Reforming U.S. Foreign Aid – Now Is the Time for Action
By Martin C. Fergus

Most of us can recall horror stories of the misuse of U.S. foreign aid – of food lying by the dockside, unused, while people go hungry; of funds that are diverted by dictators into Swiss bank accounts; of irrigation projects that displace the poor and add to the profits of agribusiness. As is made clear in Lesson 12 of Finding Solutions to Hunger, KIDS’ sourcebook for middle and upper school teachers, much of foreign aid is *not* spent on programs that improve hungry people’s lives.

But these foreign aid failures should not divert our attention from foreign aid programs that do work. Bread for the World (BFW), which lobbies our nation’s decision makers in Washington, D.C. to end hunger at home and abroad, calculated that in 2007 forty percent of U.S. foreign assistance was allocated to “poverty-focused development.” Such aid went to “programs that work in poor communities to immunize children, train teachers, build water wells, schools, and rural roads, and provide agricultural training to help farmers increase their productivity.” Progress has also been made in providing health facilities and greatly expanding (by tenfold over the last six years) the availability of treatment for HIV/AIDS.

There is, of course, *much* room for improvement. Some of the sixty percent of foreign assistance that is not focused on poverty reduction not only fails to make things better for the poor, it makes things worse. This includes programs that emphasize the agricultural export sectors of developing countries rather than promoting local food security. And foreign aid is only one component of a broad national agenda – including U.S. trade, investment, migration and national security policy – that affects the poor. According to BFW, policies that affect development are currently “scattered across 12 departments, 25 agencies, and nearly 60 offices in the U.S. government, making a holistic plan for development nearly impossible.”

Even the portion of assistance that *aims* at poverty reduction can be better administered. An analysis by Charles Uphaus, a policy analyst for Bread for the World Institute (the educational arm of BFW), points out that aid objectives are often unclear or inconsistent and recipient countries have too little input, leading to development efforts that lack sufficient grounding in
realities. Programs are heavy on regulations and restrictions. For example: “Food aid must be delivered in-kind rather than in cash, procured in the United States, and shipped on U.S.-flagged vessels.” This process is prone to inefficiencies and undermines the capacity of local farmers to sell their crops, making difficult the development of a sustainable agricultural system. Further, there is little accountability built into these aid programs and the funds are often committed for too short a period to bring the projects to fruition.

Uphaus goes on to outline some “general principles” for reforming the foreign aid program. Among them are:

- Global development and global poverty reduction must be elevated as specific goals in U.S. foreign policy…
- Poverty reduction should be the primary focus of U.S. development assistance…
- Development assistance should be undertaken in partnership with recipient countries in support of the development goals they determine in consultation with their civil society, focused on long-term goals with intermediate objectives…
- An effective, streamlined agency is required to direct all U.S. foreign assistance…
- Other U.S. policies (e.g., trade, investment, migration) need to be looked at in light of development goals and objectives…

Fortunately, the time is right to turn such ideas into practice. The first step toward what eventually will require a broad overhaul of the U.S. foreign aid system has already taken place. On April 28, 2009, H.R. 2139, the Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act of 2009, was introduced on a bipartisan basis. As of this writing (late October) the House bill has 118 cosponsors and the Senate bill has 14 cosponsors. Both bills are currently in committee in their respective houses and the Senate bill is scheduled for markup in the near future.

A concrete opportunity now exists to improve U.S. assistance to poor and hungry people abroad. Our Representatives and Senators need to hear from us if these bills are to move successfully through the legislative process. Now is the time for action.

Resources

- For legislative updates and further information on the issue of foreign aid reform, and other hunger issues, visit Bread for the World’s Website at www.bread.org.

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The purpose of Kids Can Make A Difference® is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.
Thoughts on *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*, by Peter Singer (Random House, 2009)...

By Jen Chapin

**BOOK REVIEW**

Peter Singer, the prominent and often controversial philosopher and ethicist, wants to end world poverty. And he knows that if only the 855 million or so of us in the world who are relatively affluent would adopt a basic ethical standard of giving, we could do it.

Singer makes his case for more widespread charity methodically and simply. If you could save a life, let alone numerous lives, through no great sacrifice of your own – wouldn’t you do so? After all, providing life-saving calories, bed nets, vaccinations, re-hydration therapies, even a simple surgery to those in extreme poverty certainly must mean more to us than a single upscale restaurant meal or a paper-cup latte habit. Right?

