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## A Matter of Seconds: An Interpretive Study on Media Reporting of Life-threatened Children

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A MATTER OF SECONDS:  
AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF MEDIA REPORTING  
ON LIFE-THREATENED CHILDREN

by

James M. Kavanaugh

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
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Under the Supervision of Professor John Bender

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2011

A MATTER OF SECONDS:  
AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF MEDIA REPORTING  
ON LIFE-THREATENED CHILDREN

James M. Kavanaugh, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: John Bender

Based on the premise that journalists and media systems have an ethical responsibility to report on the issue of child mortality, this interpretive study examines the question of how they can do so effectively, with the possibility of inspiring generous action among their audiences. The study compares results from human science research on charitable giving to distant victims, with a set of interviews involving a diverse group of media specialists. In conclusion, while the media staff of nonprofit organizations, compared to journalists, tend to be more aware of social research related to charitable giving, as well as more comfortable with the concept of “advocacy” for sick remote children, there is one theme on which most media specialists tend to agree: They should tell the stories of life threatened children – and give voice to the voiceless – whether the young ones live in the United States or in faraway countries. The more debatable question is not if to report, but how.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Summary Statement:**

*Based on the premise that journalists and media systems have an ethical responsibility to report on the issue of child mortality, this interpretive study examines the question of how they can do so most effectively, with the possibility of inspiring generous, public action.* The study compares findings from human science research on charitable giving to distant victims with interviews of a diverse group of media specialists. As revealed in the exchange of views, there is no single way to cover the stories of remote sick children, who according to UNICEF (2010c), die every few seconds from preventable illnesses. On the contrary, the participants' responses form a quilt of possibilities, weaving between areas of specialized knowledge, while exposing boundaries of professional traditions, as well as regions of agreement and unexplored territories for creative initiative. In conclusion, while the media staff of nonprofit organizations tend to be more aware than journalists of research related to charitable giving, and more comfortable with the concept of "advocacy," there is a central theme on which most media specialists would agree: They *should tell the stories* of life threatened children – or give voice to the voiceless – whether the young ones live in the United States or distant nations. The more divisive question is not if to report, but how.

### **Key Terms:**

- "*Journalists and media systems*": The focus of this thesis is the relationship between our primary systems of mass media (i.e., Internet, television, newspaper, and radio), which includes journalists and organizations producing and disseminating world news, and the global issue of child mortality. Saving the lives of distant young ones requires

ongoing awareness of their life threatening situations; of cost effective solutions; and of transparent, accountable, and effective charities. The most useful vehicle for this awareness raising is mass media.

- *Child mortality rate:* U.N. Millennium goal No. 4.A. calls for a two-thirds reduction of the under-5 child mortality rate between 1990 and 2015 (UNICEF, 2010b). This roughly amounts to 11,000 deaths a day. Such a figure would unquestionably be a marked decrease from the current daily loss of 22,000 children. The goal, however, does not include children 6 years and older and still allows for thousands of avoidable deaths each day. From a moral perspective, the only acceptable number is zero. Nonetheless, for practical purposes of this discussion, any mortality reduction near the U.N. goal can be considered significant.

- *Distant children:* For most people, it is easier to give to their own children, or those in their local communities, than little ones of different ethnicities, languages, and skin colors in faraway lands. The largest number of children in life-threatening situations, however, resides in remote villages on other continents. The two regions farthest behind on survival indicators are sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the under-5 mortality rate exceeded 50 per 1,000 live births in 2008, with South Asia at 76 and sub-Saharan Africa at 144 (UNICEF, 2009).

- *Life-threatening circumstances:* According to UNICEF and other relief agencies, most of the 22,000 daily deaths are preventable with low-cost, proven interventions such as expanding programs for immunization, breastfeeding, mosquito nets, and clean water. Lack of safe water and proper sanitation is the world's single largest cause of illness. In 2002, 42 percent of households worldwide had no toilet and one in six people had

no access to clean drinking water. Some 4,500 children die each day from polluted water and lack of sanitation facilities. Countless others suffer from poor nutrition.

(UNICEF, 2009)

- *Effective reporting:* Assuming that a majority of U.S. citizens can regularly give a reasonable portion of their income, passing up on a daily soda, bottled water, or latte, how can journalists and mass media systems, drawing upon human science research and practical knowledge, help to motivate more people to contribute to the reduction of child mortality? For example, we know that citizens can respond generously during natural disasters with an increase in media coverage (Brown & Minty, 2006). In four days the nation contributed \$150 million in relief for the Haitian earthquake victims. Charitable donations for the Indian Ocean tsunami reached \$1.9 billion. In spite of an inconsistent pattern of whom U.S. citizens choose to help, and what mass media decides to cover, (Armstrong et al. 2006, Oppenheimer & Olivola, 2011), both often overlooking those in most need, the collective capacity of the United States to give to unknown victims exists. It always has. And through regular, thoughtful, and inspirational coverage, or effective storytelling, journalists and news organizations can unleash this potential to help save life-threatened children.

- *Human science research:* There is a growing body of experimental and field-based research identifying a core set of factors that stimulate charitable giving to unknown victims, as well as factors that inhibit such generosity (Oppenheimer & Olivola, 2011). One of critical motivators is the perception of relational or social closeness (Small, 2011). The more people feel an emotional connection to a distant child in need, or the more they can identify with the other's predicament, the greater the possibility that they may help.

For a concerned journalist, this may mean telling stories in ways that increase the perceived proximity of victims, and create a felt connection.

### **Interpretive Methodology:**

This hermeneutic or interpretive inquiry is based on a cross examination of three bases of knowledge or conceptual horizons:

- (1) *Presuppositions* – or the author’s assumptions, referred to by Heidegger (1927) as “forestructures” and Gadamer (1989) as “preunderstandings:” i.e., the gravity of child mortality as a global issue and the ethical imperative of journalists to help;
- (2) *The larger context* -- empirical data from social, psychological, and mass media research related to charitable giving and/or responsive action with life-threatened strangers; and
- (3) *Texts for analysis* – a set of 19 interviews with journalists and media specialists who represent different approaches to news coverage of the child mortality issue.

Whereas phenomenology seeks to describe the main themes and conceptual structures that shape our world views, like uncovering the architectural plans of a home, hermeneutics tries to penetrate the meaning of its expressions, like speech and action (Polkinghorne, 1983). Long ago the term “hermeneutics” referred only to the interpretation of sacred texts. Today it represents a general philosophy of understanding. In a hermeneutic paradigm, meaning is rarely obvious. In order to comprehend a world news article, for example, we have to engage with its words, story, and context, making meaningful links between them. Knowing emerges from our conceptual interactions



(Dilthey, 1900). Once inside a news article, our attention shifts back and forth between the story and its context, as well as our expectations and reflections. We alternate between a broad sense of the whole and a focus on the parts. Each learning cycle increases our comprehension. Humans make sense, in Dilthey's terms, in a "hermeneutic circle." The penetration of a story's meaning, explains Gadamer (1985), or "correct understanding," emerges from a "fusion of horizons," a synthesis of our experience, culture, history, and assumptions. We grasp a pattern that links the various parts or horizons, arriving at conclusions that represent our best interpretations.

Making sense of a complex phenomenon like child mortality, and its relationship to our mass media, involves translation of words, as well as statistics. In contrast to prescribing a specific method, hermeneutics emphasizes a systematic process of moving back and forth between the larger context of a subject (i.e., child mortality, mass media, and charitable giving) and the various parts or voices (i.e., representatives of different forms of news coverage). In this iterative process of engagement and reflection, analysis and synthesis, conclusions can be drawn of "transferable" value, as opposed to "generalizability" (Koch, 1994). Therefore, in this interpretive study, a set of themes or intersubjective patterns emerge from the interviews of the participants, which increase understanding of the thesis issue.

### **Organization of Contents:**

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each representing a different horizon of knowledge.

#### *Chapter I: The Moral Case for Media Action*

Written in essay format, this chapter establishes the moral foundation for

increased media action on the issue of child mortality. It outlines the author's personal assumptions, influenced by philosopher Peter Singer, the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.

*Chapter II: The Statistics of Child Mortality*

In essay format, this chapter examines the sources and accuracy of statistics on child mortality, and how the numbers translate into real children, with names and parents, living in communities on other continents, particularly Asia and Africa.

*Chapter III: The Obstacles to Helping*

This essay explores the list of factors on why people do not contribute to the prevention of child mortality, including the historical lack of mass media attention. Unfortunately, for the children dying by the thousands each day, most media systems are profit-driven enterprises, in which financial considerations largely determine the kinds and extent of issues covered.

*Chapter IV: The Research on Giving to Distant Victims*

This essay presents a counterargument to Chapter III, drawing upon research findings on charitable giving to distant victims, making a case that we do have the capacity to solve the problem of child mortality, and that there are evidence-based principles to guide journalists and media specialists hoping to inspire news audiences. It includes research on media coverage during natural disasters, which supports the claim that intensive news coverage can impact levels of giving to unfamiliar victims.

*Chapter V: Media Conversations*

This final chapter presents the salient themes or interpretive patterns that emerged from a set of interviews conducted in the fall of 2011, with a variety of media-related

individuals, whose work overlapped in some way with the topic of child mortality. The 19 participants included ethicists, foreign correspondents, citizen journalists, and media staff of nonprofit charities. The identified themes, illustrated with interview excerpts, do not represent correlative relationships, but rather patterns in social thinking, which the author considers meaningful to better understand the media's role in the effort to reduce child mortality. The excerpts have been arranged to read like a group conversation or a coffee house talk, allowing for a comparison of opinions on the different themes. Two of the core questions include "What is your opinion about using your role as a journalist (or public relations officer, communication specialist, etc.) to advocate for children in life-threatening situations?" and "Are your media efforts guided by any principles from research or field experience that might inspire audiences towards charitable or helping action for distant victims?"



## CHAPTER I

### Reporting on the Pond:

#### The Moral Case for Helping Distant Children

“Remember the starving kids in Africa,” my mom would preach at dinner. The distant children seemed fictional, like foreign photos in the *National Geographics* on the coffee table. I needed her bitter reminders, that is, until life led me by surprise to some of the real children. After college graduation, on a search-for-the-self quest to Europe, I chose a less trodden path over the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco and Algeria, then crazily across the roadless Sahara to black Africa. When I eventually did find some clarity, weary of being a tourist and wanting to join the Peace Corps, I was in a cool mountain region of eastern Zaire. I had decided to get off a “matatu,” an overpacked van with people hanging on bumpers, in a crumbling mud hut village. An Australian traveler had taught me this random bus jump to “get a truer sense of an area.” From my lucky window seat, squeezed among breast feeding mothers, it looked like a genuine “middle of Africa.

It felt bitter cold, a sharp contrast from the sultry Congo basin. “Mzungu,” I heard children shouting, or “white man” in Swahili. When they surrounded me in their torn shorts and skinny bodies, wanting to touch my strange long hair, I noticed that a few of the younger ones had swollen bellies. The image triggered a rarely used, eerie sounding word into my awareness: “kwashiorkor.” I now associate it with a sad blank look of deprivation. The term comes from Ga (in the Kwa language of coastal Ghana), meaning “disease of the displaced or no longer suckled child.” It is a severe form of protein malnutrition, caused by an inadequate food supply based mostly on starches and

vegetables. Kwashiorkor disables the immune system, making a child susceptible to a host of infectious diseases.

I cried that night, unable to make sense of why I had been born in the white comfy suburb of San Carlos, California, and the children in a remote, distressed village of mountainous Zaire. “Why them and not me?” It was an ancient riddle. Birthplace seemed random and inequitable, even cruel. Yet the children had been so generous, holding my hand as they guided me through their beloved village, not a one begging for money or reaching for my backpack. In many villages of every other African country I had travelled, certainly in each city, the young had learned to beg to foreigners, to help feed their families, or sadly, to survive without parents. Before leaving the next day, I traded my Kelty pack and Adidas shoes for a natural weave sack and sandals of recycled tires. It seemed like a fair trade. Or maybe not, an ethics philosopher might argue. I still had my survivor’s pouch, secretly fastened to my waist, of traveler’s checks. And the lean children remained with little food.

Kwashiorkor, like pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria, is one of many preventable diseases that threaten the lives of children, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, who according to UNICEF (2010c), die at a rate of 22,000 a day, or one every few seconds. Every three or four seconds is a blink, a few breaths. One day of global child mortality is equivalent to 10 years of a 2004 Asian tsunami. It’s hard to imagine; harder to comprehend. A more significant contrast lies in our mental imagery. While many citizens might recall the extraordinary TV footage of the tsunami, few have memories of distant fragile children dying silently from pneumonia. How many of us think of them during a typical day? It may take a conscious effort, and even visual reminders. In my

room hangs a picture of an African child. Below the photo is a note with the number 22,000, divided by 24 hours a day, then by 60, rounded off to 15 per minute, which if divided into 60 seconds, equals “every four seconds.” Whether or not this child mortality rate is a rough estimate, anywhere near such numbers should belong on an emergency care list for humanity, along with climate change and species extinction. It is a monumental loss of lives, incomparable to any natural disaster.

According to philosopher, Peter Singer, a long-time advocate for distant child victims, none of us should ever forget them, and those with enough resources to meet their basic needs, should do something to help. Singer argues that people who can give, should donate a portion of their income to nonprofit organizations with a proven capacity to treat and prevent children’s diseases. In 2008 interview by the author with Dr. Singer, he restated his moral challenge using an analogy of a child drowning in a pond, in need of heroic rescue by an adult passerby:

The simplest reason for me to explain why we have an obligation to give to those who are much poorer than us, is that it’s quite easy for us to do so. It’s like rescuing a small child, who you see has fallen into a pond and all you have to do is wade into the pond and pull the child out. Everyone would do that. If you asked people if it would be wrong to ignore the child and just walk by, everyone would agree it would be wrong. Well, there are in fact millions of children who are dying from preventable diseases throughout the world and we can help them, just as easily as wading into a pond. It wouldn’t take very much if each of us were to give, let’s say one dollar out of every 100 dollars we earn. That would be enough to pull these millions of children out of danger of dying from preventable

diseases, and to enable their families to grow more food and to provide education.

We really could do it without any great sacrifice. And given how much it would mean to these people, we ought to do it.

We can do so, and so we ought to, simple as that. It is our moral obligation, asserts Singer, as fellow humans. “The great majority of American people,” he added in the interview, “do have something that is beyond what they need, that they can afford to spend. It will vary according to income, but there is always something.” Singer gave examples of the beer, lattes, bottled water, and other extras we buy. “Those two dollars,” he stressed, “are more than a day’s earnings for much of the world’s population.” At the interview’s end, while the philosopher acknowledged that people may decide to give their money to other important causes such as global warming, child mortality is an “immediate issue, an emergency,” he explained, with children dying as we speak, drowning in a bottomless pond.

Child mortality is also a human rights issue. In 1948 the U.N. General Assembly adopted a milestone document called the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” which for the first time in human history, set forth the minimal living conditions expected for all people, including indigent families in remote African villages. The “right to life” is a basic principle, as well as a “standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services,” in addition to “security in the event of sickness.” (United Nations, 1948, Articles #1 and #25). In other words, on whatever continent a child is born, he or she has the right to live, grow, and develop. To further ensure this global ethic, 11 years later the U.N. General Assembly adopted the “Declaration on the Rights of the Child ” (United



Nations, 1959,) proclaiming in its Preamble that every child, “by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth” (p. 1). This document specifies that all children “be entitled to grow and develop in health,” and “to this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services” (p. 1, Article #4). In 1989, these children’s rights became a universally accepted and legally binding set of obligations, defined in a UN treaty referred to as the “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” In sum, any child who dies from a preventable illness, anywhere in the world, dies from international neglect, of his or her legal rights.

Child mortality is also a media neglect issue. If all adults should care for sick children, if it is their human right to be protected, if most Americans need reminders of their plight, and if a root purpose of mass media is to make us aware of local and global events, then journalists and news organizations should help to save their lives. “Help to save” means that a reporter of child mortality can raise awareness and inspire compassion in an audience, hopefully expanding their boundaries of human caring. Or to use a term of Peter Singer’s (2010), a journalist can help to create “cultures of giving,” communities concerned with the welfare of sick distant children. “I really don’t think of the kids over there,” a neighbor said. “I don’t hear of them in the news.” No news means no awareness and thus, no caring. Although earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and wars can gain the attention of our news media and busy neighbors with a tragic loss of human lives, distant children who die every few seconds from preventable causes, unfortunately seldom do. It’s a big snag, because even with sound moral arguments, universal rights declarations,

and multiple indicator data on child mortality, a successful rescue mission of such vast numbers of children has to include informing the world, regularly and effectively, of their ongoing plight. As un-newsworthy or unmarketable as dying children in remote poor villages may appear to media systems, their stories should be told. Assuming that it is the moral duty of able citizens to give what they can to reduce child mortality, it is the ethical responsibility of journalists to “give voice to the voiceless” (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). Someone needs to report the tragedies in the pond.

## CHAPTER II

### The Mix of U5MR: Good Enough Numbers

Statistics do not show human tears (Brodeur, 1995). Numbers can feel cool, intangible, and distant, a step removed from a concrete entity of more importance. In the term “five people,” for example, which word stands out the most? Numbers are symbols that refer to quantities of things, like human beings, and the larger the figures, the more they can blur their references. “Twenty-two thousand children dying each day.” What exactly does that mean? According to UNICEF (2010c), that is the child mortality rate estimated on a daily basis for children 0 - 5 years. An average citizen, however, more inclined to understand events through stories or images, might struggle with such a complex statistic. He or she could use an analogy to make the data more tangible. For example, 22,000 lives is equivalent to the disappearance of a small town every 24 hours. It sounds like a science-fiction movie, but one might better grasp the alarming scope of this perpetual loss.

Movies can also add feeling to numbers. In a poignant, romantic comedy, *The Girl in the Café* (Yates, 2005), an aging and lonely researcher for the British government named Lawrence, played by Bill Nighy, is preparing his statistics for a G-8 summit discussion on the U.N. Millennium Goal to reduce extreme poverty. During a work break Lawrence walks to a crowded café, where he meets Gina, an enigmatic Scottish woman with little to do, portrayed by Kelly MacDonald. They get together for a few meals, equally pleased to have company, until the shy official finds the courage to invite the younger Gina to accompany him to the summit in Reykjavik. Bored in the hotel

room while Lawrence meets with his associates, Gina reads his conference materials that include the U.N. statistics on child mortality. When he returns she comments on the shocking numbers, and suggests that they might have more emotional impact if presented with photographs: “It would make it feel more real.” Lawrence responds with empathy: “It’s all very bad now...I remember when the terrible tsunami struck, with that grim death toll of 250,000. That’s an average week (of losses) for the poor.”

As the summit convenes with protests raging outside the hotel, an increasingly bold Gina accompanies Lawrence to meals, taking the opportunity to share her opinions with the wealthy nation leaders. The film reaches a tense climax at a formal dress dinner when Gina interrupts a toast by the U.K.’s prime minister, questions the G-8’s slippery stance on the millennium goals, and brings the dying kids to life at the table: “My friend here tells me that while we are eating, a hundred million children are nearly starving. There are millions of kids that would kill for the amount of food left on the side of our plates. Children who are then so weak that they will die if a mosquito bites them. And so they do die, one every three seconds.” Gina snaps her fingers. “There they go.” She snaps again. “And another one. Anyone who has kids knows that every mother and father in Africa must love their children as much as we do. And to watch your kids die, to watch them die, and then to die yourself in trying to protect them, that’s not right.”

It’s the snapping of her fingers that awakens the audience, the translation of an abstract, five-digit number to a few seconds, the time span of a breath. Tic...toc...tic... “There goes another one,” she reminds the nation leaders, along with the movie viewers, skillfully making the numbers penetrate our thick skin. A reliable statistic for a child rights advocate, even if only a close approximation to social reality, can confirm the

severity of a problem and gain public attention, as if stamping the issue with a seal of scientific approval (Franklin, 2006). Cold digits may not arouse warm feelings (Slovic, 2007), but they can be translated into more tangible forms of communication. Tic...toc... It's harder to forget the haunting death count of seconds, than a monthly rate of child mortality. Such an intuitive understanding can even lead to more thinking, and to a line of reasonable questioning: Is it really three seconds, or four, six, or ten? Do thousands actually die each day, or is this a generalization? Does a week, month, or year provide a better estimate? Who are these young people and where do they live? Why do so many of them die? Who even knows such answers and how do they know? In sum, there is more worth knowing than just 22,000, or every few seconds.

