the first partial nuclear test ban treaty was signed. Six weeks after the speech. That is what can come from reaching out to find connection with others. It is a demonstration of what is possible and practical when we overcome fear and search for the true human connection.

Today, people believe that solutions to other problems are impossible; that poverty cannot be solved, that climate change cannot be addressed, and that issues of the environment cannot be addressed. As John Kennedy said, “That is a dangerous, defeatist belief.” He is right--it leads to the conclusion that we are doomed. None of these problems is beyond solution if we overcome the fear, which is the greatest obstacle of all, and understand the nature of the challenges, the power of the technologies that we have and the practicality of our solutions.

What is this problem of absolute poverty? How can it exist in the twenty-first century, in a time of incredible capacity to produce, to grow food and control diseases? How can it be that ten million children died last year because they were too poor to stay alive? And how can it be that we are not yet addressing this issue?

Two million children died of measles, although there is a measles vaccine that could have saved every one of those children. One to two million children died of malaria, although malaria is a 100 percent curable disease, cured by an 80-cent medicine. About two million children died of respiratory infection because they lacked the 10 cents for an antibiotic. About two million children died of dehydration from diarrheal disease because they could not get simple oral rehydration therapy to keep them alive until the infection passed. That is how simple and how ludicrous the problems are. Millions of utter tragedies. They are absurd tragedies in the sense that they were completely within our control to prevent.

The problems of extreme poverty are the core difficulties of people who lack the basic tools and basic means of staying alive and climbing out of poverty. It is not a matter of blaming the poor, because the poor that I have seen are among the hardest working, most focused on the future, and most loving of their children of anybody in the world. They simply lack the most basic means because, for example, the clinic is 20 kilometers away and the water source is not even a well, just an open spring which is dangerous to drink from. They cannot afford the five dollars that it would cost for an insecticide-treated bed net to protect from malaria for 5 years.

Probably the hardest thing for us to understand is what it means to have nothing. Nearly one billion people are in that state on the planet. A condition you cannot escape without a helping hand. When you have nothing, no bank is going to lend you the money, and you cannot save your way out. You need every ounce of your energy, your income and your food supply merely to survive. You cannot tighten your belt when you do not have a belt, and you cannot pull yourself up by the bootstraps when you are barefoot. They cannot do it on their own. What we do not understand, what our leadership refuses to see, are the necessary steps to move from a state of such powerless existence to a place where people can save and invest for their future. They are such small steps. In fact, the first step would be almost unnoticeable in terms of the effort required on our side, a tiny fraction of what we waste in war and on the Pentagon.

I did not understand what it meant to have nothing for a long, long time. I worked in many poor places, but I had not worked in the poorest places, and could not imagine what they were like. I began to work in tropical Africa in the mid-1990s, about thirteen years ago now. Even though I was experienced and well traveled by then and had been a tenured professor at Harvard University for quite a while, I was stunned by what I saw. I just had no idea. I had never seen children die right before my eyes. I had never been in clinics where patients were three to a bed. I had never been in a hospital without running water and electricity. It was my naïveté. I did not understand how small things make the difference between life and death.

I was overwhelmed when I began to work in tropical Africa, even after having worked in India, China, Bolivia and many other poor places. Nowhere had I seen the truly extreme nature of disease: the pandemics of AIDS, the resurgence of malaria as a result of spreading drug resistance and much more. I had never experienced so much death around me before and could not have imagined so many people dying without heroic actions being at least attempted. It took me three or four years to understand we were doing nothing to help because we put up a wall of confusion around ourselves. We want so much to believe that we are helping. We have a well-ingrained habit of patting ourselves on the back, but we do not conduct a searching analysis.

When I started working in Zambia in 1996, the first thing I was told was that ten of our counterparts had died of AIDS in the last couple of months in the Central Bank. When I inquired about the doctors and the medicines, I was told, “There is nothing like that.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “People do not just die without having a doctor?”

“Oh, yes they do.”

“There are medicines!” I insisted.

“Well, no, not here.”

