



"Universities Fighting World Hunger"

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It is unlikely that anyone in this room has ever lost a child to hunger and the diseases that go with it. I assume few of you have ever met a mother whose baby perished from starvation. If you walked the streets of Maradi in Niger, you would meet dozens in a matter of minutes. Every five seconds, a mother somewhere in the world mourns the loss of her child – though relatively few other people notice its passing.

In developed countries, hunger has become invisible. Truth be known, in a world where 1 billion of us eat too much, it's getting even harder to remind folks that 850 million don't get enough to eat. And virtually no

one knows that hunger still kills more people every year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

Hunger seems way too big for any of us to really dream of solving it. Back in 2000, 189 heads of state pledged to halve the proportion of the planet's people living in hunger. They agreed upon a series of 'Millennium Development Goals' – eradicating poverty and hunger, getting all kids everywhere into school, evening the balance between men and women, cutting child mortality, combating disease. But sadly, on hunger, we're going the wrong way. In recent years, the number of hungry people has grown by almost 6 million each year. It doesn't have to be that way.

There is no excuse for any child going hungry. Whichever way you look at it – religious, moral, social, political or economic – it is simply wrong for children to lose their futures to hunger. We're proud that the World Food Programme reached more than 50 million hungry children last year. But it's not enough.

The good news is that child hunger can be conquered, and all children can be given an opportunity to go to school. Like any apparently insurmountable problem, it needs to be broken down into manageable parts. Roughly 180 million hungry children are already receiving international assistance, or they live in China, India or Brazil, where the governments have the resources required – and have made concrete commitments – to address child hunger. We estimate that there are approximately 109 million children and pregnant women at risk of delivering malnourished babies, who still require help.

The cost of helping them is not prohibitive. Studies conducted by the World Food Programme have shown that for roughly US \$5 billion a year, we can feed the children not currently being reached by their governments or international assistance. This would include a comprehensive package of health and nutrition for pregnant women and children aged under five, plus school feeding for those aged 5 to 15.

While US \$5 billion may seem like a big sum, it's made up of some very manageable parts. For just US \$34 per child per year, we can not only give children a meal in school – with all of the vitamins and minerals they need for healthy growth. We can also make sure that they get regular health checks and de-worming treatment. For US \$60 we can give young children – aged under five – special supplementary food, complete with extra micronutrients, vaccinations, de-worming and basic health checks. For the same price, pregnant women and nursing mothers who are at risk of giving birth to babies weighing less than 2.5 kg can receive extra food. These rations would be fortified with iodine, vitamin A and iron – those micronutrients most often missing from poor women's diets – which can cause maternal illness and birth defects. Nutrition education is also included in the package for women, to ensure that they know what foods they and their children need to lead healthy, productive lives.

We hope that the developing countries where the programme would run might provide the food needed to meet their own children and women's needs – at a global value of a bit less than US \$2 billion. The remaining US \$3 billion would need to come from international sources.

That's a big request, especially when all of us are aware that this is not exactly the brightest moment for economies in major donor governments

– the US, Europe and Japan. That’s why we need corporate and private donors, communities and schools involved.

I am certain that our universities contain some of the people who can help us conquer hunger. I’d like to come to you with three ideas. First, let’s try to capture the energy, the creativity and the passion of your students to tackle this age-old problem. Second, I appeal to you to focus some of your research and study on solutions to the problem. Academics have the wherewithal to discover why one in eight people on this planet still can’t get enough to eat – decades after Norman Borlaug’s ‘Green Revolution’ guaranteed that there was enough food produced to feed everyone alive. Finally, our universities hold precious funding for research that could help save countless lives –even though the people who need them don’t yet feature on most consumer analysts’ radar screens.

Let’s start with the students. Famous for their activism, students could easily take up the hunger cause. We have found that once they hear about the problem, American students like the connection of helping students around the world who are less fortunate. They are amazed at how cheap it is to give a child in school a healthy meal – just 19 cents -- which even the most cash-strapped of students here can afford. And with just 19 cents, students feel that they can change the world: one life, one meal, one day at a time.

