



FEEDING MOUTHS AND MINDS

By DAVID TOBENKIN

Students and faculty
at colleges and universities
are battling one of the world's
most challenging international
development issues:

HUNGER.

Students
on an anti-
hunger march
at Auburn
University.



GROWING UP IN THE RURAL VILLAGE OF KIKONENI

in the coastal region of Kenya, Esther Ngumbi felt the pangs of hunger. “I grew up in a community where the food was not always there. Sometimes the crops would fail. Sometimes we would have corn and beans and sometimes not that.”

The experience led Ngumbi to become a PhD student specializing in entomology, the study of insects, at the College of Agriculture at Auburn, Alabama-based Auburn University. After graduation, she hopes to return to run her family's farm. “That's why I decided to go to agriculture school—I wanted to be a source of hope to those people.”

But Ngumbi is not awaiting her return to Kenya to address the specter of hunger. At Auburn, she is a leader among a new generation of student activists who, with faculty and administrators at many universities, are attempting to focus university resources and efforts to confront the issue of global hunger, including hunger in the United States.

Such activities include increasing social activism to promote policies that fight hunger; academic efforts, including teaching, research, and outreach that examine the underlying causes of hunger and possible solutions; and international and domestic interaction with the poor to sensitize and directly address such issues. Hunger experts say that universities are natural venues for anti-hunger efforts given their multiple points of contact with the problem and possible solutions.

Academia Broadly Involved in World Hunger Issues

“It's probable that every academic discipline is involved when you think of hunger and the reasons for it,” says Carol McLaughlin, research director for global public health at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for High Impact Philanthropy, which counsels philanthropists on how to choose worthy causes to alleviate societal problems such as hunger. “For example, at the University of Pennsylvania, researchers in public health examine food issues in a manner related to health and nutrition, political economists study food security, the vet school looks at the various food industries and how to produce food while preserving the environment at the same time, and the law school examines land use and land rights issues related to food production. There are also political science issues such as migration and refugee issues, which are involved in many international hunger situations.”

“There are many definitions of world hunger and many ways to go about doing one's part in a university,” says Keith West, Jr., George G. Graham Professor of Infant and Child Nutrition at Johns Hopkins University whose

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is the third in an occasional series on international development and international higher education. Each article focuses on one kind of international development work. The first article, “Fledging the Phoenix,” on reconstruction efforts after natural disasters was published in the July/August 2009 issue; the second, “Developing K-12 Education,” was published in the November/December 2009 issue.



research examines improving through nutritional means the health and survival of infants, children, adolescents, and women of reproductive age in underserved populations. “Hunger finds different forms of expression and consequence in different settings, so it’s always important for universities to be precise in defining the context in which they deal with hunger. In terms of broad areas that we do well, what we are supposed to do is research cutting-edge issues to

World Food Programme, more than 1.02 billion people in the world do not have enough to eat, including more than 400 million children. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that the recession in the United States has led to deterioration in U.S. food security, defined as continuous access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food adequate to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. In 2008, 14.6 percent of U.S. households lacked food security, up from 11.1 percent in 2007.

Despite universities’ many roles in addressing the challenges, hunger experts say their efforts to date have in some ways added up to less than the sum of their parts. They say that when universities’ multiple points of contact with the issue combine with the subject’s complexities domestically and abroad and the further challenges of coordinating efforts among a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and groups on campuses, universities’ energies and focus are often dissipated. This is compounded by the fact that many of the efforts tend to be student led, with all the issues of organization and continuity that entails. And anti-hunger efforts must compete for scarce resources with a multiplicity of other causes on campuses.

“Although the UN’s first Millennium Development Goal is to cut in half the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015, as compared to 1990, we unfortunately are seeing all kinds of things happening that are causing the incidence of hunger to go in the opposite direction,” says June Henton, dean of the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University and an originator of Universities Fighting World Hunger (UFWH), an organization attempting to create a comprehensive academic initiative to facilitate intercollegiate efforts to combat the hunger problem. “Continued population growth, rising food costs, and the use of food for fuel have all contributed to the increase in world hunger in recent years. We can’t just continue doing what we have always done. There is hunger research underway at universities but no collective action. Universities are typically focused on pursuing their own agendas and, especially when state funded, are careful with policy issues and tend to take a hands-off approach. Until Universities Fighting World Hunger, there had been no concerted effort to band together and work to fight hunger by means of both a grassroots student campaign and a long-term academic agenda.”