U5MR – it sounds like a science code. It's the acronym for the under-5 mortality rate, a barometer of child well-being for the United Nations, and a critical statistic for international organizations to make informed decisions on aid. Unfamiliar to most people, it is a product of complex statistical measurement, based on a variety of sources such as the nutritional status and health knowledge of mothers, level of immunization, access to maternal health services, family income, and availability of food, clean water, and basic sanitation. U5MR represents a “probability,” expressed as a rate of 1,000 live births, of a child born in a specific year dying before reaching age 5 (UNICEF et. al, 2011). As a best estimate it provides an aerial view of the health status of a majority of children, even a whole society. The numerical versions of U5MR, such as 22,000 deaths a day, can influence global policy, or when reduced to seconds, may even stir emotions, especially if accompanied by names and images.

IGME – another cryptic acronym, referring to the Interagency Group for Child

Mortality Estimation. Formed in 2004 to set best practices for assessing levels and trends for infant and child mortality, it consists of representatives from UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Division (UNPD), and academic specialists. IGME is the world's calculator of U5MR, the main data source to measure each country's progress on the U.N. Millennium goal No. 4.A: to reduce the under-5 mortality rate by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015. In 1990 the U5MR among developing nations was 100 deaths per 1,000 births, or one of every 10 children. On a global scale, the rate was 12.5 million, or if divided by 365 days, roughly 34,000 a day. A two-thirds reduction by 2015 would mean a daily loss of 11,000 children, or half of today's rate, more or less. This extraordinary ability to measure national progress on the U.N. goal of child mortality comes from IGME (UNICEF et al., 2011). How they do it is no simple matter. In fact, the terminology sounds like alchemy.

IGME uses "MICS" – or "multiple indicator cluster surveys," kind of a tongue twister. It's easier to just say "mix," which it is. It refers to a household survey initiative launched by UNICEF to help countries fill data gaps needed to monitor the living conditions of women and children. MICS gather information on a long list of indicators: i.e., age, sex, birth registration, orphanhood, breastfeeding, immunizations, Vitamin A, illnesses, literacy, education, child labor, Vitamin A, use of iodized salt, ownership of goods, use of insecticide mosquito nets, access to clean water, and durability of housing. These cluster surveys reportedly produce statistically sound estimates for various social indicators, like the U5MR, required for monitoring the goals of the U.N. Millennium Declaration. Since 1995 nearly 200 surveys have been conducted in approximately 100 countries and territories. (UNICEF, 2005, UNICEF et al., 2011).

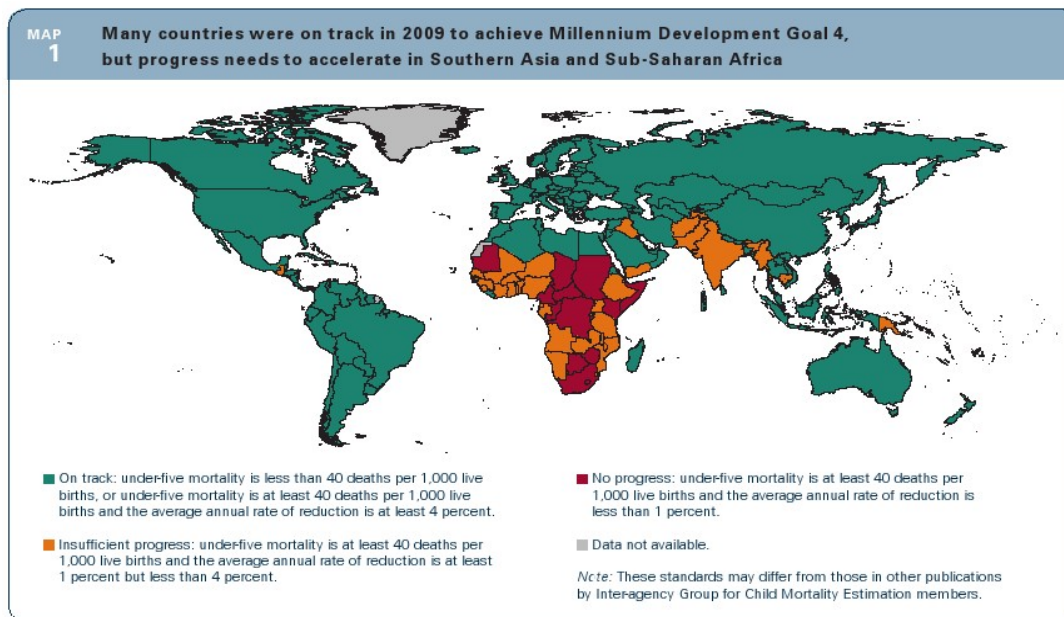
But MICS are only one source, used by IGME, to produce U5MR. There's more math. Using both direct and indirect methods, the consortium compiles data from all possible sources representative of a given country (UNICEF, 2005). Direct methods collect hard data like birth dates, survival status, and age at death, typical information found in vital registration systems, whereas indirect methods can utilize less detailed information available in national population censuses and general surveys. This diverse mix of data is analyzed, with some sources requiring special methods of calculation, commonly yielding different estimates of child mortality for a given place. For example, indigent women in remote villages are frequently missed by household surveys, censuses, and vital registrations, which results in understated levels of child mortality. In order to minimize such errors and harmonize trends over time, UNICEF developed an estimation methodology with its IGME partners (UNICEF, 2005). In plain terms, it explores probabilities, hoping to derive numbers closer to social reality.

It does sound a bit like the language of subatomic physics. When the diverse data is synthesized, they produce a mathematical model, fitted to a regression line, which can estimate "trends" in child mortality (UNICEF, 2005). In sum, closeness does matter, just like in physics. A good approximation, derived year after year, ideally points politicians, planners, and citizens in the right direction. Because teams of international statisticians perform such intricate math with empirical integrity, it's hard to dismiss the magnitude of an estimate like 22,000 a day, and to not feel the weight of a child dying every few seconds.

How exact with the numbers does IGME, UNICEF, or their public relations staff need to be, given that victim statistics can generate a "psychic numbing" response

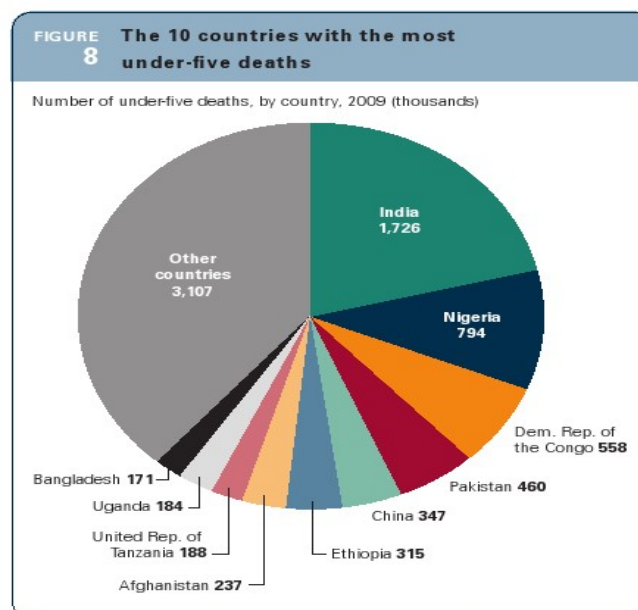
(Slovic, 2007) in a news audience? For a statistician, closer is better, of course. But average citizens, ready to stop their analysis with a stamp of scientific approval, may need more tangible information in order to make sense of the abstract figures. They may require a name, place, illness, or photo, “to make it feel more real,” as the girl in the cafe suggests. As if recognizing this challenge of statistics communication, IGME and UNICEF do provide such identifying information, adding flesh to their bare numbers. The mix of U5MR is made from real life bits of descriptive data. Their statisticians know, for example, that South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are far behind other regions on indicators of child mortality. In fact, a child born in sub-Saharan Africa faces a below-5 mortality rate that is 1.9 times higher than in South Asia, 6.3 times higher than in Latin America, and 24 times higher than in wealthy nations (UNICEF, 2010c). In simpler terms, one child in eight dies before age 5, compared to one in 167 in developed regions. While such geographical distinctions use numbers, with the ability to numb our emotions, they clearly point to the life-or-death influence of a child’s birthplace. And to make sure people see the contrasts, UNICEF provides a colored map. All the countries not making progress towards U.N. Millennium Goal No. 4.A, highlighted in red, are in Africa.





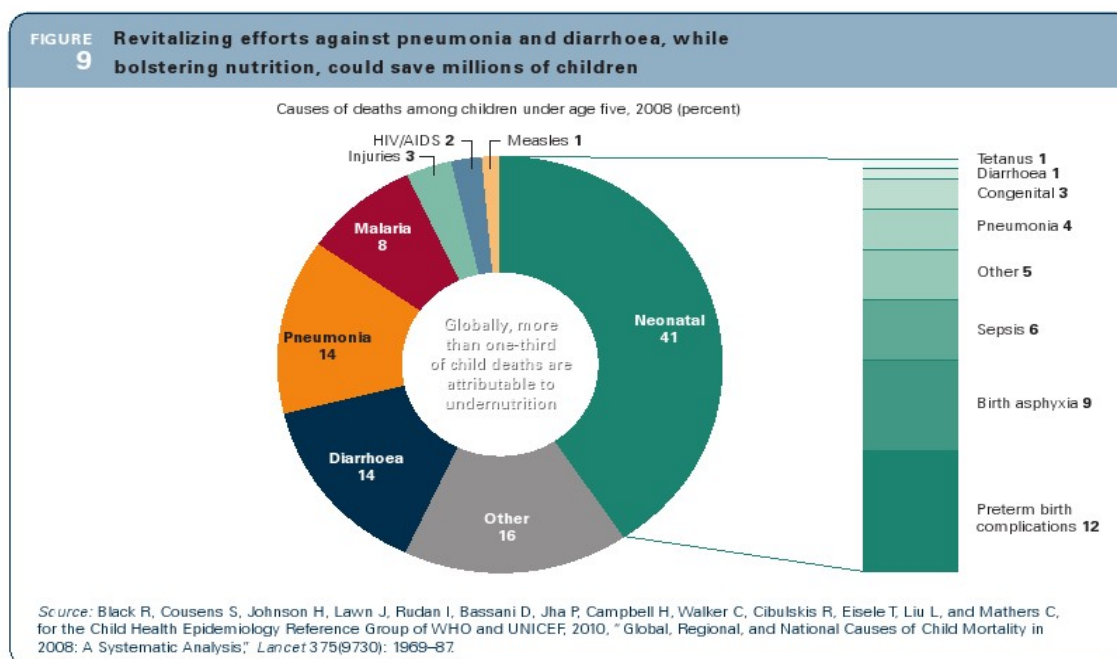
Source: UNICEF, 2011: Levels and trends in child mortality.

Whereas North Africa and East Asia have made significant progress in reducing under-5 mortality, according to IGME the problem has become increasingly concentrated in 10 nations: i.e., India, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Uganda Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Bangladesh. India and Nigeria combined account for nearly a third of the under-5 deaths worldwide.



Source: UNICEF, 2011: Levels and trends in child mortality.

But what are so many children dying from? IGME and UNICEF statisticians also provide this tangible piece of the story. The two biggest killers are pneumonia and diarrheal diseases, such as rotavirus. Then come malaria, injuries, and HIV/AIDS. In a sense, these are symptoms of root causes. What children actually die from are unhealthy conditions like malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of immunizations and access to medical care, or in two words, extreme poverty. The most indigent children are more vulnerable across all regions of the developing world, with below-5 mortality rates more than twice as high than for children from the wealthiest 20 percent of households. The majority of these little ones are born in remote rural villages. Three quarters of them die within a year. (UNICEF, 2011)



There is more difficult news to hear. These fatal conditions can be prevented with low cost interventions. Existing vaccines and antibiotics, for example, can significantly reduce deaths by pneumonia (Rudan et al., 2007). Rehydration salts and fluids can treat diarrheal illnesses. Because many diseases are water-borne, improved drinking water and sanitation methods are effective remedies, particularly for the 900 million people with no access to clean water, and half the developing world without adequate sanitation, a billion of whom continue to practice open defecation (UNICEF, 2011). Simple and inexpensive water treatment with bleach, along with safe water storage, has proven successful in preventing diarrhea (Migele et al., 2007). And then there is the insecticide-treated mosquito net, perhaps the most concrete solution for the average person to grasp, within the reach of 7 to 10 dollars, becoming a symbol for the efficacy of low cost aid. Without one, claims UNICEF (2011), every 30 to 45 seconds an African child dies from malaria.

Child mortality statistics come down to a matter of seconds to make the numbers real. Whether it's 22,000 or 18,000 dead children a day, a third from India and Nigeria, 14 percent from pneumonia and 13 percent from diarrhea, after awhile most people become numb, and hopefully conclude the figures are good enough. Statistical accuracy is only one ingredient for increased public awareness and responsive action. From a moral perspective, close enough should be adequate to make decisions. Any number, without an ethical value, has little meaning.

Even the term U5MR, "under-5 mortality rate," does not include the millions of children over 5. While the numbers do decrease after age 2, older children also die from diseases such as malaria and pneumonia, adding to the death toll. At some point, whether 5 or 10 or 30 seconds, most rational people will conclude: this is too many

children dying unnecessarily from preventable causes. And then, they are in the realm of human rights. At some reasonable stage of decision making, once the statisticians have done their job and empirically confirmed a global problem, the questions should shift from “how many” and “why,” to other regions in our brain, linking numbers, emotions, moral judgment, and generous action. “That’s not right,” concludes Gina, the girl in the café.

### CHAPTER III

#### **Birth as a Death Sentence: The Great Inertia to Helping**

If you are a child born in the war-torn Congo without a mosquito net, in a village surviving on plantain, drinking contaminated water from poor sanitation, nowhere near a medical facility with immunizations and antibiotics, the odds are stacked against you. They form a despairing wall of high probability, a death sentence in one year. For 75 percent of the some 264,000 children who die annually from preventable causes, life ends during their first 12 months (UNICEF, 2011). It ends prematurely because they contract a serious illness like pneumonia, diarrhea, or malaria, overloading their immune systems weakened from malnutrition. Usually the root causes are poor diet, lack of immunizations, poor sanitation, water contamination, and no mosquito nets -- each factor also a symptom of extreme poverty. Ultimately the children die because they do not receive medical treatment. Without proper help, the disease prevails.

Assuming that poor countries lack adequate medical care in rural areas, and can benefit from the financial assistance of wealthier nations, a common argument for the failure to reduce the high rates of child mortality, is the fragmentation and dysfunction of the global aid system (Hancock, 1994, Maren, 2002, Milanovic, 2005, Zimmerman, 2005, Easterly, 2007). Complaints of critics range from poor governments pocketing the relief money and rich nations directing its distribution for their political advantage, to questions about the efficacy of aid itself, the integrity of charity organizations, and even the rationale for saving lives in a hungry, overpopulated world of diminishing resources. In truth, it's hard to find a convincing counterclaim for an effective relief

system. While the U.S., for example, contributes the largest dollar amount to international aid, it's a mere 2 percent of its gross national income (GNI), and only 10 percent of this money goes to countries in most need (OECD, 2011). In 1970 the U.N. General Assembly agreed that "each economically advanced country" would contribute 7 percent of its GNI to "official development assistance" or ODA (United Nations, 1970, p. 33). Although the U.N. proposed to reach this goal by the mid-70's, the majority of wealthy nations have broken this promise for the past 41 years. And this "ODA" does not include adequate medication for the myriads of sick children in poor countries, or prevention measures for the countless at-risk of disease.

It's very complicated, admits the child advocate, Peter Singer, as with any global system (Singer, 2010). But relief organizations exist, he asserts, with transparent records of responsible fiscal management and reliable data on effective low-cost interventions. Therefore, if there is a fair chance of medicine and mosquito nets reaching distant sick children, it justifies United States citizens to undertake charitable efforts:

Whether the complications involve Dutch disease, bad institutions, or population growth, they introduce an element of uncertainty into our efforts to provide assistance. Nevertheless, some degree of uncertainty does not eliminate our obligation to give. If an aid project has a good chance of bringing great benefits to the poor, and the cost to us of making that aid project is comparatively minor, then we should still give the money (p. 125).

"Complicated," however, may be a mild term. Even if one believes that giving to distant victims has ethical merit, particularly since the U.S. consumes a fifth of the world resources with less than 5 percent of the human population (Worldwatch Institute, 2010),

and if one assumes that making an informed donation can save lives, the odds of getting help still do not favor unknown children in faraway lands. Evolution as well is against them. For millennia, humans have survived and evolved by selecting, protecting, and nurturing their kin or in-group (Allport, 1954, Hamilton, 1964, Buss, D., 2005). The universal instinct to “take care of one’s own” has deep genetic roots. Experimental research on charitable giving to unknown victims indicates a strong preference to give to one’s kind (Rachlin & Jones, 2008). The perception of a group affiliation increases helping behavior, especially when one views a victim as a member of his or her in-group, such as a fellow citizen. And the closer the perceived relationship, or the less attributed “social distance,” the more likely a person will help an unfamiliar other (Small & Simonsohn, 2006). Just knowing a victim’s friend, for example, can increase giving behavior. Unfortunately, for the majority of life threatened children in far off continents, such findings on proximity worsen their odds. The psychology of charity favors “identifiable,” nearby victims, with commonalities to the givers. It’s no surprise given our social evolution. Closeness evokes sympathy. But it’s not good news for a sick Asian child.

How can we possibly identify 22,000 children, one by one, dying daily in distant countries? It’s an impossible mission. In the research laboratory, a name or photo can prime people to pick a particular victim (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a). When children are presented in a group, or as a pair, one distinguishing feature can highlight a victim, trigger sympathy, and increase his or her chances of being helped (Small et al., 2007, Slovic, 2010). A name, face, or story can activate our quick, gut-mode of decision making, a core element of generosity (Slovic & Slovic, 2004). Of course, people don’t

live in laboratories where investigators provide money to give away, then display photos of children, and ask participants to select a favorite one to help. In real life one receives holiday letters from charities, email requests for disaster relief, and church pleas for distant aid projects. The emphasis is often “a cause,” not an identifiable person. Most citizens hear of death tolls, strings of long dry numbers, without names, faces, or stories. Words like “dying African children” trigger neural associations with statistics.

Ironically and tragically, after all the extensive work of international statisticians to measure the problem of child mortality, identify the areas of urgent need, and foster humanitarian action, the same statistics that they provide can shut people down. They can numb and jam our thought processes, claims cognitive psychologist, Paul Slovic (2007, 2010). A person’s slower, deliberative, and more rational mode of decision making, referred to as “System II,” in contrast to our reactionary, emotional “System I,” tends to freeze with big numbers like a computer on overload. If humans made helping decisions based on a studious review of severity of need, Slovic argues, if they gave more from hard data and less from emotions, we would not have the numbing figures of child mortality. The problem would already be solved, along with poverty, genocide, and climate change. Statistics and moral judgment would have overcome the in-group biases of social evolution. Or the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights would have, or certainly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All the numbers, which modern civilization accentuates in its mass media communications, and reason, which favors objective need over subjective likes, would have saved myriads of children. But people are also System I creatures.

Social action is driven more by emotions and less by statistics. Humans give



more to unknown victims in heartfelt moments, than from pauses of moral deliberation. Because of this tendency, “pet causes” overshadow greater ones. And the causes seem endless, with over a million charities in the U.S. alone. Deluged by email, radio, letter, newspaper, and TV solicitations, along with walkathons, runathons, swimathons, and knitathons, an average citizen faces nonstop demands from nonprofits for “joining or pledging,” “monthly or yearly,” and “check, card, or bank withdrawal” decisions. Charitable giving is no simple matter. In our culture of consumer of “hyperchoice” (Schor, 2004), it can feel as complex as choosing a cell phone or TV channels. So to simplify their giving decisions, people contribute most to familiar causes. Of the estimated \$211 million donated by citizens in 2010 to social concerns, 35 percent went to religion, 14 percent to education, 9 percent to human services, 8 percent for health, 8 percent for public-society benefit, and 5 percent for “international affairs,” mainly for the Haitian earthquake (Center on Philanthropy, 2011). Given the high value of faith-based organizations in American society, one can understand why this subsector has received the largest sum of contributions for the past 56 years. But this trend does not favor African children dying from pneumonia, unless religious institutions redistribute a reasonable portion of their donations to international relief agencies. Unfortunately, a church congregation is more likely to help a member’s child with a genetic disease, or even an entire country hit by natural disaster, than to use a credit card for child immunizations in Sudan. “Compassion is a fragile flower,” writes the psychologist Batson, “easily crushed by self concern” (Batson et al., 1983, p. 718).