Singer thinks so, and even offers exact calculations on how much each income bracket should give, a seven point plan for easy giving, and a strong presentation of the huge numbers reaped from even modest standards of philanthropy. After providing statistics on world poverty and affluence, Singer addresses common objections to giving and explores studies on human nature explaining our attitudes toward charity. As individuals, the more money we have, the more inclined we are toward self-sufficiency and the less inclined we are to feel responsibility to others. We generally are not moved by statistics on the suffering of millions of strangers far away, yet on the other hand, a single photo providing us with an image of a suffering “identifiable person” can incite greater generosity than statistics or even a photo plus statistics. We think of ourselves as a compassionate and generous society, yet private and public aid from the wealthy countries to address poverty adds up to only pennies per dollar of GNP, while rich economies benefit from the raw materials and cheap labor of the poor ones. Many complain that aid is not effective, yet Singer cites myriad examples of efficient organizations making a huge difference. He bemoans the absence of a true culture of giving, and shows how changing that dynamic through leadership by example and methods like mandatory employee donations can be impactful.

Again and again, while reiterating the ethical debates over whether it is wrong for the affluent *not* to help the poor, Singer stresses that each of us need only give a little to end extreme poverty worldwide. And if we were to actually strive for an ethical life, we would see to it that basic needs of others were met before providing for non-essential luxuries for our children and ourselves.

(continued on pg4)
Singer’s arguments are not controversial and his facts are not surprising to those of us already concerned with hunger and poverty. Personally, I agree with pretty much everything he writes. Yet, I found myself, perhaps unfairly, wanting more from his book than its bulletproof logic, powerful examples of need and compassionate responses to it, and pages of citations. I wanted him to address what is so sorely lacking from contemporary discussions of extreme poverty, and which to me is such a compelling reason for a multi-pronged and sustained response to it: the historical reasons WHY it exists, and how an unjust economic and food system degrades us all.

From the early pages of his preface, I had my own parallel conversations with the book’s arguments. Singer cites “improved seeds and agricultural techniques” as solutions to extreme poverty that are within our reach. I want to know: which seeds and which techniques? The same patented seeds that Monsanto is aggressively marketing as part of a new “green revolution” out of the food crisis? (Seeds often requiring purchase of companion chemical fertilizers and pesticides?) The same unsustainable and mechanized techniques that have consolidated farms in corporate ownership, dislocated families, created dependency, and favored resource-intensive monocultures over integrated food systems?

Singer acknowledges the importance of programs that build self-reliance rather than just give handouts, and the organizations he highlights as effective are all doing important work that saves lives. Yet, he dismisses the idea that concerned people might want to engage in changing the systemic roots of poverty rather than just treat its symptoms. We couldn’t defeat the continuation of wasteful subsidies to agribusiness in the 2008 Farm Bill, he argues, so tough fights like those are better left alone so that we can focus our resources on the immediate. By this logic, supporting a program like “KIDS Can Make A Difference,” which does not treat malaria today but instead empowers the next generation to join the fight for justice, is wasteful and perhaps even unethical.

Again, unfairly, in reading Singer’s crystal-clear prose I felt myself yearning for poetry. By coincidence, I was finishing up John Steinbeck’s classic depression-era novel “The Grapes of Wrath” when I opened “The Life You Can Save.” In Steinbeck’s book, we intimately connect with the suffering and resilience of the Joad family, and by extension the thousands of farm families displaced and facing hunger due to economic structural injustices outside their control. The book resonates greatly with our current economic and food crises both domestically and abroad, and probes into deeper questions. Singer notes that we need a “culture of giving,” and while knowing (and hoping) that his drier, finite sort of appeal will reach many, I couldn’t help wishing that he would make his own contribution to this culture in a more visceral way. I wanted Singer to engage my outrage, my empathy and creativity, not just my sense of responsibility (and though he claims to want to avoid it), my guilt.

Of his fellow environmentalist David de Rothschild in a recent *The New Yorker* magazine feature, William McDonough said: “So David is taking a romantic approach to a whole series of very serious issues and will bring them into awareness, through the poetic imagination, with the science behind it. Which is really how cultures can most effectively engage certain kinds of questions – through the delightful prospect of the great adventure..” The challenge before us all, as educators and activists, is how to rouse others with the call of the great adventure -- creating the more just world within our reach, one that sustainably supports us all.

Jen Chapin is a songwriter, singer, former Chair/current secretary of WHY and a member of the KIDS Advisory Board. To hear her music and read more, see www.jenchapin.com.
We all agree that kids can make a difference; and in New London, kids DO make a difference!