So what was happening? It took me three years to untangle rhetoric from fact, to realize that as late as 2001, with more than thirty million infected, not one African was on anti-retroviral treatment funded by a Western government or an international agency. The whole Clinton administration came and went without one person being funded for medications. It was already well known that the medicines were lifesavers, yet not one person in Africa was on a U.S. government program, or a European program or a World Bank program.

It took a long time to realize this fact because there were so many speeches, so much professional concern and so many declarations regarding all our efforts and everything we were doing. I only fully understood in 2000, when I was flying to Durban for the International AIDS Conference. I was reading a World Bank paper which did not mention anti-retroviral medicine. In a four-page scientific paper the words “anti-retroviral medicine” were not even mentioned because donors did not want to acknowledge the medicine, as if it was some secret. What the article did say was that the World Bank would help to finance bereavement training. It would help enterprises to restructure. It would advise on how to have human resource programs in the midst of a high-disease burden. At that point, I questioned a lot of colleagues and it turned out that the Western world was spending \$80 million, roughly three dollars per infected person per year, to address this issue up to 2001.

The problems of AIDS, malaria or food insecurity are not grand problems of cosmic uncertainty. They are not the great mysteries of the universe. They are the mysteries of our inattention. The inability to solve this problem does not rest with our technologies. It lies squarely with us and with our understanding. As I have looked at these shocking realizations, what has amazed me is our incapacity to understand and to act with the power we have.

I have almost given up on Washington. For a long time, I hoped that someone would sign a check and we would get programs going. I have realized that it is not going to happen that way. I have realized that it is going to happen when we understand the stakes, the opportunities, and when we make direct connections. I have realized that whether it is a global classroom, a temple to a community, a city to a city, or an individual to an individual, we need to turn the tide on a large scale. The beautiful part is that making a difference does not require us to overturn our lives. It does not require self-abnegation to the point of living an aesthetic life. It just requires our attention, our awareness — nothing more.

Let me focus on malaria for just a moment because it is the perfect example of a scourge we can end. Malaria is a mosquito-borne, tropical disease. The parasite, which is a protozoan, lives in the mosquito and is transmitted to a human when the mosquito bites. That person gets sick, and then another mosquito comes to bite that person and pulls up the parasite and goes on to transmit it to somebody else. This transmission requires warm temperatures, making it a tropical disease. It turns out, for absolutely accidental and fascinating reasons, that in Africa malaria incidence is by far the worst in the world. This is not because Africans are uncaring, corrupt and do not know how to get their act together, but because of the kind of mosquito they have, the high temperatures and the ample mosquito-breeding sites.

There is one type of mosquito, *Anopheles*, that transmits malaria, but there are many kinds of *Anopheles*. As it turns out, Africa has the only kind that does not bite other

animals, it only bites humans. Africa's problem is a burden of nature. It is not the fault of the poor, and it is not to be blamed on the poor.

One hundred years ago, even a few decades ago, we did not have the tools to help. Now, thanks to modern processes, for example making bed nets that protect against mosquitoes, help is here. The bed nets drive mosquitoes out of the hut since they are repelled by the smell. The nets are made in an ingenious way which includes a mosquitocide, and thus it protects the child from being bitten. A company invented a way to put the insecticide right into the resin that is used to weave the net. For five years, when you wash the net, the mosquitocide keeps coming out from the resin and keeps providing a protective cover. If you protect everybody this way, you can drive the malaria burden to zero.

How hard could this be? The nets cost ten dollars-- that's all and they last five years! Do you think we could manage this? We know there are roughly 500 million people in the malaria region of Africa, and that the average size of a household is five people. That's 100 million households. The average number of sleeping sites in the household is three, so three bed nets are needed for five people. Three bed nets for 100 million households, or 300 million bed nets that cost ten dollars equals \$3 billion.

Here is another denominator. Every minute, the United States spends \$1.2 million on the Pentagon. Every day, we spend \$1.7 billion on the military. It costs \$3 billion for five years of bed net coverage versus \$1.7 billion per day of military spending! It seems to me that 44 hours of the Pentagon budget would fix this problem. My longstanding policy recommendation is that the Pentagon take next Thursday and Friday off. If they did, and we could use the money to give every African family in a malaria zone protection against malaria, our security would be raised profoundly in terms of good will, in terms of understanding and in terms of human connection.