Charitable giving to distant sick children is more than complicated. It’s a moral knot, needing a hero inside us to cut through knee jerk preferences, to consider severity

of need, to cross boundaries of social distance, and to embrace strangers, outside one's circle of giving. This isn't easy, living far from South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, in a culture of self-interest (Singer, 1995). There are many other reasons why people do not help child victims in foreign countries, such as thinking that "Others will help," "It's not my responsibility," "I don't have money," or "It's only a drop in the bucket" (Singer, 2011). But perhaps the great obstacle, next to a general lack of awareness of the chronic problem, is the dominance of self-concern. In a society of overconsumption, one's attention tends to focus on satisfying personal needs, particularly material ones (Schor, 1998). For Bangladesh parents struggling each day with extreme poverty, this is an understandable state of mind. They must worry about water, food, shelter, and clothes for their children to survive. While extreme poverty does exist in the U.S., it is not the norm. American children do not die every few seconds from contaminated water, poor sanitation, inadequate medical care, or malnutrition. Real poverty, explains Amartya Sen (1999), is a "lack of capabilities" that prevent people from realizing their values, such as caring for their children. In addition to an inability to pay for basic needs, extreme poverty means suffering with sickness, enduring chronic pain, coping with difficult social situations, facing community exclusion, feeling powerless, lacking access to information, silencing one's voice, losing self-confidence – and tragically, even losing one's children (Narayan et. al, 2000, 2002).

In sharp contrast, U.S. poverty is a "relative" condition (Cassidy, 2006). While people do struggle financially, they worry about paying for medical and utility services to which they do have access. Many "below the poverty line" may own a television, stereo, washer and dryer, even a car (Cox & Alm, 1999, Cramer, 2003). They want to advance,

versus need to survive. As John Cassidy (2006) writes,

Although many poor families own appliances once associated with rich households, such as color televisions and dishwashers, they live in a society in which many families also possess DVD players, cell phones, desktop computers, broadband Internet connections, powerful game consoles, S.U.V.s, health club memberships, and vacation homes. (p.10).

There is always a Jones family down the block, and a Gates estate along the ocean, both with more things to wish for. In a society with “hyper-rich” who spend \$300 on a bottle of wine and cherish their yacht cruises, the American poor dream of a high income lifestyle. Sociologist Juliet Schor explains:

In the bottom 80 percent people want what the top 20 percent have, versus the people at 40 percent wanting what the people at 50 percent have...That was the ‘horizontal emulation system,’ where people want just a little more than they have. Now the \$100,000-a-year plus income is an aspiration across the distribution, even for people who have very little or no chance of achieving it. (p. 2006, p15)

Americans dream for the Gates’s estate, not the Jones’s duplex. “I work hard for my money, and I deserve what I want,” expresses the attitude of many U.S. citizens. The problem of self-interest, however, is not the logic of “what I buy is my business.” It is the distorted perception of what one needs to purchase, which in an overconsuming society, has no end in sight. There is always the next thing, the wide screen HD TV, the ipod or pad or phone, whether from Wal-Mart or Nordstrom. Busy shopping at the mall, on-line, or over the phone, Americans have gotten stuck in a costly cycle of things

acquisition, spending more on perceived needs and digging deeper financial holes (Schor, 1998). Whether or not the fixation to a higher standard living is a form of addiction, it is habit forming. Hypnotic stores, catalogs, and news ads of “consumer hyperchoice” (Mick et al., 2004) seem to perpetually feed limitless desire. The U.S. is raising children “born to buy,” warns Schor (2004), with brains wired for “I need it Mom,” able to recognize logos by 18 months and asking for brand names by 2. Work and spend and work-spend-more.

But what does shopping have to do with distant dying children? Everything, Peter Singer might say. As one neighbor honestly admitted, “I don’t even think of them. They’re just not in my awareness.” With the spare coins U.S. citizens may have in their pockets, the two bucks that the “Third and Fourth Worlds” earn in a day, they’re thinking of spending for a latte, bottled water, soda, cigarette, beer, gum, candy... The problem of self-interest comes from short-sighted attitudes and narrow boundaries of self and family, which result in a mass scale ability to overlook child suffering in faraway lands. “I don’t even think of them.” And this limited awareness, with its symbolic fixation on styles and brand names, is in large part due to a daily saturation of commercial advertisement, promulgated by mass media.

It is extremely complicated. The U.S. news media systems financially depend on ubiquitous ads, encouraging audiences, along with the American government and climbing social networks to “buy more” (Schor, 1998). Work-and-spend may be good for business, the economy, and social status, but not so good for distant sick children. Their plight tends to choke from a big money knot, an interdependent relationship between consumer advertisement, mass media, habitual shopping, and free market

enterprise – a communication buying system. In this blurry mix, news also becomes a commodity, a marketable product that should “info-tain.” No matter which of the multiple formats people choose to get their world news (an easier decision than charities or cell phones), somewhere within or beside the crafted communications, someone is selling something to a consumer audience. Watch and read, but also “spend.” “Treat yourself.” The message is rarely “give to others,” particularly to sick, faraway children..

Because the news must compete for distracted attention, arouse high-definition senses, and hook viewers to return as niche audiences, who ever hears of the pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria among Nigerian children? Of the thousands of thoughts people have each day, what is usually on their minds? Sex, family, work, health, food, shopping, booze, health -- or sick Asian children? Moment to moment, where are the minds of Americans? Does U.S. world news make citizens more aware of unknown victims, or does it select parts of a world people may want to see (Vasquez, 2003)?

When considering the complex odds stacked against life-threatened children, perhaps the most pervasive obstacle to charitable aid is the lack of public awareness. “We don’t think of them,” and so nothing happens. It’s the “out of sight, out of mind” principle, which produces citizens “out of touch.” How often does the daily news of the deaths of 22,000 children reach one’s living room or computer screen? The stories of them passing silently in remote villages seldom makes the “newsworthy” list of media systems. Child mortality is a downer, an audience loser. A natural disaster, on the other hand, is captivating headlines, good for business, and worth full coverage, at least for a while. Given that another main purpose of mass media is to generate income, a crisis is a win-win event. News systems can both inform and make money. According to the

Pew Research Center (2011), “two major disasters, the earthquake in Haiti and the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico, captured the public’s attention more than any other major stories in 2010” (p. 1), with the trapped Chilean miners not far behind. An analysis of the Pew Center’s “Weekly Content Analysis” provides another view of U.S. world news. The top stories of 2011 have been the Japan nuclear accident, the Royal Wedding, the Arab revolts, and of course, the killing of Osama bin Laden. According to the Tyndall’s Report “Decade Review,” the long term focus of U.S. news has been “regional-local-domestic,” followed by “national non-political,” and then “international,” with the latter category referring to the Iraq war, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the Afghanistan war, the al-Qaeda network, the hunt for Osama bin Laden, or in other words, national security (Tyndall, 2010). The ongoing turmoil in Darfur and other parts of Africa, where tens of thousands have been murdered and millions forced to flee their plundered villages, obtained relatively scant coverage in 2004, only 23 minutes on ABC, CBS, and NBC combined (Tyndall, 2010) – not much time for genocide. U.S. coverage of international news is regionally “concentrated,” concluded Horvit (2003) in a study of the Associated Press and 10 American newspapers, with 70 percent of the news produced by the AP focused on only 25 countries.

On any given day, on any media platform, it is rare to read, hear, or see news of child mortality. Even in the social media, explains The Pew Center (2010a), “bloggers gravitated toward stories that elicited emotion” (p. 1). On Twitter, “tweeters” seek to “pass along important – often breaking – information in a way that...assumes shared values in the Twitter community” (p. 1). Perhaps YouTube offers the broadest mix of world news, but usually in a “you gotta see this” rush to share a sizzling story, like

Pope Benedict falling during mass, or a Brazilian news anchor insulting local janitors. In sum, across all social media platforms, concludes The Pew Center, “attention spans are brief. Just as news consumers don’t stay long on any website, social media doesn’t stay long on any one story” (p. 1). As news audiences graze from one story to the next, from new mobile devices or old TV remotes, there is more financial uncertainty in the “news ecology,” more gaps in international coverage, and little place for stories of dying African children, particularly from the long-distance view of North America.

World news produced from and for the U.S. has long been criticized for its “Americentric” quality (Pew Research Center, 1995, Vasquez, 2003, Collins et al., 2011). In a four-month analysis of over 7,000 international news stories, The Pew Center found that newspapers and network television focus on world news with a “distinct American orientation,” while local television virtually ignores the world. The study concluded that “the U.S. media carry few international articles that would broaden and educate Americans about the world beyond those hot spots where ‘breaking’ news, usually about conflict, is occurring” (p.1). As an all-in-one system to report, produce, and edit world news, U.S. media tend to select, cover, and interpret its own newsworthy stories of global problems, a process of agenda setting, while less captivating topics like child mortality in Nigeria rarely make the list (Vasquez, 2003). As James Painter (2008), a researcher on world news explains, “To broadcast news is to choose, and to choose severely, among a host of possible events, ways of framing them, and duration of time spent revealing and explaining them” (p. 7). America news networks, instead of broadening the global awareness of citizens by offering multiple perspectives, provide “U.S. news of the world,” like a U.S. map of the world with North America at the center.

Ironically, the media organization that does provide more news coverage of developing countries in the southern hemisphere, Al Jazeera English (AJE), is available 24/7 in only a few U.S. cities: Washington, DC; Burlington; Vermont; Toledo; Ohio; Bristol, Rhode Island; and after a long consumer campaign, New York. For a Western democracy with limited capacity to provide extensive news coverage of distant countries, this makes little sense. Abderrahim Foukara, Washington bureau chief for the Al Jazeera Arabic channel, argues for a broader concept of world news (Tharor, 2011):

At a time when many U.S. news outlets are feeling strapped for cash and cutting down on foreign coverage, you have this channel which continues to invest in its international reporting. Not just in Egypt and the Middle East, but in Latin America, in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Asia. Not only are all these parts of the world very important in their own right, but it's also very important for Americans to know what goes on there. (p.1)

Unlike the world news of CNN, Fox, and CNBC, tightly framed by U.S. perspectives, Al Jazeera English seeks foreign views, covers remote parts of the world, uses local reporters, and boasts of giving “voice to the voiceless” (Burman, 2011). A comparison study of BBC, CNN, and AJE found that 81 percent of AJE’s news items included countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, twice the coverage of these regions than BBC and CNN (Painter, 2008). As explained by Tony Burman (2011), head of strategy for Al Jazeera in the Americas,

The strength of Al Jazeera’s performance is rooted in its news gathering ability. Together, its Arabic and English-language services have more than 70 news bureaus, 400 reporters worldwide – more than either the BBC or CNN. By



comparison, in the U.S. now, there are fewer than 100 foreign correspondents attached to the major American mainstream news organizations. A population of more than 300 million people served by fewer than 100 foreign correspondents.

Think about that...Our objective is to let the world report on itself. (p. 3)

Think about that, a world reporting on itself, including the stories of remote sick children with malaria. But unfortunately, on top of the long list of complex factors reducing the odds of life for them, perhaps mass media weighs the most, suppressing their stories each day, increasing the distance between “us and them,” and hampering the ability of U.S. citizens to embrace ill young ones, on whatever continent they are born. The problem of child mortality is extremely complicated, even when citizens fall back on ethics, and Peter Singer’s analogy of the pond. It’s not as simple as walking along the edge of shallow water, noticing a drowning child, and wading in to the rescue. The pond is very deep, full of children, dying every few seconds. While some are closer to shore, or more identifiable, together they form a mass statistic, numbing the collective psyche. Rather than a quick gut response, leaping to save one child, many citizens question the value of the effort. “It’s a drop in the bucket.” Other people are around, heading towards the mall on cell phones. Vendors create distractions, selling endless whatnots. There is news blasting in multiple media, but few stories of the children. Should they dive to save one, feeling behind schedule, in a hurry, with other priorities?

Luckily for the drowning, thanks to a hero potential inside all human beings, some hearts do feel compassion. Some minds do cut through the brush of distractions, see through their doubt, and leap into the unknown water. And they do save real lives, one after another.

## CHAPTER IV

### **The Hero Inside: The Science of Rescue Reporting**

Although the odds may not favor a Congolese newborn to reach age 2, every person with the resources to help, argues philosopher Peter Singer (2010), should try to save her. This moral imperative includes journalists and communication specialists. In spite of social distance, a culture of self-interest, economic recession, or mass media neglect, news reporters should make people aware of the global problem of child mortality, and ideally, use principles and methods that may increase the possibility of a helping response. For a Bangladesh village child failing from cholera, it is a mission worth an extra effort. There are U.S. citizens willing to share time and income, effective nonprofits ready to provide low-cost relief, and communication methods proven to link the two together. The bridge is an intentional reporter.

Giving voice to the voiceless, an axiom of journalism ethics, includes telling the stories of thousands of life threatened children. While objectivity in reporting is also a core principle, or “providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues,” so is “telling the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when unpopular to do so” (SPJ, 1996). Ethical journalists “show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage” and “use special sensitivity when dealing with children” (SPJ, 1996). In sum, objectivity and compassion should blend, not conflict. A journalist can tell a fair and accurate story of distant children with ardor. If both ethically and effectively communicated, a news article, blog, or video can

improve the world, like decreasing the child mortality rate. Though a news audience may respond in other productive ways besides a financial contribution, such as offering their time or advocating for policy change, a donation can provide immediate relief. While a journalist's goal is to accurately report, and not to solicit funds like a public relations officer of a relief agency, he or she can inspire compassion for a statistically verified problem, with the hope that it may catalyze helping action. Similarly, although the telling of inaccurate or slanted stories of children struggling with disease is an unethical practice, as well as the use provocative images to solely evoke emotion, the sincere intent to save their lives, is not.

#### Subjective Closeness

Assuming that it is important to tell fair and thorough stories of distant fragile children, and to do so in a compelling manner, how can findings from laboratory and field experiments assist an intentional journalist to do both? Along with practical advice, research offers some guiding principles. The first is to increase closeness. As a general aim, an effective reporter of child mortality stories needs to reduce social and physical distances between distant victims in impoverished communities, and potential givers in wealthier circumstances. The main tool to close this gap is information that can evoke emotion in the helpers. Effective communication in this context, that is, presuming an ethical base of accurate coverage, also arouses sympathy, which in turn, can spark generous action. Among experimental studies to increase understanding of charitable giving to distant victims, "closeness" and "sympathy" reoccur as prime motivators. Whatever the underlying reasons for such prosocial behavior, whether it is "impure altruism" or a desire for "warm glow" (Andreoni, 1990), "conditional cooperation"

or willingness to give more to the common good (Fishbacher et al., 2001), or an “aversion to inequity” or a preference for fairness (Fehr & Schmidt, 1999), it seems to make a statistical difference when a potential giver “feels close” to a victim (Small & Loewenstein, 2003, 2005, Small & Simonsohn, 2006, Small, 2011).

This closeness factor might be called the significant others principle, which originates from the “my tribe” or kin selection pattern of our social evolution. In a Western culture like that of the U.S., shaped by the value of rugged individualism, subjective boundaries of closeness may extend to one’s nuclear family, extended kin and friendship network, the church or local community, or even to “my country.” Thus, getting average citizens to perceive a sick African child within their mental boundaries of significant others, or their circles of caring, can take some doing for a well-intentioned reporter. Imagine thousands of remote children dying each day; that’s a lot for any mind to embrace. The feeling of separation that comes with physical distance, however, can be mediated by creating a “subjective sense of social closeness” or a “felt connection” between unfamiliar people (Bohnet & Frey, 1999, Charness & Gneezy, 2008). A U.S. citizen, for example, may view a Pakistani child as less distant as anonymity decreases between them. Given a name or face, a far off victim can look more familiar, like other young members of the same planet, even like one’s own kin, deserving compassion.

### Emotional Thinking

A sense of closeness is a key motivator of charitable giving because it does involve a “felt connection,” and according to research, emotion is a main catalyst of generous behavior. As psychologist Nico Frijda (1986) explains, “In contrast to cold cognitions...emotions are passing and signal to an organism to stop current activities,

pay closer attention, and respond... Emotions create a mental spotlight, whose intense focus rapidly promotes an urge to act..." (p. 150). The instinct to "gut react" is one of two pathways or systems by which humans process information (Epstein, 1994, Stanovich et al., 2011). Whereas quick, automatic, concrete, and nonverbal processing characterizes this affective System I, System II is slower, more rule-based, controlled, abstract, and deliberative. Each distinct mode informs and influences the other. When it comes to charitable giving to distant victims, System I tends to nudge people more. So victims that evoke stronger emotional reactions have a greater chance of being helped (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a). "In fact," explains Paul Slovic (2007), "apathetic responses to others in need could be a result of not meaningfully representing their situation and suffering" ( p. 30). A news article, for instance, may describe the plight of distant children with abstract statistics like 22,000 deaths a day, resulting in a "psychic numbing" response among readers. But when a journalist tells a compelling story with concrete mental images, the chances of an affective reaction increase (Dickert & Slovic, 2009). People respond generously because they "feel for" the other (Batson et al., 1997). Nicolas Kristof, for example, of the New York Times writes:

MWANABWITO, Tanzania -- Her face was calm and soothing, but Mariam Karega's eyes brimmed with fear as she cradled little Hussein and nursed him, trying to pump life into him along with her milk. "I'm losing hope," Mrs. Karega said, her big aching eyes radiating the terror of any parent holding a dying child. "He's tiny and he's stopped growing. And although he'd started to walk, now he can't anymore. I don't think he'll make it." It was a sweltering afternoon. A dozen other villagers sat solemnly around Mrs. Karega and her 15-month-old

son, a knowing sympathy hanging in the air along with the flies. In this village of thatched mud huts in rural Tanzania, in East Africa, the trauma of losing a child is almost as common as a scraped knee. These children are dying not from something intuitively monstrous, like the crocodiles that lurk in the Ruvu River below the village, ready to spring on any unwary bather. Instead, the children are dying of mosquito bites. (1997, p. 1)

### The Identifiable Victim

According to social research, a reliable tool to evoke sympathy for distant victims is to increase the “identifiability” of the suffering other, or to make him or her less anonymous, and thereby decrease subjective distance. This might be called the personal story principle, illustrated in the above account of Mariam Karega. In laboratory studies the “identifiable victim effect” has become a kind of axiom of charitable giving, and the name of “Rokia,” a well-referenced, independent variable (Kogut & Ritov 2005a, 2005b, Small et al., 2007). In the landmark “Rokia study,” donors gave more money when asked to support the 7-year-old girl with a name and photograph, starving in Mali, Africa, than when invited to help three million children, just as hungry, in the same country. Furthermore, when the funds appeal showcased Rokia, along with statistics of general needs in Mali, donors gave less, than they did without the number data. In sum, people tend to contribute more to an identifiable victim than a “statistical life” (Small, et al. 2007). They are also more willing to help a single victim than a group, even of two people (Västfjäll et. al, 2008). Robust charities such as Save the Children have long recognized that linking donors with children who have names, faces, and family stories, results in donations. KIVA, another successful nonprofit, connects able donors with

village merchants in transparent relationships of microfinancing, which help alleviate the burdens of poverty, including child illness. Both strategies reduce social distances. Kogut and Ritov (2005b) found that potential donors organize information differently for a single victim than a group. The perception of one individual as a coherent, mental unit, leads to more cognitive processing, stronger impressions, added distress, and thus, more compassion. In contrast, people tend to view groups as distant, abstract units, leaving cooler impressions (Susskind et al., 1999). Such findings make one wonder: if only more people knew the name and story of a distant sick child.

What does such research suggest for a concerned journalist? Perhaps nothing new for a novelist: keep stories personal with concrete details. Give statistics a face, the universal symbol of human life. Journalist Paul Neville (2004) writes of the need to help readers see through the formless “data” to the actual people they represent, to “remember faces behind numbers:” “It's silly to suggest that people should never be dealt with in statistical groupings and that portraying them as such isn't a revealing exercise. But it's far too easy to lose track of the flesh and blood that's behind these numbers” (p. 1). During the peak media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, on every major news program and each newscast, CNN and CBS ran photographs of children displaced from their families, along with descriptive information and hotline numbers (Broughton et al., 2006). Like a candlelight vigil, this around the clock procession of human faces reunited families, as well as media systems, relief agencies, and charitable citizens in a felt common cause. The television faces of suffering others evoked sympathy, and an outpour of giving.