This notion cuts through the idea that international aid is the domain of politics and economics. It becomes the very personal engagement of the students working for other kids. It is people to people.

To capture this youthful energy and raise funds for our efforts to end hunger, WFP launched War on Hunger: a student-led campaign that aims to educate school and university students on the issue of international hunger. The War on Hunger Spokesperson is Lauren Bush, a Princeton student, top model and the President's niece. She is also modest, dedicated and passionate about this cause, having visited our operations in Guatemala, Sudan, Tanzania and Kenya.

The campaign uses the internet extensively, taking advantage of a medium which kids are very familiar with these days. The site -- WarOnHunger.org -- provides current information on global hunger as well as a variety initiatives students can undertake including campus and community anti-hunger campaigns, fundraising events, and letter-writing appeals to elected officials, corporate and civic leaders.

Auburn University has done more than any other university as part of this campaign. Auburn has long been committed to promoting issues of hunger and nutrition through their global agriculture initiative and research at the College of Human Science into such topics as hunger and infant nutrition.

The WarOnHunger online campaign gave them a way to put what they were learning in class into action. Not only did they get their students involved, but also the administration and faculty. This has made the program a huge success.

Dean Henton's commitment to this project has kept the students interested, focused, and productive. Projects have included: concerts, fundraisers, articles in local and regional newspapers, and the creation of

a web site. The commitment to involve the entire Auburn community has been the sort of holistic approach WFP was hoping to spark with WarOnHunger. The idea of hunger becomes not only something you read about in the newspaper, or learn about in class. It becomes a community project that is involved with multiple aspects of people's lives.

Let's look at faculty too. Among your academic staff, are some true geniuses. If just a nanosecond of their attention could be turned to hunger and the 'banal' diseases that afflict so many of the world's population, I am convinced we could make enormous strides for humanity. This research might not be the kind that produces immediate financial returns – but in the medium to long term the global economy will surely benefit. A study last year showed that a 1 percent decrease in malnutrition rates in a country correlated to a 4 percent decrease in poverty. A five percent decrease in malnutrition would give us a 20 percent decrease in poverty. Addressing iron-deficiency anemia alone could increase GDP rates by 4 percent. Now that's a worthy return for our efforts.

What are the areas we could use your help on? The options are endless. How about the optimum nutrition needed for poor people living with AIDS? How about ways that poor farmers can get the most out of biotech crops? How about even better evidence from economists that fighting hunger reduces poverty? What about designing a marketing campaign that would bring the invisible issue of hunger to the world's attention?

My friends at Indiana Medical School are helping us in a very practical way. Together with two medical schools in Kenya, they have founded AMPATH – an Academic Model for the Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS. This project provides anti-retroviral treatment to more than 15,000 HIV-infected Kenyans and, thanks to generous grants from the

U.S. government, aims to double that number by this time next year. Up to half of all new patients in AMPATH's drug therapy are highly malnourished. Dr. Joseph Mamlin told us how clinicians were shocked to find the average newcomer weighed about 108 pounds. Because, in his words, "drugs don't have any calories," AMPATH created a comprehensive program that involves food "prescriptions" as well as cooking lessons to ensure good nutrition, the development of farms and individual vegetable plots for those on the AIDS drugs.

The World Food Program supports 440 AMPATH patients and their families with food. Food is provided for only six months during the patient's initial period of treatment and immune reconstruction, unless the individual remains very ill. AMPATH finds most patients gain enough weight and strength by then to return to normal activities. It is amazing how this simple "prescription" can literally turn lives around.

Of course, all of this costs money – and a good word from you to your Foundations and funding partners would go a very long way to redirecting a fraction of those research dollars to projects that have the potential to change hundreds of millions of lives.

Generosity is not lacking. Wherever I go, whoever I speak to, is inevitably moved by the plight of hungry women and children. This year has seen unprecedented charitable donations. In the tsunami, in Niger, and most recently in New Orleans, people's generosity is overwhelming once they see the magnitude of the need. The American Red Cross reported receiving more than \$20 million less than 48 hours after Hurricane Katrina hit. There is a philanthropist in everyone. I know that I can count on the philanthropist in each of you.

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