It is clear that the health problems of the poor have solutions — like bednets against malaria. Issues for agricultural productivity also have simple solutions. A while back an agronomist took me, a complete city boy, out to the fields and said, "See the yellow on that maize stalk. It should be green. The yellow is an indication of nitrogen deficiency, because this farmer is too poor to buy a bag of fertilizer."

Two hundred years ago, you didn't need to buy fertilizer. The population was one-tenth the size it is now, and when the soil ran out of nitrogen, you moved to another area. It was called slash-and-burn or rotation agriculture. Now the population in the world is 6.6 billion and the old ways just aren't an option. But, if you take out the nitrogen, the potassium and the phosphorus, every year, without putting them back, you get massive crop failures.

Farmers in Africa have the yield of about 1 ton per hectare. That is about one third or one quarter of what it should be, and it is not enough to feed the family, much less to have a surplus to take to the market to earn a profit.

Certain things are utterly unimaginable, but true. One of these things is that the World Bank, headquartered in Washington, let African farmers farm for twenty years without fertilizer. Twenty years ago, the World Bank said that the problem of African agriculture is government intervention. They advised that the government get out and let the markets take over. They were wrong. Unfortunately, the market runs away from people who have no money. If you are investing in a business that is specializing in

customers who have no money, I suggest you get into another business. The market is not designed to solve the problems of people who have no money.

For twenty years there was no fertilizer. I was a latecomer to this-- what did I know about fertilizer? I am a macroeconomist. I had to learn about malaria. I had to learn about AIDS. I had to learn about fertilizer. The mistake I had been making until then was thinking that someone must be taking care of these problems. The reality is that we were letting people go hungry year in and year out. Then when an extreme famine came, we would ship food from Iowa at about eight times the price it would cost to give a bag of fertilizer in the first place! If you give a 50-kilogram bag of fertilizer to a farmer with half a hectare farm, he can triple his production. This can happen within one season, not years of training and a generation of change, just a bag of fertilizer.

In September 2006, the World Bank issued a report in what is called its Independent Evaluation Office. If I had to paraphrase the 150-page review of their twenty years of agriculture work, the title would be "Sorry," because the report quite honestly said, "Well, we blew it for twenty years. Nothing we recommended worked. We said the market should get involved but there was no market."

Let me close by telling you what we have done and mention what you might do.

A few years ago, my colleagues and I worked with Kofi Annan, then U.N. Secretary-General, and we decided that we needed action; we needed to put the policies in place that would save lives. I went knocking on the doors of the White House and 10 Downing Street and other places for help. I explained this to a benefactor, a wonderful trustee of Columbia University, Gerry Lenfest, complaining about the lack of financial support and all the rest, and he said, "Well, what if you actually did this, how much would it cost to help a village?"

I made some quick calculations, and he took out a checkbook. He wrote a \$5 million check and said, "Go get it started."

We started in Western Kenya, in a place called Sauri Village. One of the most incredible days of my life was meeting with the community in Sauri in the summer of 2004. I recounted it in my book, *The End of Poverty*. People had walked many kilometers to come, and we sat in the sweltering school hall. I asked them questions. I asked them about malaria. Everybody had it. I asked them, "How many of you have bed nets?" There were two or three hands out of the 250 or so people in the room.

I have heard so many rumors from Washington and elsewhere, all of them wrong, like, "Maybe they don't like bed nets." "Maybe they are too hot and they bother people." I asked this roomful of people: "How many of you know what bed nets are?" I thought that maybe they don't even know. Every hand went up. I asked, "How many of you would like bed nets?" Every hand stayed up and people got very excited.

A woman in the front row stood up and, through the interpreter, said, "But, Mister, we can't afford bed nets."

They are poor, that's all. They know what bed nets are. They know malaria is killing them. They would love bed nets. They just can't afford them.