Our organization, FRESH (Food: Resources, Education, Security, Health) has been working along with young people in New London Connecticut for five years now. Our programs for people aged 5-21 are a continuum of involvement and engagement with the food systems: exploring natural systems, confronting the status quo through education and advocacy, and building the skills and relationships that will result in the strong vibrant local food system that is crucial to our goal: making healthy food normal again!

Today, junk food is ubiquitous. It is at school, at church, in the home, and it dominates the market place. Everyone knows what it is, how to handle it and where to get it. The consequences of our current [junk] food system are also easy to find: from obesity, diabetes and coronary disease; loss of regional farming and farm culture; to the relatively subtle loss of ecological literacy amongst our children: the status quo in food is entrenched and aggressive in its peddling of disease in fancy wrappings. The current focus on a national health care system, we hope, will be another opportunity to focus on the relationship between what we eat as a society and public health, as well as the rich collective opportunity we have to prevent much of the personal and ecological illness which is so rampant today.

Our work is part of a national movement to reclaim the food system: to transform the way we currently grow, access and eat into systems that are sustainable, just, accessible and beautiful! Young people are at the core of our efforts. Since our start in 2004 we have employed, trained and provided opportunities for hundreds of youth to get involved is this transformative and empowering work. Youth powered the creation of our productive 2 acre organic farm at the site of a residential school for foster-care involved children and they have used their own hands and minds to plan and build the infrastructure for community gardens in New London which have greatly increased the amount and the visibility of gardening in the city. These dynamic urban sites provide exciting experiential education for school children, another ‘path of participation’ for young people in this ‘growth industry’ of local and healthful foods. And the experiential learning is not only for children. An important part of our youth employment program is advocacy and leadership training. Along with basic agricultural and life skills we teach and practice critical thinking, problem solving, creative communication, public speaking, and community organizing. And its not only young people who need to understand the ecological impacts of their daily decisions, the global implications of the systems by which they are fed, or even how to grow and cook food. These basic yet complex insights, information and skills are in too short supply. Happily the demand for all of these is growing! Many are starting to realize that “We ALL Make a Difference”; the youth who work with FRESH are spreading the skills and perspectives they gain so that everyone, young and old, rich and poor, can get involved in making change.

We are particularly proud of one example of this which I would like to share: our new collaboration with Public Allies (www.publicallies.com), an Americorp related program which pairs community service work with intensive organizing and leadership training. Jessica Cartagena, who at 19 has been with FRESH for 4 years, is the first Public Ally to come from and work in Eastern Connecticut. She has just started the program and is already highly energized by the opportunity to learn and work with the highly diverse and dynamic cadre of other young people who she is participating with. Four days a week she is working with us to bring our youth training programs to a higher level. On the fifth day of each week she is herself receiving training with PA, which promises to bring her to a higher level!

So whatever your age, we hope you will check us out on the web (freshnewlondon.org), and be on the look-out for ways to get more involved in the kitchens, gardens and farms that are in your community!

Arthur Lerner is Co-Founder and Director of Operations for FRESH. He can be reached at 860-444-8050 x.14 or artherner@hotmail.com
Last January I was given the opportunity to go to India for two weeks to do teacher training for iEARN (International Education and Research Network). This was done at the invitation of the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Delhi, India. I was asked to introduce teachers to online classroom interaction through participation in iEARN. As the Indian students become involved in the iEARN projects, they will interact with students in classrooms in the U.S. and around the world to collaborate on projects in science, math, art, social studies, and/or language arts. Through these interactions, they will master basic technology skills and improve their communication skills. They will also build friendships with people from other countries and cultures, helping them to develop a global perspective. This, I believe, is a step towards peace and understanding in the world.

My first workshop was at St. Xavier’s School in Patna, one of the more economically depressed areas of India. There were 28 teachers from various schools in the area participating in the workshop. They were really excited to learn new skills and to be able to communicate in English with other teachers around the world on the iEARN forums. Before doing the workshop, I was concerned about how the poorest schools, with no computers, would be able to participate in a global telecommunications network such as iEARN. However, I discovered that in the western regions of India where some schools were already participating in iEARN, those schools with computer access partnered with schools that didn’t have access, and posted their work on the iEARN forums for them. There is great disparity among the schools in India and their access to technology, but the teachers are all willing to work together so that everyone can benefit.

After completing the workshop in Patna, I returned to Kolkata for two free days. I spent Sunday doing some sightseeing around Kolkata, visiting the Victoria Memorial, the markets and the Ganges River. The streets were crowded with cars, rickshaws, bicycles, motorbikes, animals, and people. There are over thirteen million people living in Kolkata, so the congestion on the streets is a real problem. Trash and garbage are everywhere, and pollution of the rivers and air is very evident. But in spite of the pollution, there is so much beauty. The Indian women, in their colorful saris and salwar-kameezes, are absolutely gorgeous! And the children, with their sparkling eyes and winsome smiles, are extremely charming. Even the food in India is beautiful! The fruits and vegetables in the markets are always artistically arranged, and truly a delight to the eye. The naan, chapattis, dosas, dahil, samosas, and curries are works of art – and they taste good, too.