In Ontario, Canada, University of Guelph students on “delivery day” during a meal exchange program in fall 2009.

map and prevent hunger, identify underlying causes, and develop and test ways to mitigate its causes. In addition, research and dissemination of its findings are critical to preventing hunger and malnutrition. Once evidence is strong enough, we should be involved in advocacy and guiding the implementation of the findings. That branches into the universities providing technical assistance to governmental and nongovernmental actors on the front line. It’s also our job in public health nutrition to influence policies that can improve food security and nutritional well-being. Universities have a big role to play in teaching each new generation of professionals the mistakes of the past, how to learn from them, and pursuing through science and advocacy a world with improved food security and nutritional well being in the future.”

An International and Domestic Issue

Food security issues continue to be a profound challenge not only internationally but also domestically. According to statistics of the United Nations (UN)

Collaborating to Fight Hunger

Some colleges and universities are addressing such challenges by attempting to organize anti-hunger efforts both at their campuses and on an interuniversity level, including Henton’s new intercollegiate effort,

According to statistics of the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme, more than 1.02 billion people in the world do not have enough to eat, including more than 400 million children.

UFWH, established as a partnership by Auburn and the Rome-based UN World Food Programme, a first for the UN system.

Auburn itself represents an example of what can be achieved when dedicated and persistent administration commits a high, sustained level of effort to combat global hunger. The university, from top administration down to students and faculty in individual colleges, has emphasized a coordinated and multifaceted approach to addressing the hunger issue. While coordination and continuity are weak in many university efforts, Auburn's program has stood the test of time, with the initiative still strong six years after university anti-hunger efforts started in 2004.

Auburn's grassroots hunger campaign is student driven, with a Committee of 19 that provides leadership for colleges and campus groups. Ngumbi, for example, is the College of Agriculture's representative to the Committee of 19 and also participated in the World Food Programme's School Feeding Programme in Kenya. The Committee of 19 was named after the average cost in cents to feed a school child per day in the developing world (inflation has subsequently increased the cost to 25 cents).

"We focus on hunger both domestically and internationally," says Emma Keller, a senior at Auburn and president of the Committee of

19 since May 2009. "Locally, we promote volunteering and donations to food pantries. We also raise money for the World Food Programme. We try, above all, to educate fellow students about the issue. No one is pro-hunger. They are just uneducated. Once you educate them, you empower them. Most people don't know it takes only 25 cents a day to feed a child at school. We have about 23 representatives from various groups, including every school and college and also from major student organizations, such as the Black Student Union and the Student Government Association. I would say hundreds of students are involved because each representative leads a subcommittee, and some of those subcommittees have up to 30 students. One good thing about this set-up is that it allows students to get as involved as they want."

Each student representative is backed by a faculty adviser who is tasked with participation in the program. Underlying that faculty participation is a firm stand by the university's top administration that the hunger issue is an Auburn University issue and that the university should take a lead role in addressing it.

"The leadership we've had has been very important," Keller says. "Dr. Giles [Harriet Giles, director of external relations at Auburn's College of Human Sciences] and Dr. June Henton are the visionaries. Without faculty support, it is hard to get things done. Most students

Harvard student Sarah Nam (center, top) participated in a malnutrition treatment program in Rukungiri, Uganda. She is pictured here with fellow students, a village elder, a doctor, other participants, and with several children who were treated.





are only there for four years and they get very busy with their majors, so the faculty is the permanent structure. In our efforts to expand to other universities, that is the biggest challenge: getting faculty support.”