We talked about fertilizer the same way and they knew exactly what the situation was. This wasn't about changing some deep cultural habit somehow, it was just about poverty. I said something about electricity and a man raised his hand, stood up, and said, "Professor, I am chairman of the electricity committee." Wonderful!-- but there was no

electricity anywhere. He explained through an interpreter that they had been told in 1997 that electricity would be coming, so they formed a committee. But electricity never came.

There is nothing that can't be done in a straightforward fashion, in partnership, to address these problems. We have launched a program that we call Millennium Villages, of which Sauri is one. These are villages committed to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, the goals to fight hunger, poverty and disease by 2015. The Millennium Villages now cover about 600,000 people across Africa.

Governments, NGOs and companies are all partnering on the Millennium Villages Project. Sometimes companies are vilified, but some of these companies have key technologies that can work towards human betterment. The first company I talked to was Sumitomo Chemical, which makes wonderful bed nets. The chairperson immediately said, "I will provide bed nets for every sleeping site in all of the Millennium Villages for free." He delivered 360,000 bed nets for free. It didn't take twenty years to see the results. It took a few days to cover all the sleeping sites. They didn't go missing, they weren't stolen, and they didn't end up in safe deposit boxes. There weren't bribes. There wasn't any theft. There were bed nets protecting people from mosquitoes, and the malaria burden went down.

The point is that there are solutions. They are within our hands. We have no time to lose; our safety depends on it. Our security depends on it.

We can take action. I would like everybody in one way or another to help partner in the cause of meeting the Millennium Development Goals. One way that you can do it is something as straightforward as helping to provide bed nets. There is an organization which I helped to start, called Malaria No More, that can help you do that. The Web address is [www.malarianomore.org](http://www.malarianomore.org). It is led by a wonderful philanthropist named Ray Chambers. He is raising tens of millions of dollars for bed nets and helped to get *American Idol* to Africa last year.

Another way is an organization that I co-founded with Mr. Chambers called Millennium Promise, which is devoted entirely to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Because of the beneficence of wealthy people who support the organization itself, we can say that every cent anybody contributes goes directly to villages. It is used to empower people through a holistic approach, addressing malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis, through a clinic, safe childbirth, safe drinking water, a bag of fertilizer, food supply and micro finance. It is an organization that helps with the transition from subsistence to cash earning, so that communities can escape from poverty once and for all.

I met with heads of state last week in Ethiopia, Mali and in Liberia. The words and the ideas are spreading. President Toure of Mali is an absolutely wonderful person. He has seen the village that we started in Segou, Mali, and asked for more. This past week, we opened the Timbuktu Millennium Village with the most incredible hospitality you can imagine. We are now working with the government on scaling up to 166 communes.

I believe we are capable of ending poverty and changing the world. I have no doubt that by doing so, we can make the most important connection of all, across every racial divide, religious divide, linguistic divide or any other divide you can think of including class. Human-to-human contact is so powerful. It is the essence and the path to peace on the planet.



Let me end with one statement from that peace speech by John Kennedy. I find these words to be the most beautiful spoken by any American president of modern times. He said: "So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children's future, and we are all mortal."

### **Question-and-Answer Session No. 1**

**Audience member:** What I am wondering about is population and the environment, the growing population. What happens to the capacity of the environment to provide for us?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** Thank you very much. That's in my next book, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*. We are 6.6 billion people on the planet, and on the current trajectory the United Nations projects that we will reach 9.2 billion people by the year 2050. All of that increase is projected to take place in today's poorest countries, because that is where the fertility rates remain so high. People don't have access to family planning. Their children die in large numbers, so they compensate by having lots of children, almost like an insurance policy.

One of the things that has been learned throughout history is that if children survive, the fertility rates come down, and eventually the growth rate of the population diminishes. There are practical reasons for saving the children, beyond the obvious moral ones: doing so will help to make a reduced fertility rate possible and thereby help slow population growth. It is very important.