### Building a Culture of Giving

There is nothing deceptive in communication methods like creating a sense of closeness, personalizing a story, providing identifying information, and showing the human face of victims, that is, assuming that they protect the dignity and rights of children as UNICEF (2012) advises. A research-informed journalist who hopes to contribute to a decrease in preventable child deaths, can link distant victims and potential helpers within caring relationships or “cultures of giving” (Singer, 2011), by reporting tangible stories that create felt connection. Although child mortality is a global problem, it can be framed as “psychologically near” (Lieberman et al. 2007), within a context that can open the door of a Colorado home, enter one’s circle of meaningful relations, and touch a caring heart. In another study, merely knowing the friend of a distant victim was sufficient to increase charitable giving (Small & Simonsohn, 2006). This acquaintance effect makes it easier for a potential helper to take the perspective of an unseen victim, to imagine oneself, for example, in the predicament of a cholera stricken child, in a remote village of Tanzania, the home of a coworker’s relative. One subjective link to an unknown other is enough to create a sense of “we-ness” (Hornstein, 1976). This is the same principle behind the use of celebrities as U.N. ambassadors. People know George Clooney and Angelina Jolie. “They’re one of us, over there helping children. We too should care.” The acquaintance effect also lies behind the media’s focus on the “good American” in natural disaster stories, whether a physician, relief worker, or CNN correspondent, a heroic countryman eases the way for audiences to connect to foreign victims. Ultimately, people are social animals and some familiarity does help. Applying this research principle, an intentional journalist might benefit from building a



Facebook-like network, or a web of recognizable faces, through which a child victim can be linked by social association, assigned relational meaning, and hopefully embraced as a small innocent in need of help.

Some researchers speculate that the proliferation of digital technologies may facilitate such cross-cultural connection, closing the distance electronically, between a sick Nigerian child and a generous New Yorker. As Cryder & Loewenstein (2011) explain:

Even if technology has historically decreased sympathy...some of the newest (forms) hold the promise of increasing sympathy by increasing tangibility. New information technologies, most notably the Internet, have the capacity to connect us to specific people, places, and events, in real time, to a degree that was unthinkable in the past. Many of the neediest potential recipients of aid, such as people in Africa suffering from AIDS, malaria, and dysentery, are extremely distant both in geographic and cultural terms from people located in centers of wealth such as the United States. At a mass level, the Internet holds the potential to bring needy people and potential donors much closer together. (p. 246)

It is a hopeful notion, and likely a sacred belief to Facebook staff, whose mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” In this digital age, it is commonplace for journalists to have a Twitter blog, Facebook link, and You-Tube footage of news reports. People no longer ask if one has a webpage; it’s assumed. So it’s not so farfetched to imagine that if more social media exchanges included the names and stories of life-threatened children, maybe it would expand our digital cultures of giving. And imagine if the stories originated from the children’s own

villages, told by local representatives, also with names and faces. For example, The Advocacy Project, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., recruits graduate students with communication backgrounds to serve as “Peace Fellows.” The volunteers help marginalized communities in other countries to tell their stories, develop digital media tools, and launch their own advocacy campaigns. In other words, students with whom Americans can easily identify are linking U.S. citizens to native villagers in distant countries, including identifiable victims. They are also building global friendships, facilitating dialogue across cultures, and increasing felt connections between potential donors and indigenous people. This ubiquitous process of social network weaving may eventually embrace more sick children. In both social research and mass media practice, there is hope for such a quilt of relationships.

### The Optimistic Reporter

In spite of the odds against life-threatened children, optimism is another guiding principle found in empirical studies on charitable giving. Since colonial times both mass media and relief organizations have focused their reporting and images on the dim side of child mortality, using stereotypes of “starving victims” in a “dark continent” in need of white saviors (Paech, 2004). The epitome of this distorted form of tragedy coverage is the image of a helpless, emaciated African child – once called the “Biafra child.” Although an infant dying from diarrhea may be an unpleasant sight for a foreign observer, he or she is the beloved of a heartbroken mother. Not only do morose and overstated presentations of human suffering ignore the dignity and rights of children and families, as do some emotional appeals for donations, they can also backfire, leading to “futility thinking” as opposed to optimism (Singer, 2010). People don’t like to give to

“lost causes.” It’s the “drop in the bucket” assumption. “There’s too many of them, thousands of children dying. What can I do?” Pessimistic thinking focuses on “whom we can’t save,” in contrast to “whom we can.” Therefore a journalist seeking to reduce child mortality must direct viewer attention to the hopeful side of human tragedy: to the children’s will to live, the parents’ efforts to comfort, the doctors’ interventions to heal, the village’s plans to develop, the donors’ generosity to help, and just as important, the reporter’s determination to inspire. The motivating focus should not be the dark cloud, like the “starving African child,” or even a silver lining – but the silver lining in the dark cloud, like [www.lifeyoucansave.com](http://www.lifeyoucansave.com).

Social research indicates that people donate more when they believe that their generosity does make a tangible difference (Cryder & Lowenstein, 2011, Small et al., 2010), like paying for a mosquito net, immunization, or health clinic transportation. In fact, charitable giving can increase a sense of happiness (Dunn et al., 2008, Meir & Stutzer, 2008), which in turn can encourage more altruism (Anik et al., 2009). This positive feedback loop is consistent with findings from neuroscience research, showing that people who give to strangers have higher than normal levels of the hormone oxytocin (Zak et al., 2007). In one study, after participants were given either a dose of oxytocin or a placebo, they had to divide a sum of money with a stranger who could accept or reject the proposed deal. The group given oxytocin offered 80 percent more money than those with a placebo. "Oxytocin specifically and powerfully affected generosity using real money when participants had to think about another's feelings," explains Zak (p. 1).

But what does oxytocin have to do with journalism? Everything, a brain researcher may reply, if one wishes to inspire a news audience to help distant victims.

In a campaign to reduce child mortality, an effective reporter can champion the cause with hope, commitment, and passion, to rally the spirits of potential donors and boost oxytocin levels. Research also indicates that people give more when a spokesperson declares a personal connection or supportive attitude with a cause, particularly members of Western individualistic cultures (Miller & Ratner, 1998, Ratner et al., 1999). In the film, “Reporter,” by Daniel Metzgar (2009), a gritty documentary of the work of Nicholas Kristof, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist travels with two students to the war-weary Congo to raise awareness and stir compassion. While the film uses the “good white guy” principle or acquaintance effect to connect Western audiences with distant victims, the tenacious Kristof appears as a hero with a worthy cause, redirecting viewer attention to a female victim named “Alita.” Her struggle against malnutrition reflects a more complex story of health challenges in the conflict region, clearly of deep concern to the protagonist Kristof. By the end of the film, it is clear that compassion has a virtuous place in journalism.

An inspired reporter can shine light on dim subjects. When an audience recognizes the hard effort to cover a human rights issue in a remote African village, the story can acquire emotional meaning. It appears worth the extra mile. Like running a marathon, people can derive satisfaction and symbolic value from engaging in a tough challenge (Ramos, 1999). In terms of charitable giving, a donation may seem more valuable when it involves personal sacrifice, particularly with an issue of global sacrifices like child mortality. In other words, not only is it worth a long distance effort to tell thorough stories of malaria stricken children, and of their determined parents and heroic aid workers, but the tenacity to do so can result in more public altruism. And the more

good Samaritans who join the cause, the more others may want to rally with them.

Generosity can spread with social contagion (Fowler & Christakis, 2010).

News that others give to a cause, as well how much they donate, can increase charitable giving (Croson & Shang, 2011). It's the bandwagon effect. In fact, people commonly "precommit" themselves to making a contribution, or join up for a cause, which can also lessen the sting of parting with their money (Meyvus et al, 2011). Peter Singer's website, [www.thelifeyoucansave.com](http://www.thelifeyoucansave.com), displays video stories of everyday citizens "making the pledge" to give a portion of their income to a nonprofit organization working to reduce child mortality. The transparency of the long list of donors is infectious.

### The Tsunami Effect

The social contagion of generosity peaks during human disasters. Factors proven to increase victim aid seem to line up in unison, forming a charity army that can rally the masses. It's as if the vivid and intense violence of a hurricane or earthquake triggers a fire alarm in our emotional System I. Sympathy for the waves of unfortunate floods our senses. The president speaks to the nation. Priests, ministers, and rabbis preach to their flocks. Everyone talks with someone – of the crisis. The tsunami effect touches the nation, as the Red Cross mobilizes its emergency kits, relief workers, and 800 numbers. And the mass media, like a leviathan waking from its daily nap, rises and gathers its oceanic force: radio, TV, newspapers, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, all focusing and reporting on one world event, an unusual conjunction that ripples across continents. Multimedia, 24/7 coverage is a news saturation occurrence, perhaps the one time when victims share the spotlight with celebrities, when sick children receive needed attention, and when mass media unleashes its dormant compassion along with its global militia.

“From a broader social perspective,” writes Brown and Minty (2006), researchers of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, “our results clearly demonstrate the causal impact of media coverage of humanitarian crises on charitable giving. This conclusion suggests that encouraging media to keep humanitarian crises in the news is in the best interest of relief” (p. 17). This is a simple formula with a powerful product:

Major crisis + 24/7 news = Large Scale Generosity

An eruption of news coverage of a collective trauma, activating the full potential of a mass media system, can generate a national release of charitable giving. It is no coincidence that American citizens donated \$2.4 billion to the victims of September 11, and that U.S. charities raised \$1.6 billion for disaster relief after the 2004 tsunami, as well as \$3.3 billion following Hurricane Katrina. These surges of generosity coincided with a tidal wave of news coverage, which engulfed TV, radio, print, and the web, channeling the nation’s attention on suffering victims of misfortune. During these crisis periods, mass media systems seemed to pause their agenda setting, relax their profit goals, and join the bandwagon of charity. If only temporarily, altruism was a shared expectation.

For researchers Brown and Minty, the Indian Ocean tsunami created optimal conditions for a case study of the media’s impact on large-scale, charitable giving. According to U.N. records (2005), 229,966 people had been killed or reported missing, including many Westerners (with more identifiable faces). With Congress in recess and the nation in holiday season, the tsunami had little media competition in U.S. news. Other research suggests that this is the right time for an unanticipated crisis, in contrast to an ongoing problem with regular news coverage, to obtain high levels of media exposure (Wynter, 2005). Brown and Minty studied the tsunami coverage of ABC World News

Tonight, CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, The New York Times, and *The Wall Street Journal*, trying to understand the spike in donations to 8 U.S. charities providing relief services to victims. And they found an unprecedented volume of related news:

For example, CNN deployed over 80 anchors, correspondents, and producers to provide 24-hour coverage of relief efforts. Similarly, the tsunami dominated the front page of *The New York Times*, garnering over half of the articles on the front page in the week following the disaster. And *Times*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Economist*, and numerous other news magazines featured the tsunami and recovery efforts in multiple cover stories. Indeed, the tsunami dominated worldwide media attention well into January, 2005, much longer than any natural disaster in modern history. (p. 5)

Using online records to track donations to each charity, and applying controls for donor fatigue and various biases, the authors found that increases in contributions closely correlated with increases in media coverage. The authors offered this conclusion:

An additional minute of network television news coverage increases a given day's donations by 0.036 standard deviations from the mean, or 13.2% for the average agency. One additional story in *The New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* increases a given day's donations by 0.050 standard deviations from the mean, or 18.2% for the average agency. Results are similar using instrumental variables, underscoring the robustness of the estimates. (p. 4)

An earthquake event can send a tidal wave of news, and produce a surge of mass giving, that is, depending on the epicenter. In a related study, Brown and Wong (2009) found that after the 2008 damage of Cyclone Nargis, public generosity directed to

Myanmar, shifted course, over to Wenchuan, China, hit by a devastating earthquake. The two Asian disasters appeared to compete for coverage, compassion, and credit cards. Similarly, though absurdly tragic, in 1994 the trials of O.J. Simpson and Tonya Harding eclipsed the news of the Rwandan genocide, and sidelined relief donations, a regretful error for mass media and the nation. Unfortunately for distant victims, the charitable giving of U.S. citizens can rise and fall whimsically with more or less coverage of news events. It's the downside of our gut-reacting System I.

It's also the soft side of our mass media system, known to pack up any time for the next headline tremor. Disasters raise much attention and money, for a while, but then cameras and sympathy cool. And the 220,000 children who die every 10 days, or three times a tsunami each month, with no clamor or action images, disappearing from remote villages, unseen by CNN, their numbers keep mounting into a death toll unsurpassed in human history. Thus, despite the centrality of emotion in research on charitable giving, in the long run, child victims may have a better chance of survival if people were to think through global crises. If more of us were to take time and examine the data, System II might come to the rescue, and direct more giving to those with the highest needs.

#### Cool Off, Mindfully

*“Finally, we find that donations decay over time, even controlling for media coverage of the tsunami, providing evidence of donor fatigue.”*

(Brown & Minty, 2006, p.4)

Media events and charity drives can end as quickly as they start. While the G-20 nations and global news networks could together reach Millennium Development Goal



No.4.A this year, reducing the mortality rate to 31 children of every 1,000 – they don't. After each media tsunami recedes, citizen fervor subsides, along with the warm glow of giving, the bustle of relief workers, the charm of celebrities, and the 24/7 coverage. Perhaps the big challenge for a concerned reporter of life-endangered children is the short span of attention and the moral stamina of mass media. Although it can rapidly mobilize and deploy its global forces for a news breaking catastrophe, it's unreliable for long term struggles like malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea, tuberculosis, HIV, and other threats to fragile children. Media organizations, worried for their own business survival in a competitive world of multiplatform news (Pew Research, 2011), overlook quieter stories of chronic high need, like South Asian infants who only live for weeks.

But money worries are not the only distraction. Even public television networks, even NPR, fall short on their coverage of U.N. Millennium Goals. Sick distant children, no matter how many, or what their tropical illness, are still “foreign news.” Who gets malaria in New York? Cholera is only a Third World problem. In a parallel way, the emotional System I tends to underrate the sick in tiny remote villages, preferring close, tangible victims. In a sense, the intertwined systems of news media and emotional thinking have a case of helping blindness, or “scope insensitivity” (Huber et al., 2011). Neither result in sustained patterns of generosity based on the severity of human problems.

In the struggle to give voice to voiceless children, it may be the lone reporters in the Congo, or social networks of them, in contrast to traditional media systems, who endure long distances of steady coverage, or at least have the will to try. Moral stamina, though not the focus of experimental studies on charitable giving, seems a core quality

for any reporter of child mortality issues. It's not easy to inspire picky audiences with unending distant stories of tragic illness. Donors experience fatigue with lasting problems; so do reporters. Assuming mass media may never adequately cover our millennium goals such as reducing child mortality, the struggle to decrease its haunting numbers may take marathon reporters with resolve and calm temper. If such journalists can stay the course, they may get more people to stop, think, and make more measured choices. In fact, there is actually some good news from the generosity research with regards to a more thoughtful, less reactive approach.

Although most experimental research on charitable giving validates the primary role of emotions in decision making, it looks like deliberative thinking also has a promising place. Whereas methods to “prime” a giving attitude in donors can backfire, such as having people perform money calculations (Small et al., 2007), or measure the level of needs of recipients (Kogut & Ritov, 2005b), some new studies suggest that mindful awareness can influence who gives to whom (Huber et. al., 2011). The key is to slow down the helping process, and prevent a gut reaction of System I. For example, when researchers present people with different types of donation decisions, and have them carefully rank their choices according to severity of need, they can select strategies of giving based more on reason than emotion. In one such mindfulness study, participants had to choose between two humanitarian crises for a financial contribution: either malaria in Ghana or tuberculosis in Malawi. The investigators altered the number of victims in each scenario. In an encouraging display of System II reason, 88 percent of participants decided that the “objective scope” of the crises should carry more or equal value than their “emotionality.” In sum, in spite of an innate tendency to feel one's way

through social problems, many people do prefer to help others based on a thoughtful assessment of need. They may just need more reminders to slow down and reflect, from mass media, for instance, prior to making helping decisions. As Huber et al. explain this sensible position of optimality,

because altruism is a precious but scarce resource, its wise allocation should be a priority. That is, given the amount of money a person would be willing to give to charity, and the relevant information available, a donor should allocate the donated funds in as efficient as manner as possible. (p. 215)

The success of nonprofit organizations such as Village Reach and the Against Malaria Foundation, both with plain and factual websites, emphasizing financial transparency and proven results, suggest that there is a growing, committed population of informed and deliberative philanthropists. This is a hopeful sign. In a more reasonable, caring world, perhaps 22,000 children will rank higher each day.

#### The Tin Man and Scarecrow

When these processes interact in an ideal fashion, when the Tin Man's brains channel the feelings of the Scarecrow's heart, one observes the ideal of helpful aid directed to those most deserving of it. However, this ideal is rarely observed. More commonly, we get misdirected sympathy, the Scarecrow's heart without the Tin Man's brain, or indifference in the face of ameliorable suffering, the Tin Man's brains without the Scarecrow's heart. (Lowenstein & Small, 2007, p. 113)

Closeness, sympathy, emotions, optimism, oxytocin, contagion, bandwagon... sounds like a team sports contest. Although speaking to the heart, or the Scarecrow in

Americans, is a big part of nudging them to embrace foreign children, it has a downside: people may give to whoever they feel like. On the other hand, reasoning with the Tin Man or deliberative side, encouraging people to weigh the objective scope of suffering, can also backfire, with a psychic numbing of emotion. Donors can also rationalize a less optimal, giving decision using cognitive rules or biases. For example, they may dismiss an effective relief organization due to misinformation, decide to give to multiple charities instead of one, or only support efforts using co-national agencies (Baron & Szymanska, 2011). In this “dance of affect and reason” (Lowenstein & Small, 2007), there are no clear, foolproof steps for producing an optimal aid response to sick remote children.

After review of the diverse research on charitable giving to distant victims, one might conclude that the wisest path for a concerned journalist is one of mindful balance, a kind of middle way. To inspire “the Tin Man’s brain to channel the feelings of the Scarecrow’s heart” requires accurate and measured storytelling, in addition to passion and moral stamina. A reporter must arouse sympathy, but not overwhelm; provide empirical data, but not overload; encourage reflection, but not promote cognitive bias; and even reveal one’s personal stake, but not lobby for a side. In the complex field of real life, among poor villages of the Congo, finding the midway can require more art than science.

Humans do not live in experimental laboratories in which investigators show them photos of African children, have them reflect on their decision making, or ask them to choose between nonprofits. Extraneous variables are not controlled. In our everyday world of charity pleas and child advocacy, everything goes – and interacts – also creating surprises with few explanations. The science of generosity to distant victims, although

invaluable to any reporter concerned with the tragic rate of child mortality, is in its infancy, and still only a science. Just the right story, photo, or video has a magical ability to strike a nerve of compassion and move an audience to take responsive action. In finding the right voice to broadcast the voiceless young, it is as if the mirroring neurons of the Tin Man brain, co-ignite in the victim, reporter, and donor, enlarging the Scarecrow heart, and the culture of giving. “We have so far to go,” says the wise elder, Jane Goodall (2006), “to realize our human potential for compassion, altruism, and love” (p. 3). We have far to go beyond U.N. Millennium Goal No. 4.A, to save as many sick children as we can in every 1000, near or distant, with ample room for heroes, for marathon donors, charity relief workers, and intentional reporters. It is news worth making, and one hopes a story, with a triumphant ending, that some day will be told.

## CHAPTER V

### A Quilt of Possibilities:

#### Media Conversations on Saving Distant Children

In experimental laboratories on giving to distant victims, researchers try to control extraneous variables in order to predict generous behavior. In passionate offices of nonprofit charities, media teams may apply some of these research findings, but they also test their own creative strategies, nudging practice a step ahead of science. For example, while researchers may be conducting follow-up studies to validate a finding like the identifiable victim effect, media specialists could be preparing videos on malaria for special broadcasts of American Idol, or experimenting with blogs on social media. Human science can clarify the roots of knowledge, but it is often field practice that extends its branches. So it seems with the collective efforts in mass communication to help save poor children from lethal diseases, and to meet Millennium Goal No. 4.A of reducing child mortality.

This global mission to end preventable deaths historically has advanced slowly under the leadership of the United Nations, wealthy countries, international organizations, earnest advocates, and generous philanthropists. Although significant progress has been made, there is a long way to go in the reach “zero” deaths, as UNICEF calls humanity to do. Some 22,000 children continue to die daily from unnecessary causes. For the most part, news media systems have shirked their responsibility in this universal campaign, overlooking the distant victims like bystanders in high-rise offices. Given the unprecedented magnitude of human loss, there is a gross underreporting of these children’s stories. “And this is not okay,” Peter Singer, the ethicist, might say.