Auburn also benefits from its partnership with the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP). Douglas Coutts, a senior WFP advisory assigned to Auburn, serves as a visiting professor regarding hunger issues, tracks the hunger issue in the United States, leads an Auburn hunger studies minor program that launched in 2009, and works to accelerate the UFWH movement.

“I’m providing real world practical applications of how anti-hunger efforts work in the field to complement the book learning,” Coutts says. “I spent 25 years in the field in Asia and Africa managing World Food Programme development programs and humanitarian operations. Here I teach a new hunger course, ‘Hunger: Causes, Consequences, and Responses,’ which is an

interdisciplinary course on hunger and part of our new hunger studies minor. The course has included students studying in various disciplines, such as political science, engineering, business, journalism, and criminology, and examines the reasons for hunger, the consequences, and possible solutions.”



Auburn University President Jay Gogue speaks with a Kenyan student

Stronger in Numbers

Since the WFP and Auburn launched UFWH, the coalition has grown to more than 130 institutions and is now expanding internationally. UFWH provides model curricula, campus hunger organization guidelines, and holds annual conferences on hunger issues. Henton contends that, at this juncture, the next step is to further institutionalize UFWH by developing an international hunger institute bringing together multi-sector stakeholders and focusing on best practices in teaching, research, outreach, and policy.

UFWH’s cause is clearly resonating with some. Elisabeth-Christine Muelsch, a professor of French and the study abroad coordinator at San Angelo, Texas-based Angelo State University (ASU), says that she learned of UFWH while attending the NAFSA annual conference in May 2009. Later that fall, ASU joined UFWH and decided to add a service component to the school’s education abroad programs as graded course content.

“Dr. Sharynn Tomlin, who is the director of the Center for International Studies, and I agreed that there should be a service component to our study abroad programs,” says Muelsch. “The students are getting substantial scholarships so they need to give back to the community. When I went to NAFSA and saw the UFWH booth, I found it so interesting. It seemed like a good way to go. We sent an e-mail to Auburn University’s Harriet Giles, who mailed us a helpful paper that described UFWH in terms of a human sustainability model.” Muelsch says that up to 130 students will participate in education abroad programs with a service component in 2010.

In addition, she says that in summer 2010, ASU’s Center for International Studies’ education abroad group going to Italy and Greece will incorporate a visit by as many as 30 students to the World Food Programme in Italy, following an initiative that was established by Marilyn Bradbard, executive director of the Auburn Abroad in Italy Program. Ashlee Romines, an ASU psychology and social work student active in the Food for the Hungry NGO in Rwanda and Uganda, also recently gave a presentation on hunger in Africa. Says Tomlin: “While study abroad programs are an essential element in better preparing our students to be globally competent, we must also instill a deeper commitment in students to be more aware of building sustainable relationships worldwide, and supporting world hunger programs is an excellent example of that type of commitment.”

Another college increasing its anti-hunger efforts is Harvard, which in October 2008 formed the Harvard College Global Hunger Initiative (GHI), whose efforts are focused mainly on advocacy, education, and action on issues regarding global food security, says Sarah Nam, a Harvard College senior and former president of the group. The group is now composed of 140 members, including both students and community activists, and is sponsored by three Harvard professors, Calestous Juma, Graeme Steele, and Thomas Burke. It is a member of four different networks fighting hunger, including UFWH.

In January 2010 the group helped implement a malnutrition treatment program in Rukungiri, Uganda, through the Initiative to End Child Malnutrition, a collaborative initiative between GHI and the Massachusetts General Hospital Division of Global Health and Human Rights, Nam says. Rukungiri is in one of poorest districts in Uganda, and currently does not have a formal malnutrition treatment program. Three students from GHI traveled to Rukungiri to train nurses and local health workers on a Child Mal-



Two University of Guelph students pose with food they collected for the food bank before delivering it.

nutrition Treatment Protocol. The Protocol, developed by Global Health and Human Rights, has been translated into an interactive teaching curriculum by GHI members.

WFP's Coutts says that the range of anti-hunger activities at universities with anti-hunger programs varies widely, with only about 10 to 20 universities and colleges in the country "hav[ing] evolved to the point Auburn is on this issue. Most of the programs are specific to one area. Some focus on this issue in their nutrition departments, while others focus on it in their international development programs. There is little focused as hunger studies per se."

