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## **A Call for African Aid** **Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs on global poverty issues**

*Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs made a name for himself tackling tough economic problems around the world. In the 1990s he advised Russia on how to move to a free market. He helped Mongolia to privatize a herd of 24 million yaks, and Bolivia to turn around its economy. In recent months Sachs has turned to a broader challenge: reviving the moribund economies of some of the world's most impoverished nations. Earlier this year Sachs agreed to take a post as an adviser to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on global poverty issues, and will leave Harvard to head Columbia's Earth Institute, where he hopes to bring scientists into development debates. Sachs spoke with NEWSWEEK's Adam Piore last week. Excerpts:*

**PIORE:** US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill and Bono the rock singer have been in the headlines visiting development projects in Africa. O'Neill has been quoted basically saying "This is a waste of money." Bono has looked at the same projects and said "This is great, we need more like it." You took Bono on his preparatory trip to find projects that were successful. Who's right?

**SACHS:** Of course Bono's right and Paul O'Neill's going to learn! I think the basic point that Bono was making is that we're going to have to put some effort into some of the extreme problems, like hunger, epidemics, that the two of them were seeing this week. We had hoped this could be done basically for free, that it was just a matter of African governments' governing themselves, focusing on corruption, reform... But O'Neill and Bono went to places like Ghana and Uganda—places that are governing well but can't face these enormous problems on their own. It's what the Treasury secretary saw with his own eyes, and I know he was absolutely shocked. He went into a hospital ward and met people who were dying not because they have to be dying but because they couldn't afford drugs that cost about a dollar a day.

One thing we learned over the last 20 years is that traditional development recipes—focusing on market reform and good governance—are far from enough. Our approach is like telling a starving person to stand up and walk through the desert for 10 kilometers to get your food.

But what is your response to critics who say you can throw all the money you want at some of the problems in Africa and they won't go away?

I have studied these problems in more detail than any person on this planet in recent years and I know that the amounts of money going to fight AIDS, TB, to address hunger issues or for primary education have been grossly insufficient compared to any real estimate of the need. When you ask Americans what they think they're doing, they think they are spending [lots of money]. In fact we've been spending about one penny out of every \$100. Do you think that's enough to get the job done with the world's largest pandemic? The answer is no.

So you don't think the money has been squandered through corruption and inefficiencies?

The programs that are being funded are working. The problem is that when you give very little—as we have done in the last 20 years—then the immunization coverage is very low, or the children don't go to school, or the hunger intensifies. If rich countries turn their backs, of course you're going to get mass death. And Secretary O'Neil stared it in the face.

If you could wave a magic wand and change two things about the way development aid is doled out, what would they be?

Sums of money that are commensurate with the scale of the problem, and that donors pool their money instead of doing it project by project, donor country by donor country. When you get a large enough pool of funds, whether it's to eradicate polio, African river blindness, or to get leprosy under control, you produce real results. But if, instead, you're pretending—if every country puts flags up, with nobody producing real resources—you get a lot of people dying and a lot of people blaming victims.

Let's talk about science. You have said that one of the reasons you are moving to Columbia is to try and get scientists involved in development. In recent years some development experts have come to the conclusion that there are large swaths of the world in Africa and Central Asia that are simply beyond help due to environmental conditions. You seem to be saying that science can transform these environments and fix these problems.

I think that all over the world it's now possible to help children be born healthy, to be raised in good health and to get an education that can help them be productive members of the world community—and that can be true from Central Asia to Central Africa.

But the kinds of problems that the poorest countries are facing require major investments in science to find solutions and understand them. There's very little research in malaria, on tropical drought, on how to handle climate change or soil degradation that is causing the collapse of economies.