After enjoying two free days, I did a second workshop at Techno-India, a very high tech training school in Kolkata. Nearly 40 teachers attended the workshop there. Again, the teachers were wonderful and very excited about their participation in the workshop. In addition to the teacher trainings, I did three other short presentations to high school students, sharing resources for interactive online English learning. The students were delighted to have an “English Specialist” come to share with them; I was treated like a rock star, with the students clamoring for my autograph after my talk! Education is very important in India.

During my short visit, I discovered that India is a land of great contrasts. There are small “Silicon Valley islands”, where it’s very high tech, and the people are highly educated and very affluent. However, surrounding these high tech areas is the rest of India. Many people are living in huge, miserable slums where they lack the basic necessities of life (as seen in Slumdog Millionaire). Approximately 26 percent of India’s population lives below the poverty level of a dollar a day. The literacy rate is around 62%. India is aware of the many challenges facing them, such as the need for adequate nutrition, universal education, universal health care, affordable housing, and a clean environment. The teachers in India are especially aware of these challenges and are doing their best to educate the next generation to be global citizens, prepared to find solutions to these challenges. Because of these teachers, I feel confident that India’s future is in good hands. They understand that we are one world, and that we must all work together if we are to achieve a future of peace and harmony and justice.

Judy Huynh is a Box Team Member Professional Development in Service Learning— Ionia County Intermediate School District and a member of the KIDS Advisory Board.
AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR READERS...
By Larry Levine and Jane Levine

“Change begins small and happens slowly. In a time when marketers are busy promoting over-consumption to the vulnerable child market, young people need all the help they can get figuring out what they might do—besides shopping at the mall—that might make a difference. Across the country, in all kinds of settings, and with children of many ages, teachers are using the resources of KIDS to help children find a responsible answer to that question. Those are the children whom we need to hope will be the leaders of tomorrow’s world.”

Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus of Nutrition and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

This has been an exciting year for KIDS. We set three goals at the start of the year and, despite obstacles, managed to accomplish all of them. These were:

- **New KIDS Teacher Guide** has been published and we are happy to report sales are brisk. This is our final print version of the guide. All future revisions, corrections and additions will be made on our website eliminating the need for new print versions. The new guide is also available for a one-time download from our website. A major step into the 21st Century for KIDS.

- **New KIDS Website**—by the time you read this, the new website will be up and running. It contains many new features that we believe will enhance visitors experience on the site and provide them with easy to use tools. PLUS be interactive with the new guide.

- **KIDS Newsletter in digital format**—for almost 16 years, our newsletter has been published in a printed version. Starting next year, we will be moving to a digital newsletter delivered directly to the readers’ in-box. The reasons for this change are; (1) help the environment, (2) to save money, (3) to take advantage of links that are available online to enhance an article.

There is much yet to be done, and once again we come to you for your help. In 2010, our dream is to translate *Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference* into Spanish and market it through our website as a digital download. Investigation shows us that this is a major undertaking as well as an expensive one. We feel that with the shifting change in demographics in the country, that the time is ripe for a Spanish edition of the guide.

KIDS is a volunteer organization and, as such, is completely dependent on friends and supporters like you. Our goal is not only to continue to provide people with the many benefits KIDS offers, but to expand the content of the program and its reach. To do so, we are coming to you for support.

Through your past support, you have told us that KIDS is working for you! Without you, KIDS wouldn’t exist. Without KIDS, young people wouldn’t understand the root causes of the economic troubles in the world. Without KIDS, there would be one less reminder that in difficult times we’re all in this together.

Please support KIDS by taking out your checkbook and writing a tax deductible contribution to KIDS today.

Peace,

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**2009 Teacher Guide Available**

If you have not already ordered your copy of *Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference*, now is the time to do so while shipping is free. A $9 savings. Promotion ends December 31, 2009.
Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference
by Stephanie Kempf.

Uplifting, engaging, interactive and challenging lessons for middle and high school students on the root causes of and solutions to domestic and international hunger. Examines colonialism, contemporary development projects, the media, famine vs. chronic hunger, the working poor and more, as well as valuable ideas for how kids can make a difference in their community, and in the world around them.

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus, Teachers College, Columbia University