Henton is also encouraging hunger activism globally. In addition to annual U.S.-based university hunger summits, UFWH held its first conference in Rome last April, which was organized around U.S. universities with education abroad programs in that country, with participation from universities in Italy and across Europe. She is also emphasizing the potential of UFWH at various international university gatherings, such as the Asian Conference on the Social Sciences to be held in Osaka, Japan in June 2010.

Henton's message appears to have reached fertile soil in Canada with the decision of one of Canada's large universities, Ontario-based University of Guelph, to join UFWH and attempt to organize Canadian institutions in a manner similar to what Henton is attempting to do in the United States.

"I think there is a significant shift on both sides of the border toward recognition of how important it is to take a leadership role in fighting hunger in the developed and developing worlds," says Guelph President Alastair Summerlee. "In fighting hunger, we realize we have it in our own cities. In Canada, there's a sense of much more willingness and a recognition that we need to do more. And I get the sense there's that feeling in the United States, too."

Summerlee notes that such efforts are in keeping with an emphasis on public service at Guelph: "We have a long history of a number of things that are quite significant related to issues around development, including poverty and a focus on issues related to food, the environment, health, and communities, with a theme of sustainability running through them all. Food availability, security, sustainability, and accessibility are all part of that."

Summerlee says that Guelph activities include courses related to such topics at the graduate and undergraduate levels and specific courses related to poverty, such as a first year undergraduate interdisciplinary seminar on world poverty targeting the UN Millennium Development Goals that started about four years ago, as well as seminars relating to local inner city poverty. The school boasts a venerable international development program, with 700 to 800 of the school's 16,000 undergraduates in that one major and many of them focusing on poverty.

"At Guelph, the culture is to be supportive in community and abroad," says Gavin Armstrong, communications commissioner for Guelph's Central Students Association (CSA). "On campus, the CSA runs a food bank where if you can't afford a meal, you can get free food. We also offer a meal exchange, part of a [Canadian] national program run by students where students donate meals to address local hunger. One event we offer is Trick or Eat—where students on Halloween go trick or treating but for food."

Many large land-grant state schools like Auburn are natural leaders in anti-hunger efforts because they have large agriculture programs, are already community-development focused through their extension programs, and often are well-established in developing countries.

Another land-grant university active in anti-hunger issues is South Carolina-based Clemson University. Brenda Vander Mey, UFWH's



campus contact and a Clemson sociology professor, says that Clemson has highlighted hunger issues with events around World Food Day, including food collections, displaying educational materials in the main library, and compilations of information on South Carolina service and research entities that address the problems of hunger, poverty, and homelessness. Another annual event is CROP (Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty) Walk, in which participants attempt to eradicate poverty in various cities, municipalities, and abroad by obtaining pledges for hunger eradication and walking over a distance of typically five to 10 kilometers. Vander Mey says that 75 percent of funds raised through such walks go for anti-hunger work overseas, while 25 percent are provided to the local food bank.

Vander Mey says Clemson has been working toward establishing an interdisciplinary outreach program called Landscape for Learning on the Caribbean island of Dominica. Part of that program will establish demonstrations in organic gardening and sustainable agriculture, with students from Clemson and from South Carolina primary and middle schools partnering with primary and middle school students

at three schools in Dominica. She says that at least 30 Clemson students, primarily undergraduate, have participated in the program to date.

World Food Day

Newer efforts to address world hunger issues complement more venerable offerings. World Food Day, held annually on October 16, is a worldwide event designed to increase awareness, understanding, and informed, year-around action to alleviate hunger. A capstone effort of the event in the United States for the last 26 years has been production and dissemination to universities and other institutions of a three-hour block of programming related to hunger issues.

“More and more universities have a course like global issues required in the freshman year,” says Patricia Young, national coordinator for the U.S. National Committee for World Food Day. “We complement that with our annual broadcast of a teleconference providing study materials and encouraging them to become good global citizens. It’s a three-hour program, including a first hour discussing international efforts on topics related to hunger, a middle hour that

Volunteers and food bank coordinators help deliver food on “delivery day” of a meal exchange program at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada.



