

UN Millennium Project
October 31, 2005
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Response to Queries Raised by Ms. Julie Howard at the
UN ECOSOC Special Event on the Food Crisis in Africa
October 27, 2005

The questions raised by Ms. Julie Howard concerning the Millennium Village Project require a serious answer. The concepts of the Millennium Village Project are based on the UN Millennium Project, which has been strongly supported by the African Union and the countries in which the Millennium Villages are being established. The Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research is a partner in this activity. The project is winning widespread endorsement and praise because it is moving beyond endless words to real action. And the actions are proving the point. The first Millennium Village, in Sauri Kenya has just celebrated a bumper harvest, with food output increased in 2005 by 3.5 times compared with the previous year. The malaria burden is down, and all children in the schools are receiving school meals. These are early accomplishments of the Millennium Village project.

The inputs are not being distributed for free, contrary to Ms. Howard's claim. The farmers are obligated to turn a part of their increased harvest back to the community for use in the school feeding program and for others in need. Villagers are putting enormous amounts of time in measuring plots, distributing inputs, monitoring compliance, and all without compensation, because this is part of the shared responsibility built into the project from the start. The health care interventions also were not for free. The community contributed the labor and manpower both to establish the clinic and to maintain it in operation. This is a project of community inputs and community participation, supported by realistic levels of donor assistance to close financing gaps that afflict the poorest of the poor.

Nor is their neglect of what are called the "less glamorous" items such as infrastructure (a major focus of the project) and governance, which is a critical input for success. The Governments of Kenya and Ethiopia have taken on the Millennium Villages project with great seriousness and attention to good governance, from the district officials working closely with the villagers all the way to the national cabinet, which has repeatedly visited the villages to ascertain best practices that can be applied at a more general level. The difference with other projects, however, is that the Millennium Villages don't just talk about governance, they do something about it – by setting practical governance goals of community participation, scaling up public investments, and long-term planning and improvement of the business environment.

Long-term viability is clear, just as it was with the Green Revolution in Asia. Subsidized inputs in health, agriculture, infrastructure, and education lay the base for long-term

development by improving the skills, productivity, and long-term business environment of rural communities, which then go on to diversify their livelihoods beyond subsistence staple production into commercial agriculture and non-agricultural activities. Asia's Green Revolution in wheat and rice was followed by a "White Revolution" in dairy, a Tree Crop revolution in fruits, palm oil, and other tree crops, and of course a diversification into manufactures and services. The same will occur in Africa, once the process gets underway with Africa's own Green Revolution, made possible by interventions such as those in the Millennium Village project. Moreover, many of the key steps of the project engage the private sector directly, in the procurement of fertilizer, the storage of food surpluses, and the introduction of microfinance.

Millennium Villages is a modest-scale and highly promising proof of concept of the UN Millennium Project, put into operation with the enthusiastic participation of local communities and national governments. The positive lessons will prove themselves many times over, as is already occurring in Kenya, Ethiopia, and the other emerging sites of the project work. We of course welcome the active dialogue with all who are interested in these important results, and seek to expand the rapidly growing range of businesses who are making important commitments to the success of the project and its concepts.