“Everyone who can help – should.” This includes solvent news agencies and able reporters. If a journalist was walking around a pond, and noticed a child drowning, even if his job was to report on the conditions of the water, wouldn’t the higher moral directive be to save the child? What if there were 22,000 children going under? Shouldn’t he send a call for world help, or at least a Tweet? Is it the ethical responsibility of journalists to give voice to the voiceless, including infants in Tanzania struggling for life against malaria? And if so, should reporters tell the story in a compelling enough manner to evoke compassion, moral reflection, and generous action?

It depends whom you ask. If you filled a coffee house with ethicists, foreign correspondents, citizen reporters, and media specialists of nonprofit charities, you would likely hear a range of thoughtful responses, with plenty of ardent opinions. Most of the donation driven, media staff would be familiar with some research on helping distant victims. The majority of journalists, however, trained in a traditional paradigm of objective reporting, may not. Some might even bristle at the hint of that controversial term “advocacy.” But they would all probably agree that it was unacceptable for village children to die of preventable causes, and that news media “should tell” their unfortunate stories. The question of “how to” cover this issue would expose conceptual differences, as each would freely offer an opinion. In such an open exchange of views, each media specialist might sound as credible as the other. In fact, argued Gadamer (1976), the hermeneutic philosopher, only with such an intersubjective sharing of perspectives, or a “fusion of horizons,” can “correct understanding” of the issue emerge. Making sense of a global problem as complex as child mortality, and its relationship to mass communication and journalism, requires more than analysis of U.N. statistics or social science research.

It also needs to include an interpretation of the voices and thoughts of media representatives, people who represent different forms of news coverage.

In the fall of 2011, the author conducted telephone and Skype interviews with a variety of media-related individuals, whose work overlapped in some way with the central theme of child mortality. Unlike a controlled experiment, this was an interpretive inquiry, more like the study of opinionated conversation in a coffee house. The interviewees included ethicists, foreign correspondents, citizen journalists, and media staff of nonprofit charities. The findings, organized and summarized below with interview excerpts, do not represent causal or correlative relationships, but rather themes in social thinking or intersubjective patterns, which the author considers meaningful to better understand the media's role in the effort to reduce child mortality. The selected excerpts have been arranged by the author to read like a group conversation or a coffee house talk, allowing for a comparison of opinions on different themes. As revealed in the open exchange of views, there is no science-based, fool proof, or most ethical "one way" to cover the story of distant children dying every few seconds from preventable illnesses. On the contrary, the participants' responses form a quilt of possibilities, weaving between diverse areas of personal knowledge, while exposing boundaries of professional tradition, regions of agreement, and unexplored territories for creative initiative. In conclusion, there is one topic that emerges with a resolute consensus: It is an important conversation. All humanity, which includes journalists, should talk about the avoidable casualties of the world's children, whether the little ones live nearby or faraway. And everyone should examine the relationship of this tragedy to mass media, charitable giving, and one's own precious life.



**Interview Participants:**

The individuals who graciously participated in an interview, and who candidly shared their thoughts with the author, are briefly described below in alphabetical order. While their responses certainly do not represent the full spectrum of possible media views on the issue of child mortality, which is not the intent of the interviews, they do serve as a meaningful range of contemporary thinking, and the themes that emerge in the conversation, would very possibly reoccur in broader samples of the media population.

**NOTE:** Although Nicolas Kristof of *The New York Times* was unavailable for an interview, given his notable reporting experience on the topic of child mortality, his views have been included in the conversation, using selected comments from a September 2010 interview with Krista Tippet of American Public Radio, along with a December 2009 interview with Brooke Gladstone of National Public Radio.

**Todd Baer: Journalist, Media Trainer**

As a Knight International Journalism Fellow, Baer presently works as director of multimedia at the World Media Academy in Delhi, India, helping to equip students with practical digital skills and international standards to improve the region's media landscape. An Emmy-award-winning TV journalist, he formerly worked as a correspondent for Al Jazeera English, covering such stories as the Haitian earthquake, terrorist attacks in Mumbai, the conflict in Gaza, and the war in Afghanistan.

**Jill Balderas: Freelance Journalist**

Balderas is a freelance journalist focusing on global health, medicine, and international development. As a multimedia reporter she has covered such issues as health in war-torn Sudan and HIV/AIDS in Kenya, with stories in *The Washington Post*, *The Globe* and

*Mail*, and PRI's *The World*. In the spring of 2011, taking leave from her media position with the Kaiser Family Foundation, she served as a Fellow of the International Reporting Project, reporting on malaria in Uganda.

**John Beale: Director, Village Reach**

As director of strategic development for Village Reach, a nonprofit organization that improves access to healthcare for remote, underserved communities around the world, Beale oversees their social business, marketing, and fundraising strategies. Before joining Village Reach he worked in business development, marketing, and media communications in the US, Europe and Asia. He is an advocate for transparency and accountability among organizations serving the poor.

**Emily Bergantino: Communications Director, Malaria No More**

As director of communications for Malaria No More, Bergantino oversees the organization's website, public communications on their latest initiatives, collaboration with the broader anti-malaria community, and information related to malaria reduction. She previously worked for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the island nation of Aruba. Bergantino strongly believes in creatively using the media's capacities to fight malaria.

**Amy Bracken: Freelance Journalist**

Bracken served in 2010 as a Peace Fellow for the Advocacy Project, working with local media on an environmental project in Belize. Having reported for NPR, Reuters, and the Associated Press in Haiti, her byline has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Boston*

*Globe*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Her radio work has included reporting for PRI's *The World* and *The World Vision Report*, and *Voice of America*.

**Kim Crane: Assistant Editor, World Pulse**

Crane is assistant editor of World Pulse, a global media and communication network, devoted to helping global women find their media voice. She oversees the production of a web magazine, called *World Pulse*, as well as the operation of an interactive community newswire, PulseWire, which both assist women to tell their stories, including issues of maternal and child health, and to build global relationships for local problem solving.

**Irene Choge: Kenyan Journalist**

Choge is a multimedia reporter for a television news organization based in Nairobi, and a trainee and apprentice of Internews, a nonprofit organization building the capacity of media systems in developing countries. With a personal interest in maternal and child health, she has covered stories such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other deadly illnesses taking the lives of children in remote African villages.

**Deborah Ensor: Vice-President, Internews**

Ensor is the vice president for Africa, Health, and Humanitarian Media Programs for Internews, where she oversees the Africa portfolio, focuses on the role of media in the provision of health information, and builds the capacity of Internews to respond globally in humanitarian emergencies. She has more than 15 years of experience as a journalist, and holds a Master's degree in Journalism and Human Rights from Columbia University.

**Rebecca Fordham: Senior Member of Communications, UNICEF**

Since 2009 Fordham has worked for UNICEF as the global communication specialist for

Child Protection, serving as the organizational spokesperson on issues related child labor, migration, trafficking, and protection. She works from UNICEF headquarters in New York, where some of her projects have included Together for Girls, a global partnership to end sexual violence, and the Children's Rights and Business Principles Initiative. Before joining UNICEF, she was a senior producer for BBC in Washington DC.

**Iain Guest: Director, Advocacy Project**

Guest is executive director of the Advocacy Project, a nonprofit agency that helps marginalized communities, with volunteer "Peace Fellows," to tell their story and produce social change. Formerly in Geneva, he was a reporter for the London-based *Guardian* and *International Herald Tribune* (1976-1987). Guest has produced several BBC documentaries, and served as spokesperson for the UNHCR operation in Cambodia (1992), as well as the U.N. humanitarian operation in Haiti (2004). He is also a professor at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service.

**Dan Heath: Author, Organizational Consultant**

Heath is a senior fellow at Duke University's CASE Center for social entrepreneurs, and the co-author of two critically acclaimed books: *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*, and *Made to Stick*, which explores elements of effective communication, named *Best Business Book of the Year*. Heath is also a columnist for Fast Company magazine, and a co-designer of "The Life You Can Save" website.

**Andrew Hurst: Media Specialist, The Global Fund**

Hurst is a senior media specialist with the Global Fund, an international finance institution dedicated to fighting AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, which to date has

donated \$22.4 billion in 150 countries to support large-scale prevention and treatment programs. Previously a journalist for news agencies in the United Kingdom, Hurst oversees a team of media specialists with a focus on providing accurate information to the Fund's main donors: wealthy nations.

**Marian Hassan: Citizen Journalist, Peace Activist**

Hassan is a citizen journalist and peace activist in northern Somalia. A member of World Pulse, in 2010 she was selected as one of 30 "Voices of our Future Correspondents." Despite the challenges of growing up in a country torn by civil war, she persevered to become the only woman in her high school class to graduate with top marks, going on to earn degrees in telecommunications engineering, community development, and social work. She has written on the impact of drought on Somalian children and mothers.

**Nicholas Kristof: Journalist and Author**

An op-ed columnist for *The New York Times* since 2001, Kristof is a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, for his coverage of the Tiananmen Square democracy movement in China, and his persistent reporting of the genocide in Darfur. He is the main subject of "Reporter," a documentary by Daniel Metzgar, which depicts Kristof's long campaign to give voice to the voiceless, particularly in remote, indigent regions of the world, using social research to more effectively tell his stories. He recently co-wrote a new book with his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, called *Half the Sky: From Oppression to Opportunity for Women Worldwide*.

**Susannah Masur: PR Officer, U.S. Fund for UNICEF**

Masur is manager of a public relations team with the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. Since

joining the organization in 2011, she has helped to inform the public of global issues impacting children such as the earthquake in Myanmar, the violence in the Ivory Coast, the Libyan civil war, and drought in the horn of Africa. She previously worked on the media team of Action Against Hunger/ACF International, a humanitarian organization committed to ending hunger, recognized as a leader in the fight against malnutrition.

**Rob Mather: Founder, Against Malaria Foundation**

Mather is founder and director of the Against Malaria Foundation, established in August, 2004, with the purpose of serving as fiscal agent for a global fundraising event in 2005, the World Swim Against Malaria. More than 250,000 people participated in the swim, raising \$1.3 million to buy mosquito nets. Since then the organization has launched other initiatives and formed numerous fundraising partnerships. While the mosquito net has served as tangible object for donor giving, Mather contributes their success to organizational transparency and accountability.

**Stella Paul: Multimedia Journalist, India**

Paul is a multimedia journalist in Hyderabad, India, and a member of World Pulse that in her words “tells to the global audience, the unheard stories of marginalized communities.” She has worked as a news reporter for ETV and MSN, as a media campaigner for Greenpeace, and as the communications director of Video Volunteers, a large community media organization. As one of World Pulse’s 2011 “Voices of our Future Correspondents,” she presently makes documentaries with local villages on environmental issues impacting health.

Patrick Plaisance: **Professor of Journalism Ethics**

Plaisance is an assistant professor in the department of journalism and technical communication at Colorado State University, where he teaches media ethics, reporting, and mass communication theory. His research areas include media ethics, journalism values, newsroom socialization, and the philosophy of communication. His work has focused on how ethics theory can be effectively brought to bear on media practice.

Lee Wilkins: **Professor of Journalism Ethics**

Wilkins is a professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism. The focus of her research includes media ethics and media coverage of the environment. She is a co-author of one of the country's best-selling college ethics texts, *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases*, in its fifth edition with McGraw-Hill. Wilkins is also the associate editor of the country's leading academic journals on media ethics: *The Journal of Mass Media Ethics*.

## Meaningful Themes and Interview Excerpts

### *Journalism Ethics and Child Mortality*

*Theme:* Although giving voice to the voiceless does include reporting on sick distant children, there are ethical issues to consider when covering their stories. While telling a malaria story with the hope of inspiring charitable action may be ethical, even normal, tailoring a story just to evoke sympathy may not. At some point journalistic “advocacy” can cross a gray area that compromises the fairness and accuracy of reporting. On the other hand, there is also a long tradition of social justice in journalism, or in the legendary words of Finley Peter Dunne, to “comfort the afflicted.”

*Interview Participants:* Patrick Plaisance, Lee Wilkins, Nicholas Kristoff

*Interviewer:* Could you comment on this premise that journalists have an ethical responsibility to report on the stories, or even advocate for, children in life-threatened circumstances?

*Lee Wilkins:* An important question to ask is “How does this obligation stack up against others that journalists have?” Because we have a multitude of them. Overvaluing this issue at the expense of other concerns might not necessarily be an appropriate or professional thing to do. You would have to frame this as a duty-based argument, to say that we have this obligation, in addition to, not instead of, all of the other ones that journalists have. For example, if you’re going to make the case that we should worry about distant children, then part of the argument needs to include that we also need to worry about children here at home. Children in the U.S. may not be dying at such a high rate, but I think that one of the problems you get into ethically is singling out a population



as being in special need. But I think you can make this argument with all children, not just children in a particular geographic location. Children are vulnerable people already, in both philosophical and practical ways. So journalists do have an obligation to speak up for them, particularly children who are unable to speak up for themselves.

*Patrick Plaisance:* In general, the idea of journalistic independence is critical in this context. It's really kind of a cornerstone of journalism, the idea of keeping an arm's length from anyone, from any interest that might want the news presented in a certain way. Any journalist with resolve is going to be highly sensitive to being perceived as "in the pocket" of any particular interest in presenting the news. If a journalist is perceived as pushing an agenda, or political viewpoint, or an interest of a particular group, that perception can quickly erode credibility.

Having said that, obviously there's a long rich tradition, particularly in American journalism, of addressing injustice. In addition to the idea of journalist independence, our job is also to report the news "without fear or favor" as Adolph Ochs said, the first publisher of *The New York Times*. At times we may also need to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." I don't know if you've come across that quote, but it has an almost clichéd reference to this mission of American journalism, which historically has had this, I'll stop short of saying this advocacy side, but a mission clearly concerned with questions of social justice.

*Interviewer:* It seems like there's a gray area between advocacy and accurately reporting issues of social injustice.

*Patrick Plaisance:* It's true. There's both comfort and tension, which you find throughout the history of American journalism. It is a tension between this insistence on independence to protect the idea of credibility, and also this notion that yes, there is sort of an agenda to scrutinize those in power, to hold others accountable, to afflict the comfortable, and if you will, to comfort the afflicted. But I would argue that there's a fine line between this mission of social injustice and advocacy. There's a big difference between addressing injustice, bringing it to light, scrutinizing it, holding it up for public view, informing the public of what's going on around them, as opposed to advocating or pushing for a particular change, or solution, or way to solve a problem. That's a subtle but very important distinction for those journalists, worth their salt, with resolve.

*Interviewer:* Perhaps a thinner line that I find myself on is in trying to increase awareness of how journalists and media specialists, in their communications, can increase the possibility of fostering a compassionate response in their audiences. Do you have any thoughts on this issue?

*Lee Wilkins:* I think that we try to inspire all the time, and I don't think we've ever found it particularly problematic. There's a long tradition of journalists as war witnesses and custodians of social conscience. We've got practical examples like Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame*. What we can't do is to promise that because we do this sort of reporting, that there is necessarily going to be an individual or a public policy response. That was Murrow's thing. In *Harvest of Shame*, he set out to evoke a public policy response. That didn't happen. We didn't do much of anything regarding migrant workers until we passed a law on poverty, and that was four or five years after *Harvest of Shame* initially aired. So I think we try to inspire all the time. We have a professional history of

doing this. There's nothing wrong with it in an ethical sense, especially if you do it in a way that takes a critical look at the problem, as opposed to a hand-wringing look at an issue.

*Patrick Plaisance:* There's quite a bit of research that's called media effects literature and it's quite extensive. There are compelling ways to tell stories and there are ways to tell stories that won't engage readers, or make them turn or click the page.

*Interviewer:* Exactly. So when does a compelling story, told in a persuasive way, perhaps even including research factors to increase the possibility of a compassionate response from a news audience, when does it become advocacy, or begin to cross the line into unethical reporting?

*Patrick Plaisance:* I think you cross that line when you are no longer writing about an issue, but have started to prescribe, when you begin pushing a particular way for everyone to follow. And that to me, that's the line where you don't see most journalists crossing. Many of my students are interested in changing the world. They want to go out and make a big difference, and I think that's wonderful. But what I do though is to show them that the journalist's job is to spotlight injustice, to uncover things, not necessarily to prescribe appropriate solutions for it. If you look at award-winning journalism, listed each year at the Pulitzer website, which goes back for years, I will tell you what you will find. You will find writing that by its economy, by its parsimony, by its careful inherence to showing people what's going on, not merely telling them what they should do about it, that writing has more power.

*Lee Wilkins:* We can't promise that there's going to be a result, that a story will result in aid. We can't promise that things will get better. Of course, we can also hope for world

peace, but we can't expect it. There's a big distinction in philosophy between hope and expect. However, after such reporting we certainly have an obligation to watchdog what does or does not happen. You can write with the intent of evoking a response, as long as you present an entire picture.

*Nicholas Kristof:* That is one of the great perks of journalism, that there are a lot of problems in the world and that we carry a spotlight. What I want to do is shine my light to illuminate that problem, but I don't want to tinker with the evidence. I just want to galvanize people by showing them what is out there. (Gladstone, 2009)

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### *The Boundaries of Professional Journalism*

*Theme:* In traditional journalism, a reporter “with resolve” would address the complexity of a child’s life-threatening situation, not just present an evocative story of an identifiable victim. Accuracy precedes advocacy. Fair and thorough reporting comes before one’s hopes for a generous audience response.

*Interview Participants:* Nicholas Kristof, Jill Balderas, Deborah Ensor

*Interviewer:* One of my premises is that I believe that journalists have an ethical obligation to report on children in life-threatening circumstances, and ideally, to do so effectively, with the hope of raising public awareness and compassion to get them help. Do you have an opinion on this issue?

*Nicholas Kristof:* One of the challenges for me, frankly, is that if you follow this research (i.e., on victim identifiability) then you would leave out context. All you would do would be telling individual stories, and that would be one step too far for me. I do want to connect with people and inform them about these larger problems. So my compromise is that I do try to find a story that will resonate with people. But then at that point, I try to throw in the larger context, the background information, and make it clear, like in the case of the Congo, for example, how many millions of people are affected. And I hope that doesn't deter the power of the individual story. (Gladstone, 2009)

*Jill Balderas:* I would say that from a journalist’s perspective, it would never be OK for a journalist to advocate for anything. I just don’t feel like that's our role. What we really should be doing is trying to tell the depth of a story, to get all sides, to report fairly.

Specific to your question about children, I feel that children's health issues are unfortunately, often caught up in really complicated situations. For instance, take what's going on in Somalia right now. You can look at that story and say, "You know, children are starving and dying because of hunger." But the story also touches upon radical Islam. It touches on U.S. policy in Somalia, and also on the world's food program in Somalia, and on corruption in the Somali government as well. So I don't think that any of those stories are just about children's health. To understand them you have to look at their complexity, at all the factors that contribute to a problem like child malnutrition or starvation.

*Interviewer:* What about this idea of reporting to inspire a compassionate response?

*Jill Balderas:* As far as trying to get people to do something about the issue of child mortality, I don't feel comfortable with that position. Do I give to aid organizations, or would I encourage my family members to get in certain organizations? Yes. But I don't feel comfortable using my journalist platform to do something like that, for a couple of reasons. The biggest one being that I firmly believe that all of the players trying to improve children's health should be held accountable. Whether that is government entities, or the large foundations getting money, or non-governmental organizations doing work on the ground. What I would do is leave it to the reader or viewer to judge for themselves, based on the whole story of a situation.

*Interviewer:* Is it fair to say that one of your communication principles is to raise awareness of the complexity of situation surrounding issues of children's health?

Jill Balderas: Absolutely. Because they are complex. I wish things were simple. Giving a mosquito net should be an easy task, but often times, the mosquito net or drugs or other things get stuck in customs in a country, and people have to pay bribes to get them out. In Uganda, for example, for more than a year the government has money from donor organizations for a diagnostic test for malaria. But its bureaucracy has held it back.