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is dark to allow schools to have local programming and discussion and to come up with questions, and a third hour that is interactive, where they can call to talk to hunger experts. We have hundreds of colleges signed up for the program.”

Advocacy Influences Policy

When campuses work together with relief organizations, the results can be impressive. Professors and students from the Delhi University and other Indian institutions played a critical role in organizing advocacy efforts and producing research on policies to mitigate hunger used in legal arguments before the Indian Supreme Court that resulted in a series of landmark decisions relating to food rights, says Vivek Srinivasan, a PhD candidate at Syracuse University who earlier served as a full-time staff member for India's Right to Food Campaign after obtaining a master's degree in economics from Delhi School of Economics.

Srinivasan says such court decisions included ones mandating, among other things, that the nation's government-run schools, which serve more than 90 percent of all school-going children in India, must provide a school lunch to their students.

“The right to life is a fundamental right recognized in the Indian Constitution and we approached the Supreme Court of India in 2001 using this premise,” says Srinivasan, whose doctoral work concerns the delivery of public services in the southern Indian state of Tamilnadu. “We argued that if there is something called a right to life then a right to food should follow from it. The Supreme Court agreed to take on the litigation, and it resulted in interim orders by the Supreme Court to the state and central governments to implement a variety of programs related to hunger.”

Coutts says other traditionally hunger-challenged countries are even farther along: “the World Food Programme is trying to work itself out of a job. Many countries have developed their own local community development programs to the point where we can step back and phase out our assistance. Brazil, for example, now has a national school feeding program, which had earlier been started with the assistance of the WFP that involves its universities and we at the WFP are no longer there.”

The most successful anti-hunger programs in poorer countries involve programs tied to economic development, says one food policy expert. “The Indian program is wrongheaded in that it is mainly oriented to handouts—it's free this or that,” says George Kent, a professor of political science at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, who has written extensively on food security issues, including a book now being prepared on ending hunger worldwide. “To me, emphasizing handouts is a disempowering approach. I think a more successful approach is to view the main function of government as not to feed people but rather to establish enabling conditions that

allow them to provide for themselves, either by producing their own food or obtaining employment to gain the means to buy food. China has been doing a terrific job reducing numbers of hungry people if you compare the present to the Pearl Buck days when it was a center of famine. In recent years, they have been reducing the problem quickly not through handouts but through work. They are doing wonderful things, such as making things for export to Wal-Mart and through fisheries—China alone produces two-thirds of the world's aquaculture, which also boosts animal protein intake in the country.”

For some students like Keller, an international experience abroad is the galvanizing event in spurring their interest in hunger issues. “I got involved [in the Committee of 19] in my freshman year,” says Keller. “I was searching for what to get involved with. I had already been to Haiti, which is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, and to Ecuador while I was in high school. At Auburn, I was trying to find something that makes a difference in the world and that related to what I want to do in the future. I was hooked after the first meeting. What impressed me was that they were really doing something that would make a difference; it was not just students complaining about the issue. They were educating other students, raising money for food banks, and raising money for world food programs.”

Keller, whose major is human development and family studies with a concentration in public policy and legislation, last year finished a four-month internship at the WFP headquarters in Rome, part of her college's requirement for an internship by graduation.

Her volunteer work is in line with her career goals: “My dream job would be to work for the World Food Programme and make other people passionate about the issue. As one person, you can't do a lot to get rid of hunger but you can empower others to do it.”

Students Fighting Hunger at Home

Even U.S. students who cannot spend time abroad fighting hunger can pursue worthy substitutes at their home campuses, say some.

“Given the great frustration that not enough students can study abroad, we ask how we can internationalize them if they aren't involved in international studies,” Coutts says. “We can do that with domestic hunger. There are lots of similar issues with Darfur, so they can do it at home. This is not just about going to Darfur and living in a tent. In my Hunger 101 class, 15 percent of the grade in class is composed of a measurement of students' community service, such as working in food banks.”