**Audience member 2:** I am a student at Baruch College. I am from Togo, West Africa.

**Jeffrey Sachs:** I was there last year.

**Audience Member:** I know what it is to be hungry and to wake up in the morning with no food, nothing, and go to school, study and come back home and ask "Mommy, what do you have?" You don't have anything, and then you have to continue to study. Once again, thank you for giving too much to the world. I have two questions. The first one is this. What is your legacy?

The second question is this: We are aware of the situation; and some of my friends and colleagues will put our efforts together, and we will create an organization that will support the poor people in Togo particularly in West Africa. You are ahead of us as a professor. What kind of help can we get from you?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** Wonderful! Let me say one word about a very important point you made about going to school hungry. If we can help children to have a meal at school, not only

will the children go to school, but their ability to study, as you know, soars because they can concentrate.

In that village in Western Kenya, before we arrived, a wonderful headmistress said that when she first came to the district, the school was rated something like 170th out of 200 schools in the eighth grade exam--very miserable results. She realized the kids couldn't focus because they were starving. She said, "I am going to give a school meal, at least for the eighth graders during the national exam year." In two years, that school rose to number two in the district. It is incredible. She says the kids come to school thinking that they are coming for food. The meal transformed the life possibilities of the kids. In all of the villages we work in we promote a school feeding program for every child. A biscuit in the morning, some milk or a piece of fruit can change a child's life, make it possible to study and meet some of the basic nutritional needs.

I want to see student groups like yours flourish everywhere, and we are committed to giving the support we can. What I would encourage you to do is contact me. My email is [sachs@columbia.edu](mailto:sachs@columbia.edu). What we will do is find ways with Millennium Promise to see how we could give you some advice or some ideas.

One thing I am trying to do is to start Millennium Villages in Togo. Togo is very interesting in that while it is utterly impoverished, it has the potential of a very lush rainforest economy. I was in a wealthy rainforest economy a couple of weeks ago in Malaysia. They grow rubber and palm oil and wonderful fruits and so forth. Togo could do all that as well. I am asking the Malaysians to give some help to Togo. Better palm, better rubber trees, better fruit trees.

Now I am not sure what you meant about the question of our legacy. We are the generation, the first one in history, that can end extreme poverty. The year 2025 is our rendezvous date. The year 2015 is the halfway point, that is the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals. By the year 2025, we will end extreme poverty. That is our legacy.

**Audience Member:** I am a student at a community college in Brooklyn, but I am moving on to Hunter. I never really was a college person. I always wanted education, but I wanted to be a do-gooder as my career. You talked about the different ways to help.

I am asking you how I can have my life as a do-gooder, to go to Africa, to help people, to teach people as my life.

**Jeffrey Sachs:** First, you are on the right track. The most important thing is to care and to want to do it. Don't lose that focus. There are many ways to do this; there are many, many ways. There is not one path. There is not one profession. There are many ways, and it can end up being through the arts or it can be through public health or through agronomy. It could even be through economics. You never know. Keep the focus.

The truth is that I am just an economist. I know how to multiply two numbers and follow the dollars. What I became good at was finding the experts. It was my colleague who said it's nitrogen that farmers need. It was my colleague who said the solution is insecticide-treated bed nets. They gave me the idea.

Become an expert or be very good at finding them. There are so many ways to contribute, and it is more about the spirit of wanting to contribute and honing your skills and keeping the focus, and not saying "Well, I will do that after I earn my first \$50

million". Of course, go ahead and earn it (then you can do even more) but the point is don't delay. Get involved, stay involved, and keep the focus. You will learn a lot over time. You will be better at it later. Everybody makes mistakes, starts out one way, or learns new things.

What I feel so satisfied about personally is how lucky I am to have stayed focused on what I was doing, for years and years. It helps to build life and ideas around it, friendships and knowledge and experience. That is what I would recommend.

## **Question-and-Answer Session No. 2**

**Audience member:** SGI President Daisaku Ikeda stated, "This century is the century of women." I wanted to ask you how do you see the role of women?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** I like to think that men still do have something to contribute, although I think we do have a terrible tendency to mess up things. Men are a little bit more aggressive and a little bit less good at cooperative problem-solving. We find that women play a huge role in making the Millennium Villages move forward. We are constantly asked about gender empowerment. It becomes absolutely natural that once you start focusing on developing health and education and opportunities, the women come to the leadership.