*Deborah Ensor:* When it comes to western journalists covering what's happening in other parts of the world, where children suffer from life threatening situations and preventable disease, I think the media does a very bad job of it. They play the sympathy card all the time. They're too rushed. There's not enough interest in international affairs until it's a catastrophe, and then it's too late. So many things are preventable with the right attention and money early enough, but it never reaches the public attention until it's a crisis. And then it's all the sympathy stuff, the poor dying, and the starving baby pictures. I don't think that's correct, proper, or ethical journalism. You see tears, and journalists flying in and out, covering the famine for a day. They get their picture of a starving baby, then rush on to cover something else on the list. I also don't believe in journalism for advocacy. The role of a journalist is not to move people, but to report information and facts. If those facts inspire people to act, that's good. But I don't train journalists to intentionally find stories to get people to act or to make change happen. However, change can result from a journalist doing his job well.

*Interviewer:* Are you saying that if a journalist was doing his or her job well, it might increase the possibility of getting a public response?

*Deborah Ensor:* Not necessarily. Look at the Horn of Africa situation where we just did an assessment. This is the largest refugee camp in the world right now that's getting massive attention because of the drought. It's a huge topic. We should have been covering the story 10 years ago. We all knew a year ago that there was going to become a famine. But nobody pays attention until it's high drama, until they see the pictures of starving skeletal babies, or until the rock stars are there. That's really frustrating. Why is there a food shortage? There's plenty of food in Africa. It's about politics. It's about government, about corruption, about aid in the development business. All these related issues need to be addressed. Our mission is not just to move people. It's too late to move people by the time you see the starving baby. It's way too late. So the strong journalism has to come well before, when you question government policies, question politics, look at corruption, and dig into why these tragic situations happen in the first place.



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### **The Case for Positive Emotion**

*Theme:* Although “pulling heartstrings” and evoking sympathy can cross an ethical line when it veers into inaccuracy, compelling or inspirational reporting with thoroughness is possible, and it can make a significant difference to distant children suffering from disease. In short, it is not ethically necessary to remove feeling from storytelling, particularly positive emotion.

*Interview Participants:* Nicholas Kristoff, Dan Heath

*Nicholas Kristof:* My fascination with the science of social psychology and the neurology of this really grew out of my frustration with what I was writing about Darfur. I would go out to Darfur and I’d see these villages burned down, kids massacred, women raped, and I would write these columns. And I just felt like they were disappearing into the pond without a ripple. In the meantime, at more or less the same time in New York, there was a red-tailed hawk called Pale Male that got pushed out of his nest. He was living in a condo building on Central Park...and New Yorkers were just up in arms about this harmless red-tailed hawk. I was so frustrated. I couldn’t get the same reaction for hundreds of thousands of people being driven out of their homes as for one red-tailed hawk. So that led me to look at the work in neurology and social psychology of what makes us care. And as you suggest, it’s not about numbers. It’s not about statistics. It’s really about an emotional connection. It’s the emotional parts of the brain that light up when the brain is being imaged that lead to some kind of a moral decision. It’s not the rational parts...That opening, that connection, that empathy is really an emotional response when it’s done based on individual stories. We all know that there is this

compassion fatigue as the number of victims increases, but what the researchers found is kind of devastating, that the number of which we begin to show fatigue is when the number of victims reaches two.... I think that my job as a journalist is to find these larger issues that I want to address but then find some microcosm of it, some Rokia, who can open these portals and hopefully get people to care. And once that portal is open, then you can indeed begin to put in some of the backgrounds, some of the context, some of the larger issues and hopefully get people to engage with that issue. (Tippet, 2010)

*Interviewer:* Are you aware of, or guided by, any principles from social science research that can encourage charitable giving to distant victims?

*Dan Heath:* Are you familiar with the work of George Loewenstein and Paul Slovik? And their now famous study of Rokia? For me, that's the most relevant finding that speaks to your work. It's something that we discussed exclusively in our book, *Made to Stick*. It's representative of a larger principle, which is the idea that sticky communication needs emotion. The portrait of one little girl, Rokia, generating more contributions than a far more sobering set of statistics about mass starvation and mass hunger, on the surface, that's a really irrational thing; that we would give more money to one person rather than a hundred thousand. But that's missing the fact that people are motivated by feeling. We rarely think our way into change. We rarely get a pamphlet that changes our behavior. What tends to happen when people change is that they've experienced something, or they've seen something that has moved them in some way, whether it's an experience of hope, fear, promise, or compassion. There is something that changes them at the emotional level, and it is this kind of communication that has the hope of changing their behavior. And of course, if you want someone to write a check or

volunteer for any good cause, you have to encourage a generous response. That should be Communications 101 for any charity organization, and I think to a large extent, they get that. You rarely see direct mail or an advertisement from an organization like Care or Save the Children that does not have a picture of a child. They understand that emotion drives the giver.

Unfortunately, I think that the charities have learned this lesson almost too well. I think that at a certain point, an audience gets compassion fatigue. I suspect we've all had the experience of getting six or ten pieces of direct mail, all trumpeting crises, and all asking for money – today. There's this crisis in Nigeria. This crisis in Mali. This crisis in Zambia. The only way we can cope with it all is to tune out. We can't bear the burdens of the world every moment. So while I think that charities are very smart to try to generate sympathy, it can also cause heartache for possible donors because so many stories can feel aversive. People want to dodge them if they can. It's like the old anti-smoking campaign in the '80s where they showed a nasty, black lung. What they found was that it didn't work. And the reason it didn't work was because if you step in the shoes of a smoker, you see the reality of turning your lungs into those disgusting, black organs. At that point there is only two rational responses: one, you quit on the spot, or two, you turn the commercial off. I tell you, the second is a lot easier than the first.

I think that emotion is a critical part of advocacy communication, but it does come with danger, which is, it's going to be easier for people to dodge the appeal for compassion than it is for them to endure and act on it. That's why when I work with organizations, I try to encourage them to highlight the positive aspects. It's so tempting

to always harp on some terrible harm going on. But I think what really moves people to act is the idea that their personal contribution can make a difference, that there is hope.

*Interviewer:* Could you share an example of an organization that seems to understand this principle of positive, hopeful communication?

*Dan Heath:* Are you familiar with KIVA? It's basically a micro-lending site that has been hugely successful. You can go to their website and look at profiles of different entrepreneurs. KIVA has had a problem unfamiliar to most nonprofits. They have consistently had more money each year than they could use.

*Interviewer:* I've heard that each KIVA donor forms a relationship with the people that they are helping. They become partners in a good cause.

*Dan Heath:* Exactly. And that to me is the secret sauce. You go to the site and see the photo of the storekeeper in Afghanistan who needs more money so they can buy more fresh oranges for their store. There is something very powerful about this. Notice that it's just as concrete as the photos of the starving children, right? You are still talking about a human being that you can see, but there is something very different, but also emotional. You feel like you're going to be part of someone's success story, like you're a co-pilot in some minor way. That's a very different feeling than when you send \$20 to an organization dealing with bottomless misery. People like to feel like their money is going to a real person, and that it's going to be used well, and that it will make a difference.

I think the challenge for a lot of big organizations like Oxfam, is to find ways to create positive feeling when situations are often really messy, complex, and multi-

variable. All of those things tend to inhibit people's ability to make a connection. No one wants to give their \$20 to an economic infrastructure fund to boost the distribution systems for farmers in Zambia, even though that may well be critical. Most people would prefer to give their money to the Afghan shopkeeper. To a large extent, I think the quest for generating compassion, and attracting donors and volunteers, requires that our media communications be more concrete, more human, and more emotional. And that can be tough.

*Interviewer:* What have you learned about the public's responses to the Peter Singer website, "The Life You Can Save," which you help designed?

*Dan Heath:* I think we've focused on elements of hope. You will notice that the photos on the front of the website are not of starving children. They are people like you and me that have made this "Pledge" to give. That was deliberate, because a Pledge comes from positive emotion. It's people saying, "You know, I've thought about my life, and I realize that what's important to me is trying to do more for others. I feel good and proud of that part of me, so I'm going to help save the children." I think the website is a good example of the distinction I'm trying to make between negative emotion, like pity, misery, and compassion for the hungry, and more positive emotions like optimism, hope, pride, and satisfaction in making a personal difference. The positive have a longer lifespan, and they will save more lives.

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### *The Good Old Compelling Story*

*Theme:* While not a common focus of research studies on charitable giving, some studies indicate that a good story can influence decision-making, especially when a listener or reader feels “transported” by its contents, or when the story engages one in mental simulation or a reenactment of events (Green and Brock, 2000). Hearing stories can help people understand complex situations (Pennington and Hastie, 1988), like jurors in a courtroom. According to Dan Heath (2010), one of the interview participants, a story with a “challenge plot” can make people want to set higher goals for themselves, and a “connection story” can encourage people to reach out and help unfamiliar others. The “compelling story” has always been a mainstay of journalism, and the belief in its power to move others, and to possibly foster helping action, remains strong. This includes media coverage of sick distant children.

*Interview Participants:* Nicholas Kristof, Todd Baer, Irene Choge

*Nicholas Kristof:* The other aspect of this is that people connect with the stories that are kind of ultimately positive or triumphant. They want to be a part of something successful. And so when Sheryl and I were writing our book, *Half the Sky*, about women around the world, we were very much looking for stories of individuals that would plumb the depths of terrible things that happen, but ultimately end on this kind of inspiring, happy note.

I’m very engaged in writing about Congo war, Darfur, or any of these issues, and am really trying to grab the reader. And I know that your average reader, if they come across my column on the subway to work and they see that it’s about Darfur,

for example, and that they've got to be at work in 30 minutes, while they know terrible things are happening in Darfur, it's not really of any relevance to them that day. I know they could turn the page. And so I try to use whatever mix of headline-engaging first sentence, and occasionally in the case of a headline, maybe a little bit of bait to try to suck people in. (Gladstone, 2009)

*Todd Baer:* I'm always thinking about, you know the saying, comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. As an American who came up the ranks in local U.S. news, I've always been particularly interested in international news, and always found it difficult to just "sell the story," if you will, especially to an American public, who can be insular in their thinking, and hard to make a compelling story to. So when I'm telling a story, I try to talk to one person in Lincoln, Nebraska. I have to make that person care about the orphans from the war on Gaza, right? I have to make this one person in Lincoln, Nebraska care about the children in refugee camps in Northern Lebanon. I have to make the one person care about the children suffering in Kashmir. So I can't say I'm guided by any one set of principles. I feel very fortunate that I've had the reporting experience I've had, which has ingrained in me a true instinct of where a compelling story begins, and where it ends. And really, a lot of times when I'm thinking about a story, I go with my gut-feeling. I don't look at a book of ethics or research guidelines. I just go with it. That doesn't mean that it will be put in a newspaper or on television, but I'll go with a story I think the public deserves to know. I've always believed that it's not necessarily the story that you cover, but it's the way you cover it, not the story you tell, but how you tell the story.

*Interviewer:* Do you think it's the how of good storytelling that can make people care about child victims on the other side of world?

*Todd Baer:* Absolutely. I believe that 100 percent. I'm very clear on that. I think you can take a story on children in Somalia, for example, suffering from famine, and if the story is poorly written, or if the video is poorly shot, nobody will care. It happens all the time on international news when a crew goes to report on a tragic issue, like the Gaza, for example, and they tell the story poorly, or the video is shot or produced poorly, it can go right over the viewers head. Nobody cares, right? But if you tell that same story in a compelling way, the way that a good journalist can tell stories, people listen. At the end of the day, we are storytellers. And a compelling story can reach a person in Lincoln, Nebraska, or Grand Junction, Colorado. It does have this power. But a sad reality of international news today is that there's a lack of good storytelling. It's a big problem. I think the same goes for the newspaper, to be honest with you. I sometimes open up *The New York Times* and there are stories that are poorly written, poorly told. You read the first paragraph and turn the page. But they also have some real superstar reporters, great storytellers, who can connect you to children in Zimbabwe, even if you live in Des Moines or Minneapolis.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that the training of journalists these days overlooks this key principle of storytelling?

*Todd Baer:* You know, I do. I believe there's a major void, when it comes to the profession of journalism, with this storytelling aspect. When you have the Internet, and all our social media, and the fame surrounding television, and the preoccupation with



money making, I do think the art of storytelling in journalism is being pushed to the side. There's a real gap, as well as an opportunity, for reporters to learn how to pull back, and to tell meaningful stories of real people, especially children victims, in compelling ways.

*Interviewer:* Irene, as an African reporter, what do you think can move an audience to want to help sick and unfamiliar children?

*Irene Choge:* Children, by nature, move people. Let's say you have a child as the central character of a story, maybe a child who is malnourished or HIV positive. If you can tell both an accurate and interesting story of his or her real suffering, there will always be readers or viewers out there who will want to help. But how you tell the story may determine who will help this child. The other day, for example, I was doing a story in a remote village. There was this one child who was HIV positive. Apart from this fact that children have a way of moving people, I wanted the story to show how the health of this one child reflects the struggle of many other children in the same situation.

*Interviewer:* So in the one personal story, you tell the larger story of thousands?

*Irene Choge:* Yes, each one is a symbol of what is happening to countless others.

*Interviewer:* Are the local news stations receptive to your stories on child health?

*Irene Choge:* As a health reporter, if you have a compelling story, a human interest one that touches some people, there's a chance it will be told. As much as politics dominates our news, you can still find a way to air a good story.

*Interviewer:* You know, I worry that child health issues may not be sensational enough for some editors. Children die in these remote villages very quietly, without much attention.

*Irene Choge:* It's true. But personally, I try to make editors understand why a particular story is important. I've had times when I had to use my day off to shoot a story. And then I'd come back to the office and have to convince people of the project's worth. But nowadays, I think the newsroom is changing. Many people are tired of politics. They want to hear something interesting that relates to them. So I try to frame things like "This could be your child" or "This is what is happening to our children." You have to advocate for children's health issues. Maybe an editor will think that a story is not as juicy or sensational as people would like, so you have to convince him of its importance. Above all, I think you have to be committed to the issue, like malaria or HIV/AIDS, because it's not as easy to tell these stories. You may need to travel to remote places. And often there's no Internet. But these stories have to be told. So we need the type of reporters who will travel to a faraway village, who will get to know the people and their situation, and who will eventually come back with a good story.

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### *The Art of Advocacy Communication*

*Theme:* Media specialists in nonprofit organizations, many of whom have been news reporters, express more affinity with the concept of advocacy for fragile children. They also tend to take more creative liberty with their media initiatives, giving researchers something else to consider. Fostering generosity to help distant children is an integral part of their jobs.

*Interview Participants:* Emily Bergantino, Andrew Hurst

*Interviewer:* Do you have any thoughts on the role of the media specialist in advocating for children with malaria?

*Emily Bergantino:* Sure. I've been here for almost four years, which is a lot time to be talking about malaria. And it's been a really interesting experience because I've been able to see the arc of what people know about malaria go from nobody paying attention, to getting a lot of interest in the past few years. And the issue has been around for a while. It's as if the world knows about malaria this time, so you hear news agencies say "We've told them that story. So, come back to us when you've got something big. Until then, we've got to tell the public about pneumonia or river blindness." Which is admirable, but then you're always having to keep the topic of malaria relevant to reach new people. The big challenge in the U.S. is that we don't have a natural constituency. You don't find people here battling malaria.

*Interviewer:* That's a very good point. Citizens here have no frame of reference for many of the diseases that threaten the lives of distant children.

*Emily Bergantino:* Worrying about malaria, sleeping under a mosquito net, it's just not on people's minds here. Some may have grandfathers who had malaria during World War II. But that's the closest you're going to find on a broad basis. Only a few of the many people who travel abroad actually get malaria. So you're not speaking to an audience who is primed in any way, through their own personal experiences, to grab on to your message.

*Interviewer:* So how do you interest U.S. citizens in malaria?

*Emily Bergantino:* That's the challenge, finding a way that makes it relate to them, that makes something happening on the other side of the world worth knowing. And malaria is also not a natural crisis like an earthquake or a tsunami. It's a very quiet problem. It affects people not in the news, and mostly affects children under age five. They are not high-profiled victims that capture major attention. So one thing that we did back in 2007, as a creative initiative, is we partnered with *American Idol* for their first *Idol Gives Back* program. *American Idol* dedicates a show to educating audiences about a set of different issues, and then invites them to donate and support the cause. So there were several topics, some of them domestic, like children's access to health care, or the hunger problem in the United States, and then there were issues with an international focus. One of them was malaria. That was probably the first time many Americans had any sort of exposure to malaria on this scale, or realize that it was still a problem. People tend to think it's been gone forever. The interesting lesson here in mass communications was that we didn't change the story. It was the same old story: a mosquito-borne illness that kills children in Africa. But we used a new platform. We got in front of people where they already are, watching a favorite show. We didn't have to force them to watch a

malaria documentary. And that resulted in a huge boost in awareness among Americans. Even now, when you meet people and ask them if they know about malaria, they may say, “Oh yah, I know about malaria. I saw it on American Idol.” That’s because it’s an incredibly powerful platform in our culture. It’s one of those results that you just can’t brush off, like “It’s only a bunch of people doing an event one night. What long term difference can it possibly make?” It makes a huge difference. From a fundraising perspective, it helped us distribute three million mosquito nets.

*Interviewer:* That’s a big impact from one media event.

*Emily Bergantino:* It’s amazing. And also from the standpoint of awareness raising. When we conducted a survey at the end of 2006, only 28 percent of the U.S. participants classified malaria as a serious health issue. Many said it’s not serious at all. But when we did the survey again in 2009, with two *Idol Gives Back* events under our belt, that number jumped to 71 percent.

*Interviewer:* That is amazing. So are you now exploring other kinds of creative venues to help audiences grab the message?

*Emily Bergantino:* Yes we are. One thing that’s important to note about our organization is that it’s not a scientific institution. So we have three areas of focus: One is investing in tools that help fight malaria. Another is advocacy, so we have a program in Washington, D.C. to recruit government support. And the other is raising awareness, which is unusual for nonprofits. Our organization was founded on the central idea of making people pay more attention to malaria. So when we saw how American Idol works, we put together a comedy type of malaria program, a kind of bold move, using comedians to get the

message out, that is, about something incredibly serious. It was called *Comedy Fights Malaria*. We wanted to really push the envelope in terms of who we wanted to reach. And to do that, we had to reach them at the sites where they were already going online. So we went to Senegal with five American comedians, with different levels of fame, specifically with online exposure. And then we made videos of them, comedic videos, that they wrote themselves. And we posted them on different websites that we knew the comedians had a fan base.

*Interviewer:* So you used comedy to address a serious issue that kills real children?

*Emily Bergantino:* Yes. And what's interesting about this initiative, it that was clearly a risky maneuver, on a very fine line. You don't want to make fun of malaria, but you need to create entertaining content so that people want to watch it, and inside the fun is the serious message. It worked incredibly well. Each of the comedians took a key aspect of malaria and wrote their script themselves. So the message came through their own voice, their own character. And then when people watched each comedian, they were watching a character who they knew and loved, who they found funny. But at the same time, they were learning about malaria in the process. At the end, of course, we invited people to join our Facebook page, to make a donation, or to share the video with family and friends.

*Interviewer:* And did you get a rise in membership?

*Emily Bergantino:* We did, a really big surge in membership. We actually did those videos in Africa, and then shot some commercials in PSAs. And the best way to sort of quantify it, is number one, we got a lot more online donations, a huge amount, as well as

more Facebook and Twitter followers. But we also received tracking data back from the PSA firms, which showed that we were in the top 5 percent of all PSA shows. This means that for the six months the campaign was active, in the broad mix of all the PSAs producers have to choose from, ours was in the top percent. We realized that it was being aired hundreds of thousands of times all over the country.

*Interviewer:* Have these types of events changed your focus and planning as a media team?

*Emily Bergantino:* Yes. We've kind of been reacting. We started with a big broadcast outlet, a sort of broadcast moment with *Idol Gives Back*. It gave us a boost in coverage and funding, really a turning point for us. The press grabbed on and started talking about our malaria website. And then in the past couple of years, as the world has moved more and more online, our social media and online strategy have become more important. So we're kind of figuring this out as we go along, like everyone else. This is one of the best things of being a small organization. We are able to experiment.

*Interviewer:* I don't think the research on charitable giving can catch up with the creativity of media teams like yours.

*Emily Bergantino:* You know, someone might come to us with an idea, like some experimental use of Facebook, for example. And I can imagine the big organizations turning it down because there wouldn't be enough due diligence or scientific research. But we might say, "Sure, that's interesting." We might try anything to get people to have a conversation about malaria today. "Let's give it a shot," we can say. And that's actually been working out well for us. I think, especially because mass communication

changes so quickly these days, you have to be willing to take risks to get your message out. Nothing dangerous, of course, but you have to be willing to take a leap. You know, 80 percent of the time, it's not going to work. You may fall. But 20 percent of the time, it does work, and it makes all the difference in the world, especially to sick children.