There is no doubt that harnessing the power of university students and faculty can produce impressive fundraising and social action.

In August students from North Carolina State University, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, UNC-Wilmington, Duke University, NC Central University, and Peace College packaged



1,031,776 meals for the international charity organization Stop Hunger Now, according to that group. Meals packaged during the group's University Million Meal Event 2009 were used to feed school children in some of the world's most impoverished areas, such as Haiti, Kenya, and Nicaragua. As the UNC-CH event ended, a truck was loaded with the lifesaving meals to feed the hungry in Kenya.

"Universities coming together to package meals is a perfect way to start a movement," says Ray Buchanan, founder and president of Raleigh, N.C.-based Stop Hunger Now. "When students come together to learn facts about hunger and to take action, that is a powerful point in a person's life." Buchanan says roughly one third of his 50,000 volunteers are college students.

Students at the University of Rhode Island benefit from that institution's role managing the State of Rhode Island's outreach effort for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp program. "Our state government is decimated as far as workers and staff, so having students as outreach workers prepare for re-



Auburn University student Emma Keller during Hunger Awareness Week.

Universities Fighting World Hunger

UFWH, a not-for-profit organization based in Auburn, Alabama, was founded to implement an action agenda for students and faculty that encompasses hunger awareness and consciousness-raising, fundraising, advocacy, and academic initiatives that aim to create university communities that are fully engaged in the effort to eliminate world hunger. More information about UFWH will be available at the 2010 NAFSA Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, booth number 518.

ipient interviews, follow up after interviews, problem solve, hand hold, and help potential recipients with applications is a fabulous way for students to help people and learn about hunger policies and government," says Kathleen Gorman, director of the Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America at the University of Rhode Island, started in 1999 as an academic center focused on hunger. The center, which functions as a small department, has offered a hunger and poverty class for the past 10 years, and now offers a hunger studies minor and conducts nutrition-related research.

Gorman says that new courses will be offered this spring that are interdisciplinary in nature and hunger related, including one offered by a professor in animal science entitled "Animal Agriculture, Food Policy, and Society" and another offered by nursing faculty and related to health issues of hunger and poverty. "These are key opportunities to extend the focus on hunger to students across the curriculum," Gorman says.

Technological advances are also enabling students to have more robust international experiences with-

out leaving their home campuses. Athens, Ohio-based Ohio University last summer debuted a graduate student course that uses the Internet to provide direct video instruction from a university hunger expert in Khartoum, Sudan, on the topic of how best to provide emergency food and nutrition relief efforts. Offered by Ohio University's African Studies Program and the Institute for the African Child, "Feeding in Emergency Situations" is taught from Sudan via the Internet by Osama Awad Salih, an associate professor in health and nutrition at Al-Ahfad University for Women in Omdurman, Sudan. The course was developed using the technical expertise of Ohio University's Center for International Studies Associate Director for Instructional Technology and Design Ismail Elmahdi. He says that the summer course's success will lead it to be offered on a regular basis at Ohio University—potentially as one of African Studies' core courses—and that he hopes to increase the program's technical capabilities to allow direct video interaction between students at Ohio University and Al-Ahfad University.

Salih, speaking by Internet connection from Sudan, says that the course better allows its audience of crisis assistance providers to target their efforts to realities on the ground. "Most of the assistance is usually from the Western world, so the problem on the ground is often different from what is perceived in the West," says Salih. "The gap can be fixed through this link between African and American universities, which allows them to get direct information from the field. Many times, for example, the relief provided is foods that the natives don't eat or don't like."

Until Universities Fighting World Hunger, there had been no concerted effort to band together and work to fight hunger by means of both a grassroots student campaign and a long-term academic agenda.

Drastic Changes Necessary

Some professors contend that radical approaches to addressing ongoing hunger are necessary and are actually taking steps in that direction.

