

Building Prosperity From the Ground Up

Today, more than one billion people—one-sixth of the world's population—suffer from undernourishment. We have all seen the harrowing images of desperate, grinding poverty in the developing world. We want to take action, but the vastness and depth of global hunger and poverty can make it feel overwhelming and inevitable. It is not inevitable. We can end hunger and poverty, but it will take a groundswell of people to achieve it. With strategic interventions, the women and men of the developing world can end their own hunger and poverty.

Mobilizing people at the grassroots level to build self-reliance

When people are chronically hungry, they do not simply lack food. Chronic hunger is often coupled with marginalization, subjugation, disempowerment and resignation. Many impoverished communities in the developing world have watched development initiatives sweep in with abundant goods and services and then depart, leaving the community no better than it started once the goods and services are no longer available. They feel powerless and have little hope for change. They become resigned to thinking that poverty is their fate.

by Anastasia Andrzejewski
The Hunger Project



A concept design illustration for a community center to be built in Ghana.

A mother's social and economic status is one of the best indicators of whether her children will escape poverty and be healthy.



Channel Cyuzuzo, 6, daughter of Frida Mbanda, with the family cow. Frida is mother and primary caregiver to 12 children

Simply addressing the hunger is not a sustainable solution—it actually perpetuates the cycle. The marginalization, subjugation, disempowerment and resignation must be addressed if extreme hunger and poverty are to be ended. The key is empowering impoverished communities to take action to meet their basic needs. By building capacities, leadership, confidence and sense of community, people living in the conditions of hunger and poverty can be self-reliant which will ultimately lead to lasting improvement. Using this approach, the cycle of poverty can be broken by the people who are living it everyday.

Empowering women as key change agents

Studies show that when women are supported and empowered, all of society benefits. Their families are healthier, more children go to school, agricultural productivity improves and incomes increase. In short, communities become more resilient. Empowering women to be change agents is an essential element in ending global hunger and poverty. Not only do women comprise almost 60 percent of the world's hungry people,²

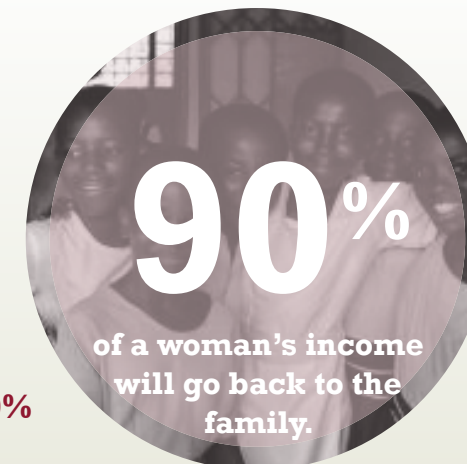
they bear almost all responsibility for meeting basic needs of the family. They cook and serve food, collect water and fuel, and care for the children, elderly, and sick of the community. Women also produce more than 50 percent of all food grown worldwide.³ Despite their critical role, women are systematically denied the resources, information and freedom of action they need to effectively fulfill this responsibility.

Investing in women pays off. Research shows that women are far more likely than men to financially invest in their children's health, education and household needs. For example, when women farmers receive the same inputs as male farmers output can increase up to 22 percent. A mother's social and economic status is one of the best indicators of whether her children will escape poverty and be healthy.⁶

There are a number of successful microfinance programs that are specifically focused on the economic empowerment of women in developing countries. Through access to microfinance, women engage in income-generating activities, increase their incomes and are better able to meet their families' basic needs. Fur-

Research in developing countries has shown that a woman will reinvest **90% of her income** back into her family.

A man will reinvest 30-40%





A woman is teaching a leadership seminar for women in the community center. Courses like these help empower the women of the communities to help end hunger and poverty in their own community.

If we want to end world hunger and abject poverty, it is imperative that we invest in women.

Furthermore women develop self-confidence and assertiveness, and thus gain elevated status in their households and communities. Such programs create a new future where women and men are equal partners in the well being of their families and their community. If we want to end world hunger and abject poverty, it is imperative that we invest in women.

An on-the-ground strategy for success

Fighting hunger and poverty on a global scale hinges on community-led development. In Africa, the Hunger Project developed an approach called the Epicenter Strategy, which has been successfully used to mobilize clusters of rural villages to create and run programs to achieve sustainable progress in health, food security, education, agriculture and income generation. Through the Epicenter Strategy, communities that were once impoverished become self-reliant in approximately five years.

Initially, people from 10 to 15 villages voluntarily come together to participate in a Vision, Commitment and Action Workshop. They create a common vision and commit to take actions, both individually and collectively, to end hunger and poverty in their villages. It is with these collective commitments that a sense of community and

accomplishment develops among the participants.

Another central component of the Epicenter Strategy is the construction of the Epicenter building. Through their own labor, the villagers construct a building that will house a training center, meeting hall, food processing center, health clinic, library, and classrooms. A nurse's quarters, food bank and demonstration farm, where farmers learn new techniques to improve their crops, are also constructed nearby.

After the Epicenter building is in place and the support programs are up and running, the community continues working toward meeting the following goals:

- + The empowerment of women
- + Increased adult and child literacy
- + Improvement in maternal and child health
- + Increased food security
- + Reduction of diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS
- + Increased access to credit and creation of income-generating activities
- + Environmentally sustainable and appropriate farming practices.

