

Jeffrey Sachs' review of my book "The White Man's Burden" further illustrates why the approach to aid he favors was one of the inspirations for the satirical title of the book. In his view, Western experts like himself can solve world poverty by bringing their superior technical knowledge to the locals. I have no complaints about the Lancet assigning someone whose views are prominently attacked in the book to review the book, since it provides opportunity to air a debate that needs to be aired.

Sachs believes that world poverty is a problem that has already been solved by natural science, but these solutions have never been applied at "scale." He does not offer an explanation for why many equally earnest and dedicated individuals dispensing \$2.3 trillion in foreign aid over the past half century did not already apply some of these definitive scientific solutions. Actually, many of them did, as Sachs shows a propensity for recycling old ideas ranging from his "Big Push" approach to break out of "poverty traps" (an idea that dates back to the 1940s), to specific technical fixes in areas like water and agriculture (for example, one of Sachs' technical fixes is facilitating "grain storage," which has been an obsession of agricultural aid programs since at least the 1970s, with poor results.)

My book argues, based on common sense and evidence, that poverty, and the failure of aid to alleviate it, is due to economics, not natural science or the lack thereof. First and foremost, poverty depends on complex economic factors such as the lack of property rights, poor contract enforcement, corruption and extortion by government officials and police, and ineffective government services, all of which block opportunities for poor people to solve their own problems based on their own specialized skills and knowledge. Scientific plans like those Sachs favors display a remarkable lack of interest in the complex politics that hamper poverty alleviation in poor countries.

Second, economic incentive problems help explain why aid often goes astray (often, but not all the time, as my book notes some of the same occasional aid successes that Sachs mentions). Large scale plans to deliver the scientific solutions do nothing to fix these incentive problems, a reality that Sachs the economist seems surprisingly reluctant to recognize. Large aid bureaucracies like the UN and World Bank have virtually no accountability for the results of their own programs. Hence, they have incentives to primarily focus on how much money they spend, and to produce numerous reports and world summits. Local government bureaucracies in poor countries have equally well documented problems with incentives and lack of accountability (health workers and teachers that don't show up, missing textbooks, drugs out of stock at health clinics – see for example, D. Filmer, J. Hammer, and L. Pritchett, "Weak Links in the Chain: A Diagnosis of Health Policy in Poor Countries", *World Bank Research Observer* 15(2): 199-224, August 2000.). Someone has to continuously implement the technical solutions and adapt them to local conditions.

In the case of bed nets that Sachs emphasizes so much, achieving the desired result that nets are protecting potential malaria victims is far from trivial. Sachs somehow finds it to be a “remarkable” success that a one-time campaign (including the use of the military) in a few districts in Zambia in 2003 managed to protect half of the intended beneficiaries (85 percent coverage times 60 percent utilization rate). A follow up study by another agency (NetMark, 2004, “Survey on Insecticide-Treated Nets (ITNs) in Zambia”) in 2004 found that country-wide, only 17 percent of under-5 children slept under an ITN the night before, and only 14 percent of pregnant women. Moreover, it was the rich rather than the poor who benefited in this example (the poorest quintile had 5% of children protected by a net versus 40% for the highest quintile.) If this is a remarkable success, I would hate to see what failure looks like.

Sachs closes with a quote from my book showing me to share the aims of his own work in getting more desperately needed goods to poor people – indeed I do! Like Sachs, I also salute the efforts of natural scientists to come up with many such effective goods. Unlike Sachs, however, I believe that fixing the economics of aid is necessary for the goods to reach the poor. Although aid can do much good in this way, I also disagree with Sachs that outside aid and foreign experts can achieve the end of poverty. That will happen only by the efforts of the people of the poor nations themselves, not by a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the White Man’s Burden.