“There has been a lack of vision and motivation toward addressing hunger that has not been adequate at the global level,” says the University of Hawaii’s Kent. “I’ve begun thinking, ‘who is motivated to do this?’ and the answer is the hungry—so I’ve asked how can they be mobilized on their own as communities. I’m advocating creation of local food policy councils to serve as a locus at which people could raise and address food issues that matter locally.”

Kent advocated creation of a Food Policy Council in American Samoa during a conference on food security there in February 2009. The idea was formally adopted in October 2009 when the governor of American Samoa signed an executive order establishing the American Samoa Food Policy Council to provide recommendations on how to strengthen food security there. Chairing the council is an academic, Daniel Aga, dean of the Community and Natural Resources Division of American Samoa Community College.

“The problem of health and food security is a broad problem, and we needed a food systems approach to examine it comprehensively and a lead agency to give sustained attention to the problem in a comprehensive manner and bring in different agencies to work together,” Aga says. While there is little of the chronic hunger associated with extreme conditions in Africa in American Samoa, he says obesity and iron deficiencies are serious nutrition issues confronting the island.

While supportive of the push for policy action at many universities, Keith West, professor at Johns Hopkins University, notes that the basic research role of universities should not be neglected and that sound research will better target all aspects of university anti-hunger efforts. “There is sometimes from the university point of view a notion of ‘we know all that we need to know and just need to act on it.’ The latter part, that we need to get on with it, is true. What isn’t true is that we know it all. There are huge challenges to more quickly and accurately diagnose nutritional problems in populations. Part of that is not knowing what the problem is. While we know a great deal, we don’t know it all. Such knowledge becomes the lifeline of future policies.”

West, whose research has focused on identifying and addressing vitamin deficiencies, notes that such research can save lives on a massive scale, but even with vigorous efforts can require decades to implement: “In Nepal, in the early 1980s, we did a large study of 30,000 children showing that we could reduce mortality 30 percent by adding an occasional supplement of Vitamin A. We then orga-

nized a workshop on policy for the Nepal government agencies and the UN agencies to help pull together necessary parties to formulate a national policy to avoid Vitamin A deficiencies. By 1994 to 1995, the first part of a national program was rolled out by partner agencies engaged in the challenge. Over the next four years the program went to poor places in the country and was able to roll out every six months in eight new districts to eventually become a national program. Now the supplement program reaches 85 percent of children in Nepal and is saving 20,000 to 25,000 child lives per year.”

As evidenced by students and faculty getting involved in solving the global hunger crisis, colleges and universities can make a difference in saving lives. Esther Ngumbi, originally from Kenya, is a living example of someone whose firsthand experience shows the progress fighting hunger can make.

“Esther, who thrives today as a PhD student speaks forcefully while eloquently about her experiences as a child attending school and benefitting from our (World Food Programme’s) school feeding program,” explains Coutts. “She attributes the food she received from that program as being critical to her survival as a child. Imagine this story and how it resonates with students hearing her in class lectures who think they know school lunch programs such as the federal government runs in U.S. public schools—they begin to realize the critical importance of access to good and nutritious food as this

key stage of life. Without it, would she be a PhD candidate today? What about those programs right here in their own hometowns? Maybe these are also critically important for those who have access to them? Such personal testimonials make a huge difference in getting through to students. Also helps them to realize that so much more connects us than separates us in the world and that globally suffering and needs are pretty similar.”

Esther is just one person whose life was transformed by a hunger program, and now she is giving back to higher education by educating others. And if institutions collaborate with other universities and organizations dedicated to the cause, even greater strides can be made faster—and more lives can not only be saved, but they can also be transformed. Today’s students and educators recognize that living in the global village of the twenty-first century, feeding mouths is the first step to feeding minds and it is a global responsibility. **IE**

DAVID TOBENKIN is a freelance writer in Bethesda, Maryland. His last article for *IE* was “Border Crossing” on international exchange with Mexico for the regional supplement accompanying the September/October 2009 issue.

Fighting Hunger at Home

Read about how one Midwestern college is making a difference fighting hunger at home in this issue’s

Web Extra!, “Hunger Activism By Example,” at www.nafsa.org/webextra.