A teacher and her students celebrate the opening of their new school in Ghana. This community has found self-reliance because of the Epicenter strategy.

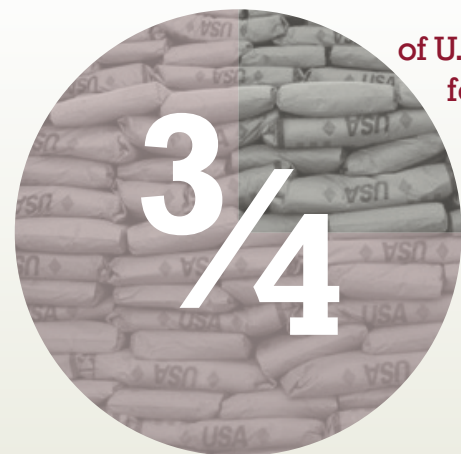


When these goals are accomplished, the community has increased clout and is able to successfully make demands of the local government for services and personnel, such as teachers and health professionals. Simply put, the community begins to emerge from the stranglehold of chronic hunger and poverty.

As the community continues to make progress, a microfinance program targeted towards rural women supplies the missing link for ending poverty—the economic empowerment of women. With the microfinance program people can expand or start businesses and with their income, improve their farms, purchase food, send their children to school and save for the future. The ultimate goal of the program is to gain government recognition and operate as a licensed Rural Bank. Once this achieved, the Rural Bank provides the entire Epicenter community with sustainable access to savings and credit facilities, and the Epicenter is deemed self-reliant.

Since the Hunger Project's microfinance program inception in 1999, nearly \$7.9 million have been dispersed to Epicenter communities. With an initial loan of \$75, Elizabeth Kalimbuka of Malawai started a cattle business. Not only has she since made a profit and repaid her loan, she also has accumulated enough food for her family until the next harvest season (about four months), renovated her home and is able to pay school tuition for her niece and nephew. Microfinance programs, such as the Hunger Project, Kiva, the Grameen Foundation and others allow socially responsible investors to use technology to defeat global poverty.

The Epicenter Strategy is a model that can work anywhere in the world. It has been implemented in eight countries in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal and Uganda) reaching an estimated 2.1 million people, who are proving through their actions that an end to hunger and poverty is possible. To date, 19 communities are deemed self-reliant, meaning they have emerged from abject poverty and the communities have consistent and reliable access to health care, education, food, clean water, safe sanitation, savings and credit. Dozens more communities are well on their way to achieving the same reality.



of U.S. foreign aid
food is grown
in the U.S.

Imported food leads to destabilization and reduced local market prices, threatening the livelihoods of local producers, and traders upon whom long-term food security depends.

Our role as a developed nation

The best way for us to help is to partner with the women and men in the developing world by being informed investors. Both through our government and through charitable non-governmental organizations, Americans spend billions of dollars on aid to the developing world. It is critical that these significant resources constitute more than just a “band-aid” but a sustainable solution.

For example, the U.S. in recent years has provided much of its aid in the form of food, but three-quarters of that food is grown in the U.S.¹² At first that might sound like a good thing, but imported food leads to destabilization and reduced local market prices, threatening the livelihoods of local producers, and traders upon whom long-term food security depends.¹³

The U.S. spends multiple billions of its non-food aid dollars funding the top tier salaries of Western “technical consultants” who advise and consult recipient govern-



With an initial loan of \$75, Elizabeth Kalimbuka of Malawai started a cattle business, and has vastly improved the living conditions for herself and her family.

ments. While it is true that there are some knowledge gaps in developing countries, this kind of assistance has been shown to yield few sustainable benefits.

However, given recent commitments by world leaders, it seems as though the U.S. and the world is at the threshold of an extraordinary sea change in how we spend foreign aid. In July 2009, world leaders made an unparalleled financial commitment to end world hunger at the G8 summit. They announced a commitment of \$20 billion over three years for a Food Security Initiative that will support rural development in developing countries.

This commitment is not only financially significant, but it also represents a shift in how the world is seeking to address the issues of hunger and poverty. Rather than

Ultimately, the key to ending hunger and poverty will only be found in the women and men who live that life each and every day.

providing short-term food aid, the focus is shifting toward building the capacity of rural farmers, particularly women, in the developing world to increase their food production.

In the developed world, in addition to governments, individuals also have an important role to play in the fight against hunger and poverty. As individuals, even a small financial contribution to a non-profit or via a microfinance program that focuses on empowering people, particularly women, at the grassroots level can have a remarkable impact on a family's life. For example, \$60 could provide a loan to a rural woman, who in turn starts a small business which will generate income which she uses to send her children to school and provide them with nourishing food.

Ultimately, the key to ending hunger and poverty will only be found in the women and men who live that life each and every day. As governments and individuals in the developed world, it is our responsibility to share our support so that people can lead lives of self-reliance, meet their own basic needs and build better futures for their children. Together—governments and individuals, developing and developed world—we must work to ensure that every woman, man, and child has the opportunity to live a dignified life.

.....

The Epicenter Strategy has been implemented in eight countries reaching an estimated 2.1 million people, who are proving through their actions that an end to hunger and poverty is possible.

Image and biography for Anastasia Andrzejewski of the Hunger Project to be provided shortly.