

Lifting the Rest

“Searchers work to bring world’s poor closer to West’s benefits

As recently stated by the World Bank Development Research Group, almost three billion people live on less than two dollars day, as adjusted for purchasing power. Eight hundred and forty million people in the world don’t have enough to eat and ten million children die every year from easily preventable diseases. AIDS is killing three million people a year and is still spreading. One billion people in the world lack access to clean water; two billion lack access to adequate sanitation. One billion adults are illiterate while about a quarter of the children in the poor countries do not finish primary school.

As often cited by the governments of the West, these tragedies of extreme poverty grow in spite of recent plans for the doubling of foreign aid, a Marshall Plan for the world’s poor and an International Financing Facility (IFF) against which tens of billions more dollars toward future aid could be borrowed to rescue the poor today. The unspoken tragedy concerns the \$2.3 trillion spent by the West on foreign aid over the last five decades which has still not managed to get twelve-cent medicines to children or to get four dollar bed nets to poor families to prevent half of all malaria deaths. We have witnessed an increasing flow of foreign aid funds from the West to the Rest over the last 10 years and yet we have still not managed to get three dollars to each mother to prevent five million child deaths or to provide subsistence living to families to enable their young children to attend school.

William Easterly, author of *The White Man’s Burden*, reminds us that in a single day, on July 16, 2005, the American and British economies delivered nine million copies of the sixth volume of the Harry Potter children’s book series to eager fans. Amazon and Barnes & Noble shipped preordered copies directly to customer’s homes. There was no Marshall Plan for Harry Potter, no International Financing Facility for underage wizards. The advocates of a traditional approach for solving the problems of the Rest can be called Planners, while the agents for change in the alternative approach to aiding the poor are

becoming known as Searchers. The short answer on why dying poor children don't get twelve-cent medicines, while healthy rich children do get Harry Potter, is that twelve-cent medicines are supplied by Planners while Harry Potter is supplied by Searchers. That is, Planners, considering poverty as a technical engineering problem, determine what to supply while Searchers, admitting that they do not know the answers in advance, adapt to local conditions and determine what is in demand.

Columbia University Professor and Director of the United Nations Millennium Project Jeffrey D. Sachs stated in September 2007 that as the West is recognizing that our world has become an interconnected village, community service has gone global as well. More and more Americans are ambassadors of good will, no longer content to let Washington alone define our nation's links to the world. Perhaps these ambassadors can be called the growing population of Searchers that are becoming discontent with Planners at the top who lack the knowledge of the bottom.

Bill Clinton in his most recent book, *Giving*, speaks of the growing backlash against the global economy in both rich and poor nations where the economic growth it has stimulated has not been broadly shared. In every corner of America all over the world, intelligence and energy are evenly distributed, but opportunity, investment, and effective organizations are not. As a result, billions of people are denied the chance to live their lives to the fullest, and millions die needlessly every year.

In my recent planning for the Safer, More Compassionate World Forum, to be held at Fort Lewis College on Saturday, November 10, I have been greatly encouraged to discover no lack of "Searchers", based in La Plata County, that have decided to individually make a difference in the world of today. These persons, motivated beyond their fears, including the ever-prevalent paralyzing threat of terrorism, are employing their talents around the globe from Afghanistan, Zimbabwe and Myanmar; from India and Nepal to Haiti and Ecuador. They have made the individual decision to spend at least a portion of their year providing dentistry to poor Afghans, providing electrical power or clean water to natives in Nepal and Ecuador or running a small micro-business to insure a daily hot meal for 300 Zimbabwean school aged children. So, can all of us decide to leave our jobs, our

families and our friends to become global searchers employing our individual talents to make a difference on the worlds' needy? No, probably not, but our awareness and support of their approach and their successes may insure that the next \$1trillion spent over the next decade may find us, as a global society, closer to realizing the goal of bringing the poor of the Rest closer to the West.

Start your empowerment by joining many of La Plata Counties "Searchers" on Saturday, November 10, from 9:45am – 4pm in the Fort Lewis College CUB Ballroom to hear first-hand of their commitments and how you can become involved. This event is jointly sponsored by the La Plata League of Women Voters and the Fort Lewis College Common Reading Experience. For more information call 970 799-1382 or click www.lwvlaplata.org.

Ross Park

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