*Interviewer:* Andrew, has the Global Fund engaged in any creative media initiatives to raise public awareness about malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS, all diseases which can kill children?

*Andrew Hurst:* As far as child advocacy is concerned, we do have some interesting programs. One was launched upon about three years ago. It was a picture exhibition called *Access to Life*. In order to document the impact of antirretroviral treatment, we hired Magnum Photo to send a group of the world's most reputable photographers to 8 countries including Peru, Haiti, Russia, Swaziland, and Vietnam. They visited houses with family members just starting the treatment. Many of these people were in a very bad shape. The photographers documented their situation. And then they went back six months later to see what had happened. Of course, in many cases the transformation was dramatic. I mean, there was a Lazarus effect, as if patients had come back from the dead.

*Interviewer:* And how were the photographs received by the public?

*Andrew Hurst:* Very well. We organized a number of photo exhibitions. I think the first was actually in Washington, D.C. Since then we've had exhibitions in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy, even New York. They've been well received by people. And I think part of the success is that these photographs tell a compelling story. I'll give you an example. One photographer visited a Haitian woman who was very ill when she started



the treatment. When it was time for him to return, he told the woman that he would be back in six months. He left behind a Polaroid camera and asked her to have someone take photographs to chronicle the course of her treatment.

*Interviewer:* And did she have photos for him when he returned?

*Andrew Hurst:* Yes. When you go to the exhibition you'll see 20 to 30 of these Polaroid shots, each one with a date, hanging on the wall in succession. And you really see the transformation. It's not just a before and after effect. It's as if a dying person has come back to life. You know, I really can't think of a more moving way to tell such a story.

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### *Numbers have their Place*

*Theme:* Statistics and numbers can play a central role in recruiting support for the plight of life-threatened children, particularly when the audience includes officials of wealthy nations, or average citizens who want their donations effectively used. There is a new type of nonprofit emerging that builds its fundraising strategies on principles of transparency and accountability, speaking to the deliberative thinking or System II capacity of their supporters. Showing clearly where the money goes, and how it makes a tangible difference to fragile children, appears to need no communication frills, or heart string pulling, for some donor audiences.

*Interview Participants:* Andrew Hurst, John Beale, Rob Mather

*Andrew Hurst:* As most of the money for the Global Fund comes from governments, we have to maintain a high level of public awareness about what we do, especially how money is spent. I wouldn't describe the work of our media team as advocacy, in the strict sense. Our mission is to inform people. So we are a very transparent organization. We believe that the public should know everything we do, especially with their money. But we are also a complex organization. We fund hundreds of programs in other countries, but don't actually implement the programs. The money is passed down to countries and then NGOs, and in the end, it might go to buying medication, bed mats, or mosquito nets. So keeping the world informed of this work is our job. The world needs to know what we do. And they want to see the data on the results we claim.

Governments, in particular, are very interested in seeing facts. They want constant reassurance that their money is being used in the best possible way.

*John Beale:* First of all, our donor base covers three general categories of supporters: one is individuals like you and me. The second category includes family foundations, ranging from organizations that contribute \$2,000 a year to those who can give up to \$100,000. They tend to be individual families, with some means, who have decided to select a formal institution to share their money with. Typically they don't require a proposal. They just have to find us, or somehow we find them. And then the third category is foundations, institutions whose job is to grant money to nonprofit organizations for mutual interests. Village Reach receives money from all three of these categories. And our communication efforts are actually different for each.

*Interviewer:* Could we start with the category of individuals? How would you describe your media efforts to reach this audience?

*John Beale:* Many people find us through an organization based in New York, called GiveWell. They are essentially champions for increased transparency among nonprofits to better inform individual donors. When most people go to a charity website, or pull out the checkbook to help a cause, they usually don't know what happens to their money. That is, unless an institution has the good sense to tell them, to report on its activities. That's what we do here at Village Reach. We have recognized how valuable it is to donors, or how competitively advantageous it is, to be transparent. That's not a risk for us. It benefits us to go out of our way to report proactively, without having to be asked about the progress of our programs. So on our website, and this is a work in progress,

we publish baseline surveys, I mean, the details of the actual programs that we find in the communities we serve. And we publish budgets and project plans in advance of implementation. Of course, we may change them overtime as we don't control everything in the field, but we try to be as transparent and proactive as possible, educating our donor base as we go along, trying to attract more people who want to understand what we do.

*Interviewer:* And that includes saving the lives of children.

*John Beale:* Yes. We don't have all the answers, of course, but we certainly have a model that we've tested and proven to be efficient and effective in saving lives, and improving the lives of mothers and children in particular. And we're trying to document this. And what we've found that donors like, or the kinds of donors attracted to us, such as people who come from GiveWell, is that they are less interested in the emotional side of whether or not we can save a child's life. They're more interested in saving thousands of children's lives. So if you look at our website, where I think our communication is slightly different from other organizations, is that we have less pictures. I'm not trying to be disrespectful to any other institution, but I would say that we have less pictures of sick babies in mothers' arms, and more information about our tactical plans, about how money is going to be used, and how we'll report back on the effectiveness of our efforts. And that seems to have attracted a different kind of giver. There's a genuine demand for that kind of accountability. Our donor base is growing at 300 percent a year right now. Given this rate, I believe people do want institutions that are more upfront and objective in terms of what their projects are really doing. Of course, they also want to know where

our focus is. As you know, it is women and children, particularly in rural communities, who are the most underserved.

*Interviewer:* In general, in your communications about your work, how much do you focus on the specific predicaments of women and children?

*John Beale:* We certainly focus on the nature of our interventions and how they do impact the health of women and children. But I think we can come across as more of a technical consulting organization, although we do our own manage programs as well, compared to an organization that says “Donate to us and we'll adopt a community.”

We probably don't focus on the children as much as you might think. For example, I just had a family foundation in here that has an interest in mothers and children. And one of the representatives said: “God, you guys are so technical. I need to prepare a report and recommendation for funding to our headquarters. But I can't see mothers and children in all the stuff you're talking about, the logistics and supply chains and wire supports and all that.” I spent an hour and a half educating her, and at the end, she said: “You've answered my questions. I just needed to understand the connections between a stronger health system in a remote community, and how that is manifested in improvements in the overall health of women and children.”

*Interviewer:* So your media focus is not an identifiable sick child or mother, but a local health system trying to keep him or her alive.

*John Beale.* Yes. While we make relatively little reference to the end beneficiary of our work, we do focus on another, typically women category: frontline health workers. When you are in a remote rural location, you may never see a physician, unless you have

a dire medical emergency and somebody can get you to a town hospital on time. So we focus on the layer of the health system most stressed by its lack of resources and remoteness. That is frontline health workers. They usually are women between the ages of 25 to 40, with two years of medical training, who administer vaccines, fix broken legs, those sorts of thing. They provide the basic interventions for maternal and child health care. And in our public communications, we try to educate donors on how stressed these healthcare women are. Because we've found that the donors attracted to our organization want to know why the local health systems are not serving these communities. They already have a sense that the intervention should benefit people, but don't understand why it's not working. So we focus attention on needed improvements to make it work.

*Interviewer:* Rob, what about the Against Malaria Foundation? What kinds of principles guide your organization in its communication with the public, particularly around charitable giving?

*Rob Mather:* We have three principles, or three pillars that guide us in our communication with the public. The first is transparency and accountability. When we are asking people to give us their money or volunteer some time, we want to be fully transparent in what we do. I think this speaks to the issue of trust. People are more reticent to support charities that lack accountability. It's often called "giving to a black box," in which you don't know what happens.

The second principle is efficiency. In our case, a 100 percent of the public's money buys the one thing we focus on, long-lasting insecticidal nets. Efficiency also builds trust, and trust determines whether people believe an organization is doing the right thing, doing a good job. But if 10 percent of the money one gives goes to paying

salaries, telephone bills, and other expenses, a donor may doubt whether an organization is doing its job.

Our third principle of communication is impact. Transparency and accountability are no good to us if what we do doesn't have an impact. This term captures a number of our activities that include reporting on malaria case rates, or on what they were before we distributed nets, and what they look like afterwards, in periods of six months, 12 months, 18 months, and so forth. So numbers have an important place. We're about to distribute 250,000 nets in Malawi that will protect about a half million people. If those nets were to get to Malawi and sit in a warehouse, that's absolutely no benefit at all to anyone. If they are distributed, and 100 percent of the nets are used by people who need them, that of course is a good thing. However, if in six months' time they're not being used, again that has little benefit. We have to ensure correct and continued use of the nets, so that when we come back in three years time, or more importantly, over the lifetime of the nets, we will have achieved the desired effect of protecting the parents and children who sleep under them.

*Interviewer:* For a media specialist, your communication principles keep the job of helping to save lives pretty straightforward.

*Rob Mather:* Yes. They are simple elements, which fall under the category of common sense. We tell people that "We'll show you what we're doing. We'll show how we do it efficiently. And we'll show you that is making a significant difference." That's our emphasis, rather than focusing on powerful videos and photographs that evoke a visceral response. Unfortunately, I think that the charity sector is given a kind of blank card to put together video footage or other media to pull on the heart strings of people. That's

too easy for organizations to do, and in the worst cases, it covers up a list of problems from inefficient operation to downright criminality. And I think in an age of increasing technology, where mass communication is more possible, available to more people, charities have a moral obligation to be all these things: transparent, accountable, efficient, and able to prove that they're actually having an impact.

*Interviewer:* Rob, I was wondering if you could also speak the tangibility of the mosquito net. Social research suggests that when an object of giving is concrete, it can increase generosity.

*Rob Mather:* I think it helps, but I don't think it's necessary. For example, if you had to raise money from the public for medicine, you might then face other barriers like having to deal with negative perceptions of the pharmaceutical companies, such as them being "big," "bad," and "stealing our money." In other words, while drugs or nets are concrete items, they don't avoid potential challenges because of their tangibility. If I ran a charity whose focus was buying and distributing drugs for sick children, I would simply use the same philosophy and communication principles that I've described. And if the product was less tangible, and as a result this meant that we had to have more employees or a more complex organization, I would then raise the money to cover those fixed costs, so I could still turn to the public and say, "And 100 percent of the money you give us is paying for X." In other words, I would still want to communicate a simple, one product thing. If I had to ask them to pay for a long list of expenses, I would then be moving away from the simplicity of our communication.



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### *Teaching Others to Report*

*Theme:* The legendary role of foreign correspondent is changing, not because it has lost purpose, but mainly due to its extra costs in a penny pinched, world economy. A less expensive and more culturally empowering model is arising: the foreign journalist as trainer, consultant, and mentor of domestic reporters. Perhaps this may benefit sick distant children: the more local storytellers, the more world listeners, and hopefully, the more help. In truth, when it comes to the magnitude of daily losses of our world's children, there is plenty of room for every concerned storyteller.

*Participants:* Todd Baer, Deborah Ensor, Iain Guest, Irene Choge

*Interviewer:* We all know that the role of the foreign correspondent is changing with the rise of the Internet, domestic reporting, social media, and other factors. Is it a responsibility of today's western journalist to train and mentor domestic reporters to help them better tell and distribute stories of children in life-threatening situations?

*Todd Bear:* Absolutely. When you take the satellites that have been around since 1980, and you take the Internet, the economics of today's news business will not allow for the Americans and Brits to run around the world and tell their selected stories. It's just not going to happen. I feel fortunate because I was able to do that kind of reporting. But times have changed. There's a new concept or call for Kenyans to tell the Kenya story, and Indians to tell the India story, and Moroccans to tell the Morocco story, and at some point, Haitians will tell the story of Haiti. So instead of running into this wall, trying to fly around the world from a cozy home in the U.S., we do need to help domestic reporters

in this inevitable change. You know, ABC News as we know it could be finished in five to seven years. It's on life support. CBS and NBC News are on also life supports. They just don't have the money to do this kind of world news anymore. There's really no choice but to get out there and share the knowledge. I don't think it's all going to happen overnight, but it's certainly tilting in that direction.

*Interviewer:* U.S. citizens are so used to having another American tell them the world news. What will it be like for us to hear more Nigerians or Tanzanians telling the story of their own children dying from pneumonia, malaria, or diarrhea? I wonder how it will impact us.

*Todd Baer:* I've been all over the world with Al Jazeera English, and I've had colleagues in Kenya telling the Kenya story, and other Africans telling the stories of Rwanda and Zimbabwe. For the longest time we've seen a white American face in places like Peru, Kabul, Baghdad, Americans who may live on the upper west side of New York, maybe graduates of Columbia or Harvard, maybe from families of wealth. And you know, many have no real understanding of an uprising in Egypt, or the impact of malaria on Congolese children. They don't know the culture like they know the U.S. They don't speak the native language like they speak English. They may have no real connection to the story. I grew up watching those white faces tell me about the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, India, and the Gaza. And I'll tell you honestly, I've been to all of those places, and what I've seen myself is very different than what they told me. The American media, quite frankly, have done a poor job at telling the stories of the world, especially the stories of children.

Interviewer: Can you think of an example?

*Todd Baer:* I'll give you a quick one. My colleagues and I were watching a story on ABC News. Some American correspondent went to Somalia with the U.N. and he did this story. And most of the report was on how he went to Somalia. The shots focused on him, the foreign correspondent. It wasn't about the children dying of starvation. And we looked at each other and we said "This is embarrassing." But it goes back to one of your questions, as an American journalist, do I have any business telling people about how to do this profession? Maybe not if we use American TV as our model. Domestic journalists should learn not to have the reporter in every shot, and not to tell stories just about the reporter. They need to learn how to tell compelling stories of their own people, their own children. And I hope some of us are helping with that.

*Interviewer:* Deborah, could you speak to this issue of training domestic journalists. I know that it is an integral part of the mission of Internews.

*Deborah Ensor:* Internews is a media development NGO, so we work in more than 70 countries around the world, specifically to build the capacity of local media. We don't produce content. We're not like a news agency. We work only to build the strength of the local media that exists. That includes everything from training journalists to working with media managers and editors, to sustainability and business planning, to regulatory reform and legal advocacy. In some places, like Sudan and Chad, we actually build infrastructure. We physically build radio stations since the media doesn't really exist there. So we help to create it. We do a wide variety of things all over the world to help bring information to people, because we believe information empowers people to change

their lives. Without information, you can't make decisions. And access to information is as critical and as important as access to food, water, and shelter.

*Interviewer:* What do you emphasize in your training of domestic journalists?

*Deborah Ensor:* We have a very specific methodology around how we interact. We strongly disagree with the model of one-time events, where you fly in to a country, gather a bunch of local reporters, conduct a training for a week, and go back home. We believe in long-term, consistent engagement with the people we work with. Even in logistically hard places like Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, we are on the ground. We don't work off shore. We work within the country, in the refugee camps of Chad. And we have a very concise package of trainings. It's a mentoring process. After formal training, we send trainers to local sites to work side by side with their partners. And we sponsor travel grants to help journalists who can't afford to go out and cover stories in remote villages.

*Interviewer:* In the training and mentoring of domestic journalists, what kind of principles do you emphasize with regards to reporting on child health issues, such as malaria, pneumonia, or water-borne diseases?

*Deborah Ensor:* We have many health projects, so we help journalists to understand the health issue itself, so they know what malaria is, and they have access to sources to answer specific questions. But more than that in this part of the world (Africa), they also need hardcore skills of a journalist. There's many thematic trainings that other NGOs do on health related topics. But if a journalist doesn't have basic tools, they won't be of much use. The thematic skills of health topics make up 30 percent of our trainings, but the other 70 percent focuses on skills of journalism: how to ask the right questions,

how to be ethical, fair, and accurate, why we need multiple and credible sources, all of those basics. Most importantly, they must learn to protect the dignity of the victims who they interview, especially on issues related to children.

*Interviewer:* Iain, how does the Advocacy Project view this challenge of helping domestic journalists to tell their own local stories, particularly of circumstances that threaten the lives of village children?

*Iain Guest:* I think we are trying to position ourselves in new forms of media, such as sharing new approaches to citizen journalism, for example, helping people to make use of social media. We want our Peace Fellows to be advocates for local causes, not just reporters of facts. I think this sets us apart from conventional media roles.

*Interviewer:* It sounds like the Peace Fellows are also media consultants and trainers.

*Iain Guest:* Indeed they are. They're sharing the digital tools with local groups so that they can then pick them up. Many of these tools not are too technically demanding, and can blend well with local culture. For example, the Fellows build on things many people have, like cell phones and personal computers. You know, even in the middle of Nepal people find computer access in creative ways. The more people are isolated, the better use they seem to make of mobile phones. So the technology is familiar to many villages. I think our Fellows help local people to put the pieces together, to say "Look, you can use this technology in such and such of way to produce content for your local causes. This can help you achieve your community goals." We believe that his kind of help is a valuable contribution. Another important thing we do is to use quilting to help victims and survivors tell their stories. They come up with these wonderful patterns and designs

which turn into quilts that we share here in the U.S. to advocate for their causes. We feel that telling the story through embroidery is a concrete way of getting their message to the world, and bringing together pieces of their lives.

*Interviewer:* The quilt is a symbol of integration, of unity. It seems like an appropriate way for local villages to share their stories, using available fabric, in addition to the cell phones. It's a village technology.

*Iain Guest:* It is. But on the other hand, it can also raise ethical questions. We've worked with many women who have sexually violated, and some of those designs are very violent. We've also worked with children who have been kidnapped. And you see horrible stuff in the quilts. How much do we encourage that? Do we suggest that they use more gentle designs? But I do believe our work is innovative, that we're trying to push the envelope, telling our volunteers that "Your experience is a different kind of story, and so tell it in your own way, use blogs, and help the people to tell their story in their own way. You are reporters. You are getting the facts out, but you are also advocates for your host organization. Ultimately your job is to give them the tools that will enable them to get their message out to the world."

*Interviewer:* From an advocacy perspective, do you think that your work is helping people in the U.S. to build relationships with villagers in remote countries, and become more concerned with their local causes? One of my premises is that the reason why citizens in wealthy nations overlook distant children, dying each day from preventable illnesses, without trying to help in some way, is that because people do not have a relationship with the children or their families. The faraway kids are not in their circle

of caring, or part of their human family. So I'm curious to see if this type of work, that is, giving more people a voice in more of the world's villages, partnering with them like you are, helping them to tell their stories of struggle, may make a difference in saving the lives of sick children.

*Iain Guest:* I believe it does. This is one of our cherished goals, to create a constituency for this kind of work in the U.S. and European countries. But it is very difficult to do, and we've tried different strategies. We're experimenting all the time. For instance, when we put together a quilt in the Congo, we found a quilting guild in Maryland to guide us, who later told us that during the process of helping, they began to better understand the challenges of people in the Congo. They had made an emotional connection.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that the surge in citizen journalism, of which your organization is clearly a part, helping villages to get out their messages, will eventually have a significant impact on the nature of world news, like how we hear about the stories of distant children?

*Iain Guest:* You know, I used to be a reporter myself, so I believe strongly that professional, experienced reporters do a good job. And as consumer, I think I am still quite conventional. I like to pick up my copy of *The New York Times* in the morning. But what I don't like about the media, or mainstream media, is the way that they exercise political control over the press. And they also require that journalism to be done by professionals. One of the reasons I like citizen journalism is that I do believe there's a room for everyone, in this quilt, if you will. I wouldn't say that the emergence of the

citizen journalist has necessarily meant that we are getting better news, or that we will be better informed. Some make that case. They look to the Arab Spring and say that this information came through the grassroots, and that it doesn't matter if it's not as polished as professional journalism. And that's true. The fact is that the news is getting out, in many ways. I think this opening of media is good for us. It adds to our knowledge. But I would also like to see mainstream media survive, to find a business model that makes sense. Because I do believe that there is an important role for the professional journalist in the middle of all of these changes.

*Interviewer:* Including training and advocacy.

*Iain Guest:* Yes, exactly. In sharing the skills.

*Interviewer:* Irene, do you see a rise in citizen journalism in Kenya, or more village people telling their own local stories, including stories on children's health?

*Irene Choge:* Yes, a lot. People are now blogging and finding new ways to share their stories. For example, as a TV journalist, if I am wanting to break news, right now, somebody else in one of the villages may also be breaking it on Twitter, or talking it up on Facebook. Or by the time I do finish a story, many people have already blogged about it, and they're not even journalists. Yes, definitely, there is more storytelling going on, and people are learning how to do it better. And it's not been a problem. There is room for many voices.