I met recently with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is the first woman president elected in sub-Saharan Africa. She is the president of Liberia. She is a wonderful leader. She is very brave and very competent, and she exemplifies for me what could be in terms of quality of leadership.

In fact, from a technical and economic point of view, all societies where women are facing severe discrimination are also economic failures. It is basic human arithmetic, which is if 50 percent of the population is hugely disadvantaged, you are trying to accomplish things with half the ability. Moreover, when women don't have choices, the children suffer, because women everywhere are the principal caregivers. When women face pervasive discrimination and they don't have access to income, the results first and foremost fall on the children. The empowerment of women is an extremely serious matter for economic development.

**Audience member:** We talk a lot about your work in my program at school. I have so many questions, and it is very hard to pick one. I work at UNICEF in early childhood development. We are having a week-long consultation this week. My boss said, "When you meet Jeffrey Sachs, please ask him about the early childhood summit."

It has been shown that if you invest in the early years, it has results and benefits for the rest of anyone's life, and that there are returns on investment economically in terms of the national picture if you invest in the early years. I was just wondering what your perspective on the importance of early childhood development has been and what you have seen in your experience.

**Jeffrey Sachs:** I think the investments start for anybody before birth. There is a tremendous amount of evidence that the health of the mother during pregnancy affects

the whole life cycle of a child. Indeed, at least it is hypothesized, very early nutritional deficiencies in the uterus can lead to cardiovascular disease late in life. Therefore, investing in a healthy early upbringing is a vital investment.

An astounding proportion of children die in the first twenty-eight days of life. This is not because of intrinsic physiological reasons, but because of simple ignorance about how to keep a child alive. Ignorance such as leaving children exposed or cutting an umbilical cord with an unclean knife, leading to tetanus, or putting a child on the dirt ground, or lack of exclusive breast feeding. People need help to know what to do. They need guidance. We need community health workers, which poor countries can't afford. One of the most crucial things, which is very important for UNICEF, is free access to all of these services. We cannot charge for this basic health care and expect that poor people will be protected. My main message is that we need to raise our voice about the importance of these interventions and insist that the only standard that is humane and decent for the world is universal access.

It is bizarre that people don't understand this, and that's where you have to come in - to raise awareness and consciousness. Our world has struggled to have the rich be willing to give even 1 percent of their income for the poor. This country came close only once with the Marshall Plan. But right now we spend only 0.17 percent of our income on development aid. We spend nearly 5 percent for the military. I put it to you that a world in which the rich can't find themselves willing to give 1 percent of their income when a billion people are at the edge of death from poverty, is intrinsically a world that will never find peace. We need to overcome this profound disconnect.

**Audience member:** The fact that you have so much conviction and determination in such a cynical world and time, I am really curious as to what your influences are, if you have a mentor or where you get this drive to actually go in front of the United Nations and tell them that you can cancel these people's debts. How do you do that?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** You just have to be stubborn, very persistent and very hardheaded. With all successes that I have learned about, read about and studied, I have found that nothing comes easy in this world. Persistence may be the most vital ingredient of success. Things that seem so obvious to us now were long struggles, such as the end of slavery, for example. We went for millennia not recognizing it for the unbelievable moral crime that it is. Then, when the movement against slavery started in England in the 1770s and the arguments were so compelling, it still took sixty years to bring it to fruition.

I have set a shorter timetable. By 2025, we have to be done with this agenda, because we have other things to do, so we really should be ending extreme poverty by 2025. These are long struggles. They are not simple. The kind of problem that we are talking about is different from many other problems in the world. Let me say why.

If you are scientist, the problem is really quite different. The problem with science is understanding. If you have understood something that is correct, you don't have to convince everyone else it is true. They will come to learn that over time.

I always love the line of Albert Einstein when he published his theory of relativity, which, by the way, just had another unbelievable triumph of confirmation last week published in *Science*. He got an irate letter from traditional physicists who said here are a hundred reasons why his theory was wrong. He wrote back and said something like "you

don't have to send a hundred, one would be enough." With science it is not a matter of piling on, it's either right or it's wrong. It turned out to be right at least as far as we know.

If you are a business person, it is also different. When you have a good product, you don't have to convince everybody that it is a good product; your customers will buy it. If it is good, other people may disagree, but you are not dependent on a majority vote; you are dependent on selling your goods.

If you are a musician, you want your fans and you want people to listen and to hear, but you don't have to convince everybody. You spend your time with your music and you are gratified when people like your music. You aren't out there all the time saying, "You have to like it."

This problem is actually different, and this is the odd thing. This one, we actually do have to change minds, because in the end, we need a collective action. No one person, even Bill Gates, is going to solve this on his/her own. No president or prime minister is going to act until he or she is forced to do so. There are few leaders among our politicians. There are many followers, and that is not all bad. Followers follow the public. It is *our* responsibility, because *we* are the public. As I get older, I am less and less interested in Washington but more and more interested in Iowa and Kansas, and I am interested in what people think everywhere, because that is what is going to count in the end. It is a little bit different from a scientific principle, and it is a little bit different from a business product, and it is a little bit different from artists who create for themselves or for their community.

**Audience member:** What do you think it will take to get people into action? You ended your book saying, "One person at a time," but it just seems that so many of my peers, including myself, have felt doubt. Until I got this book, you really pointed out how it is possible, and you stated how it could be done, kind of more from this level of but how can "we" take action.

**Jeffrey Sachs:** Right. I think what is very helpful is to be specific about things people can do, and to organize around specific ideas and goals. I certainly find my own inspiration in that. Ending poverty is a big and amorphous idea. For me what is helpful is to put it into specifics, to talk about actual things that can be done.

I find that when there is better understanding about specifics, people are much more likely to engage. People don't know the right orders of magnitude and they don't understand the practicalities. I think the way to get action is to think through problems and put them onto a level at which people can respond. What do I mean by that? Well right now what I find quite exciting is that on campuses all over the country there are more students engaged in these issues, probably ten times more, than a decade ago.

What are students doing about this? They are raising funds for malaria bed nets. That is actually a wonderful, very straightforward, very practical, and extraordinarily important thing to do. If one wanted to do nothing more, I would say to a friend give \$10 dollars for a bed net. Going to [www.malarianomore.org](http://www.malarianomore.org) is one way to do it. If we got 300 million people to do it, the job would be done. A worldwide effort is absolutely possible.

I really have seen a surge of interest. I actually think that we are on a very powerful path of progress right now. That is another reason why I am a bit stubborn in this. I don't find it hopeless at all, not only at a conceptual level, but also at the practical level.

I am going to a conference at Yale in the spring for something called “Unite for Sight.” The conference is organized by a student group which is raising funds and expertise to restore eyesight from diseases and to provide corrective glasses for poor people. It is one student’s idea.

I had an interview yesterday about a very clever website and project called Kiva. Kiva is an international microfinance project. I think it is [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org), if I remember correctly. You can get online and find a list of people with requested microfinance loans. They are very poor people, their story is told, and you are invited to give a loan. This networking has created a low-cost channel for your contribution to go through a microfinance unit and then over the next six months you get a progress report of what the individual has done. For example, they report that they have opened up a little shop or have a stall on the street. This was unimaginable a couple of years ago!

I think that there is not just one way to do this. There are innumerable new and creative ways to do it. I do believe that we have to find all of our linkages, whether it is through SGI, or whether it is through student groups or artistic groups. Kanye West is very interested in these things. I know Wyclef is and many others. If we just keep expanding the reach of this, it will actually work.

**Audience member:** I am a student in school and I see so many false ideas of success among my peers. I see that there is this kind of drive that I can already see in adults, and that it started from there. It is saddening to me, but I feel that if we had more communication with other nations it would bridge that gap of humanity. So many of my friends, I can see them going down the road with the thought of “This is my dream. I have to achieve this dream of success.” Once they reach it, they probably would ask what was it all for. I feel that to try to battle this, we need success less as individual and more as universal or global. I think that few people see that and there are many people around this world that want that. How would you try to change this idea of success?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** I would listen to you more. I think you put it perfectly. I couldn’t have put it any better than you just did.

Why don’t we help to get your school online with a school in Africa? That way you can talk to students in a very different place in very different circumstances. We have some sites where computers are just coming in; we could probably get a Web cam going and help you start this connection. One thing that is very important is following through. That’s where stamina really counts. We just have to make sure we do it, because if we actually do what we say we do, we will solve the problem.

**Audience member:** As I mentioned, I did my internship with the United Nations. I did an internship with twenty more students. Our three fields of work were going to be NPGs, environmental stability, then problems and projects that we can solve in our local communities. We had great successes working as a group and networking among those universities, but we were frustrated from the breaks we were receiving from the United Nations. I did my internship with the Department of Public Information and working with NGOs from all over the world. Even though people were interested in our projects, everybody was saying that there were too many bureaucratic obstacles that need to be overcome before our ideas find any influence at any stage to be developed.

How do we overcome this? You mentioned that we have to work one by one in our local communities, but then we also need peace by our political will. Which comes first and how do we balance between them and not lose our inspiration?

**Jeffrey Sachs:** Well, let me say that I spend a lot of my time at the United Nations as a Special Advisor to the Secretary-General, who is a wonderful person. The United Nations is a very difficult and bureaucratic place. Of course, I am a great fan of the United Nations, and I think we must get it right, because it is vital for our survival that the United Nations work effectively as an organization. I think of it like a plumbing system where the pipes do not fit together. We spend an incredible amount of time on plumbing - one leak springs loose and then the next one springs loose. It is amazingly difficult to get these new linkages right in traditional organizations. They are not well designed for the twenty-first century. The building itself has to be renovated because it is sixty years old and just not equipped for all that it needs to be.

In general, the greatest fear of bureaucratic organizations is messing up, not failing to do something. It is sad but true. Bureaucracies are vastly more concerned about avoiding problems and mistakes than they are about solving problems, even when they are filled with wonderful people. They get a lot of criticism when there is a mistake and they don't get much congratulation when they solve a problem. With any initiative the first ninety-nine responses are "what if," and "that might not work" and "no, we shouldn't try because we might fail." As a result there is a tremendous bias against action. In the meantime, the status quo is a disaster. We can't wait for these organizations. I have spent a lot of my life trying to make this work, but not always through organizations because I think we have to find many different pathways to accomplishment.

**Audience member:** I feel that I may be asking this personal question, but I would feel disappointed if I don't ask it. As a young adult, what advice can you give in saving and investing in terms of money, in terms of time and in terms of energy and ourselves? I want to get guidance on a personal and economic level how to spend and invest our time, our money, our wealth and energy wisely and efficiently.

**Jeffrey Sachs:** I don't know if I am the right one to ask. I myself was wrapped up in these issues a long time ago. I found them very captivating. What I tell my students, for example, is "don't work on a problem you are not interested in and remember why you came into the field." Don't let a professor tell you "oh that's too hard." They can give you advice, but don't lose the drive that got you into this in the first place. That is extremely important.

I have loved what I have been doing professionally now for thirty-six years, never with a regret. I have had a lot of frustration, but never with regret of what I am doing because, for me, the drive has been the compelling nature of the challenges. It is a privilege to work on them and it feels very fulfilling.

Of course, having a supportive family is for me the most important thing. My whole family is engaged. My daughter is doing human rights law, and my son is very active in political issues. My twelve-year-old daughter is completely immersed in watching the election campaign and raising money for bed nets and other things at her school. My wife

somehow forgives the endless travel and the long hours and everything else, and she is a full partner in all my work.

I am not saying I'm a paragon in any of this. I have lived very comfortably but I am also not compelled by a tremendous amount of attention to material things. Again, I don't want to be misunderstood or paint some false portrait, but I think that being very focused on this approach to life, which I was lucky to inherit from my parents and my community early on, helps to balance things. I think balance is extremely important.