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### *The Incertitude of a Good Village Story*

*Theme:* Whether a foreign correspondent or journalist mentor, getting the right children's story in a poor remote village can be full of challenges and surprises. Victims can stretch the truth; cultural values may get in the way; and editors can always select a different story. In sum, child mortality reporting can be as complex as the subject itself.

*Participants:* Iain Guest, Jill Balderas, Nicolas Kristof, Amy Bracken, and Todd Baer

*Interviewer:* Assuming that journalists do have an ethical responsibility to also report on the stories of sick children in remote villages, getting an accurate story can be another thing. Could you provide some examples of this challenge?

*Iain Guest:* It can be very complex. For example, we've been asked to support a group in Africa that works to abolish child sacrifice. I was there three weeks ago, and we had a volunteer there in the summer. It's a very sensitive issue. You know, on one hand it is an atrocious practice. Children one and two years old are kidnapped, then murdered, dismembered. It's truly horrific. But on the other hand, for us northerners to go in there and expose this practice, and write about it to the world, runs the risk being accused of sensationalism, which is something that we don't want to happen. We don't want to be seen as exploiting Africa.

*Jill Balderas:* I'm not sure if it is ever fully possible to cover complex stories of child health in other parts of the world. I think it depends, first of all, on how familiar a journalist is with a country. Five weeks in Uganda was almost a luxury for me as a reporter. Some journalists only get a week. And as you know, there are language

and cultural barriers. In Uganda, for example, it can be offensive to ask direct questions. So you have to change how you communicate with other people. And then there's trying to catch the messages they are trying to send, indirectly, which can make things super difficult. The other challenge I found in Africa was that people sometimes assumed I was an aid worker, or that I had come to give them money. And so sometimes I only received positive answers to my questions, as if the people were trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. "Oh, everything's working great," they would say, and I knew very well that things were not OK. It's kind of a response bias, part of human nature. Let's say you're trying to get information on condom use. "I'm supposed to be using condoms," some may think. So instead of saying they never use them, they will tell you how often they do.

*Nicholas Kristof:* I've learned this the hard way. When you go out and come across some brutal injustice, like soldiers who massacred people, then the immediate tendency is not only to feel sympathy for those who've been butchered, but also to believe their stories. And in fact, it turns out that victims can lie just as perpetrators lie. They're so outraged by what has been done to them that they often exaggerate. So you have to be meticulous and insistent upon verification when you're talking to those victims, just as you'd be skeptical when talking to the perpetrators. (Tippet, 2010)

*Iain Guest:* Sometimes parents are not even on the children's side. For example, we worked with sex trafficking survivors in Nigeria and, you know, some of those girls had actually been sold by their parents because they were so poor. Child labor is another complicated issue to cover. It's often the parents who hand over a child to a sister or an aunt. It can start off fairly low key, with a little help around the house, and before you

know it the child is working 15 hours a day, seven days a week. Parents, particularly those who are poor, may not always act in the best interests of a child's health. Usually they are under daily pressures, with very little flexibility and freedom of choice, as we northerners would like them to have. So it can be very complex to advocate for children and tell their stories.

*Amy Bracken:* One challenge that I faced in Belize was that there wasn't really a clear mission for me with our partner organization. It's a challenge that many people face in working for international organizations. I had two bosses. One was the Advocacy Project. And it wasn't the director of the local organization who initially contacted my boss. It was a woman working in development who communicates very little with her director. So I wasn't entirely clear on what I was supposed to do. For example, one thing I tried to impress upon the people was the usefulness of Internet outreach, at least from a fundraising perspective, to get out there online. But some were more focused on going after grants. So I realized we were not on the same page, maybe not a surprise. You know, in our training as Peace Fellows, we're told that the best way to prepare for our work abroad is to be ready to throw all our plans out the window. You never really know what things are going to be like on the ground, and there's really no way to be sure. You just have to be extremely flexible, to get good at figuring things out as you go along. But one thing that I did stress to the head of my Belize organization was that my weakness was also a strength. I told him that while I was an outsider, and did not fully understand the local ways, this also meant that I understood other parts of the world, which included people who may not understand them, and that I did have some advice on reaching out to these other places.

*Todd Bear:* I think I've dedicated a good part of my career to telling the stories of children in life-threatening situations. The children of Gaza, for example, I've done a number of stories on them, and young children in Haiti, really, all over the world. But you know, as journalists, we can pitch these stories as much as we want, and at the end of the day, we have editors and producers who will decide if that story goes on TV or in a newspaper.

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### *The Unknown Impact of Social Media*

*Theme:* While today's media specialists commonly have a Facebook page, a blog on Twitter, and footage on You-Tube, the impact of social media on charitable giving to distant victims, or more precisely the extent of its impact, remains a research question. Using social media is now a given, a global norm, for both journalists and charity staff.

*Participants:* Todd Baer, Deborah Ensor, Dan Heath, Emily Bergantino, Amy Bracken

*Interviewer:* Social media are now as common as computers and the Internet. How do you see them impacting this issue of child mortality, or reporting of the stories of children in life threatening circumstances?

*Todd Baer:* I think the social media aspect of the issue is an interesting thing. From a journalism standpoint, we have to get on the bus. It's a distribution route for our materials. If you're going to get your children's story out there, well, you have to also use the Internet. This is where a lot of the eyeballs are, where a lot of the viewers get their information. The other big thing is that it's also pretty easy. Anybody can write 15 words on Twitter and do a little Facebook update, and you don't have to go through an editor to send your message. But is that good journalism? Is that our best storytelling? To honest with you, I don't think anyone in the news business has an answer to your question right now.

One thing we are trying to do here in India at our World Media Academy, is to say, "Look, here's the digital camera, here's a BlackBerry, and here's your Twitter account, this is how you use it. But it's not about the camera, phone, or Twitter account.

It's not about the fancy iPad or iPhone you have. It's about the content you provide." So even with the technology and social media, we're still focusing on how a reporter gets good compelling content. And then when you do get good content, how do you distribute it to the rest of the world. Just because it's a good story of children of Gaza, for example, doesn't mean that CNN is going to jump off their chair and grab it. One advantage of social media is that I can go shoot a story, edit it on my computer with Final Cut Pro, and then to distribute it through all touch points on the web. But first you need to know how to tell the story.

*Deborah Ensor:* We do a lot of work with social media, training citizen journalists with their mobile phones and website options like Twitter. I think people are naturally drawn to passing on information. In terms of training our journalists to reach an international audience, I'm not entirely sure how to answer the question. Often if the stories of our journalists are good enough, they'll get picked up by international media, and they will spread across the web. We had one case where a woman did a story about people reusing condoms in one region of Kenya. It got picked up by the international media because she did a quality job. So even with all our social media possibilities, our theory is the same: if a journalist does good work, if he or she can tell a quality story, they are more likely to get noticed.

*Dan Heath:* I think what makes the website of "The Life You Can Save" so powerful is that it couples a very powerful emotion, the desire to make a difference with your life, with a very concrete formula. It has a calculator where you can plug in your income and it will tell you, "Here's what you need to give to sort of qualify for the Pledge." I think people respond better when what's expected of them is clear. For those reasons, if I have

more money, resources, and time to improve the website, I'd find ways to play up the social aspect of communication, so that it feels like "The Life You Can Save" is something that happens from person to person. So if someone is inspired and takes the Pledge, he or she will tell a family member or friend, and then share the book and the website, thinking the other may be moved as well. It seems to me like this is a perfect thing for social media to facilitate, a person-to-person dissemination of ideas. I'd love to have a team of social network geniuses to explore how to use Facebook and Twitter to circulate these ideas and connect people. With social media I really believe that this is the kind of thing that could become a large scale movement, that could make people feel part of a big caring community, which has taken this Pledge to save children's lives.

*Emily Bergantino:* I think social media is an imperfect science. Especially with fundraising no one really knows how to crack the code on how to raise large sums of money for children, for example, through Twitter. It's all pretty experimental right now. We did something new with Facebook called "sponsored stories." They were piloting a new kind of advertisement and teaming up with nonprofits to test their idea. Because of our willingness to experiment and give it a try, our Facebook following went up from like 20,000 to 200,000 in two months, which is amazing. So now we've got this great group of online people, and we're trying to figure out what they want to hear from us, or what do they respond to. And we've found that they really like it when we ask them questions, and test them on their knowledge of malaria. So we might post a photo and say, "What is it? This is a malaria quiz. If you can explain what it is, we'll send you back a message."

With Twitter, the job is really to just be part of the conversation, to make sure that you respond and give people interesting things to discuss. I think it's important for

people to feel that if they do post a question, they are going to get a quick and informed response. What's so interesting about social media to me is that you read in newspapers or hear on TV that social media is numbing us to interpersonal relationships. But we've found is that we get the best response when people feel like there's a human being behind the media. They want connection. So you have to be responsive. Last week we sent a survey to people on our email list, saying "It's been three years and we want to update ourselves about your interests. We want to know what you'd like to hear from us. What's your favorite story?" We're trying to keep them engaged. We're also informing them of our progress, showing them that it is working, and that they are an important part of a huge humanitarian success. You know, we refer to the people who follow us, in front of them as well, as stakeholders. We let them know "You have a stake in this work, so we want to make sure that you have up-to-date information. We want you to know when we're making progress, and when there's been a setback, because you were bold enough to lend a hand and say you wanted to be part of this. So it is us who owe you."

Many people can't volunteer at a food bank. They can't travel to Africa to help cure malaria victims. And we don't have the resources to send them there as witnesses. So we have media, which can link them to the sick children and their parents. And if we fail in this, if we don't create a personal connection between the kids and someone's contribution, and I just don't mean financial, some may sign up for the newsletter or follow us on Twitter, if we don't continue to serve as a bridge between an issue they care about in other parts of the world, then we certainly can't blame ourselves, as media specialists, if their attention wanders. And so we continue to bring them personal stories of individuals that we meet in Africa, determined to connect the two worlds.



*Amy Bracken:* I have an example from personal experience. After the earthquake in Haiti I was living in the U.S. I wanted good news, but I was much less interested in reading articles or listening to NPR, than I was in hearing from my Haitian friends through Facebook and Twitter. Social media can be much more personal. And for people to really understand what it's like to live through an earthquake or other natural disaster, I think communication does need to be very personal.

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*The Promise of Women Voices*

*Theme:* Of all the stories heard from interview participants, perhaps the most promising news for life-threatened children comes from the collective work of World Pulse (WP) members. Not only is WP a rich source of global news, produced by women from 185 countries, as well as a training system for new domestic reporters, it is relationship building network. It connects women from all walks of life, sharing meaningful stories from Internet cafes and cell phones, which of course, commonly focus on children in need. In their digital exchanges, strangers become friends, “find their global voice,” and support each other’s causes. With a growing membership of over 11,000, the stories of these women storytellers have been picked up by the BBC, PBS, BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the U.N., the *Huffington Post*, and more. As WP states on its website, encouraging “women to speak for themselves to the world and connect to solve global problems...It is a revolution that has already begun.” Perhaps the best chance for life-threatened children lies in the collective voices of women.

*Interview Participants:* Kim Crane, Stella Paul, Marian Hassan

*Kim Crane:* From our point of view, women's voices are underrepresented in the media, and the issues they experience, firsthand around the world, are also underrepresented in the media, such as child mortality, or the health of their children. Women live on the front lines, experiencing these issues daily. Our approach is to help them develop their personal stories, and connecting to other women through storytelling. So we’ve formed a large community of women, from all over the world, writing about issues of concern to them, and of course, this includes the health of their children.

*Interviewer:* It seems that World Pulse is a very promising story, in and of itself.

*Kim Crane:* We think so. The first part of our work is trying to encourage women, who have been told that their voices don't matter, to speak out and start writing about issues that matter, empowering them to comment on what's happening in their communities. Then the second part is to help them to get out these messages in a bigger way. So we have both a print and online magazine where we cover global issues from women's perspective and also publish many of the stories. We also have an online community of 11,000 members worldwide, and a specific program that provides journalism training to selected women leaders with promising voices. All the training happens online, where they're writing and interacting. So we have a module on internet security, one on interviewing, another on writing a good story, as well as how to place it in a global context. All of the women are paired with an editor, who helps them develop their writing voice, along with an "empowerment mentor" who helps them to clarify their vision and work towards what they want to be doing in the world. All of this is aimed at helping them develop and strengthen their voices as women leaders, on issues directly impacting their children and communities.

*Interviewer:* Are the women learning any particular principles for communication that may increase the possibility that their audiences will respond with interest, or even compassion, such as on a child health issue in their communities?

*Kim Crane:* Yes, what's really great is that this all happens through our online platform. So as they're developing their story ideas, they may be given an assignment like writing their frontline journal, or putting their personal story into the context of a larger issue

facing their community. And as they are coming up with those topics, they're talking to other women in the program, in our online community, and getting ideas, listening to feedback, while at the same time working with their editor, figuring out the angle and structure. Sometimes there's a language barrier they may need help with. So it's this whole helping process, allowing women to find their own voice, within a safe space, that makes our community unique. And we do encourage a personal voice. What's lovely to see is that in the conversation, in the commenting on the stories between the women, they experience the power of their own words, and feel how they can affect others. I think a lot of women who join the program think that they are not worth hearing, and that they should write about issues others tend to focus on. They don't recognize the power of their voice. So there's lots of social modeling that goes on between members, listening and being listened to. I think these relationships strengthen their next assignment, because they are then writing from a place of having been heard.

*Interviewer:* I assume that there must be a good deal of relationship building going on between women in the southern hemisphere and countries like the U.S.

*Kim Crane:* Absolutely. It's lovely to witness, and we actually call the editors who work with the women, "editorial midwives." They all volunteer. Some come from journalism backgrounds. They get as much out of the relationships as the women in the program. Amazing connections can happen. Much of the empowerment mentoring takes place online, through Skype or emails, so we don't necessarily see all of the connecting. But yes, important relationships are forming. For a woman in the Global South, for example, she knows that her story is being heard by someone else in another part

of the world, another woman who believes in her, and thinks her story is worth sharing to a much larger audience.

*Interviewer:* Are you finding that the stories of the women, particularly in remote villages of the Global South, are also resulting in different kinds of social action, like help for their children?

*Kim Crane:* Yes. There are many success stories that come up. We've had other members in the community get inspired by a story and want to help another woman. For example, we had a woman in Spain who had been reading about what was happening to a Kenyan woman, on the health issues facing the other's community. So she went to Kenya to help. Together they set up a mobile clinic. There are other stories like that. We also have a resource exchange, our own kind of Craigslist, where people can post their needs. So someone with a project can say that they're looking for funding, or needing a specific resource. And we've found that women from the Global North are eager to help the other members figure out how to get needed resources, and how to convert their vision into action. This is actually the piece we are still learning how to do better. The women do an amazing job of getting their stories out there, compelling stories that move people, like stories of children in their communities. But our next step in development is to help them convert the real needs of their stories into helping action. Many of the women are learning how to do this, which often does occur through their online connections. Yet I think it can and should happen in much bigger ways. So we're working on this, how to use our platform, not only to connect people, but to move others towards helping action. When we survey people they say, "We have read this story and feel moved. Now what can we do to help?"

*Interviewer:* Stella, as a member of World Pulse, do you use its social network to disseminate stories on issues affecting villages in India, particularly with regards to children's health?

*Stella Paul:* When it comes to journalism in India, 80 to 90 percent of the focus is on politics. There is little coverage on issues such as infant mortality, unless a disease becomes an epidemic. A few years ago, for example, we had something called "chikungunya," a terrible disease that spread through South India. It was only after a massive number of deaths that the mainstream news covered the losses of children. Another example is that we have very few good hospitals in India. Our incubators are in bad shape. They burst into flames, killing our premature babies. But few news agencies report this story. Only when there was a case of seven babies who died in Utter Pradesh did it finally become news. The motivation to cover stories like this has to come from within. A professional reporter here, or even a citizen journalist, has to feel strongly about children's issues, to find ways to get these stories out. So yes, World Pulse is a vehicle for this.

*Marian Hassan:* World Pulse brings women together from all over, women who personally know children struggling with lethal diseases. There are many preventable diseases which can cause death to children unless precautions are taken. Some mothers, for example, might not have enough experience to deal with such cases. For instance, some mothers here didn't take seriously the vaccination for measles. But if others could have encouraged them, maybe an outbreak could have been prevented. World Pulse allows women to share this kind of information.

*Stella Paul:* A month ago I got involved in the Voice of the Future contest for World Pulse, so I started posting stories on different issues. And I learned that they have a huge directory of people from all over the world. But I was a bit skeptical. You know, having a long list of people doesn't always mean it is an interactive system. So I wanted to check this out, I mean its level of social interaction, and how could I use this community. And when I posted my stories, I saw that women were responding, and have continued to respond. It wasn't the contest that was the important thing to me, or the extra training. What I really gained from the forum was all the relationships, the opportunity to share stories with women from across the world. That's the big thing for me as a journalist, the connections, particularly to women who are also social activists.

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### *The Rights of All Children*

*Theme:* As the chat room quiets, after everyone has shared an opinion on how to best report on the plight of sick distant children, the trusted old voice of UNICEF can still be heard. While the media specialists may have disagreed over the “how” of storytelling, one principle remains clear and unanimous: all children must be treated with dignity and respect in media communications.

*Participants:* Susannah Masur and Rebecca Fordham

*Susannah Masur:* Our job at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF is to be a voice for children in need around the world, and to draw attention to their situation in the United States, doing whatever we can to raise the needed funds to get them support and assistance. It’s UNICEF’s mission to bring about a day when no child on earth dies from a preventable disease, or a cause like unsafe drinking water or lack of nutrition. We call this our “Believe in Zero” campaign.

In terms of media communications, we are guided, first and foremost, by the need to respect the dignity of children. So we show children in a positive and hopeful light, focusing on their intrinsic dignity. If you look through the materials on our website, or our videos, you will see that this is the case. We fundamentally believe that that it is the positive, or shining a light on hope and the dignity of children, that motivates people to help more, as opposed to just focusing on bleak aspects of their situations. That's not to say that we gloss over the reality of what's happening. We do try to present the reality of children’s circumstances, but we also show what's being done to improve them. We



try to strike a balance. But with all our communications, the rights of children always come first.

*Rebecca Fordham:* With regards to media communications on fragile children, a basic guideline for UNICEF is to not cause any further harm to them, to act in their best interests. For example, in the case of child abuse, we try to ensure that there is no further exploitation through media coverage. So we don't name the children or show their faces, unless there is authorization or some reason to do so. They are already vulnerable. And we don't use images of children who have not been abused. Or with child soldiers, we don't show pictures of a child with a gun that could perpetuate the problem. Our priority is to respect the dignity of each child, as we try to give him or her a voice as well.

We also try to be as constructive as possible. In the case of a preventable illness, for example, we may show the prevention methods being used to clean the drinking water, and do campaigns on sanitary procedures, like hand washing, making the issue as interactive as possible. So we link concerns to real solutions, while safeguarding the rights of the child. In the Horn of Africa, for instance, where conditions are extremely serious, we're trying to show the actual reality on the ground, the degree of malnutrition and spread of disease through the camps, but we're also focusing on what's being done. Obviously, we can't tell outside journalists what to do, and we welcome media interest, but our primary job to ensure that the children are being protected. Reporting stories of fragile children should never cause more harm.

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## INSPIRATION

*Nicholas Kristof:* And so over time, I came to think that in fact, the power of a column and maybe more broadly the power of journalism, isn't so much to change people's minds on issues that are already on the agenda, but rather, it's the capacity to shine a spotlight on some issue and thereby project it on the agenda. And on so many of the issues that I care deeply about, the reason that they're not being addressed is simply because they're not on the agenda. And shining a spotlight and making people uncomfortable about what they see in that spotlight, I think truly is the first step toward getting more resources, more attention, and more energy dedicated to solving them. (Tippet, 2010)

*Andrew Hurst:* You know, I'm not on the ground in the villages making these programs work, but I am in a position, like everybody, to make a bit of a difference, by telling people what is happening on the ground. As you know, something like 370,000 babies are born now HIV positive. And we hope to get that number to zero by 2015. I'm not sure it will be possible by then, but perhaps within a decade or less, it should be possible. This is not rocket science. There are things proven to work. It can be done.

*John Beale:* The fact of the matter is that there is simply not enough money for all the world's problems. And so, what I would like to have in my own little way, and I think I speak on behalf of Village Reach, I'd like to see a more constructive, useful, and tactful reallocation of how our aid money is spent. At a personal level, I believe that sometimes you simply just have to give to save a child, no matter what the cost. I agree with this

principle. But in truth, there are an awful lot of children and mothers who die every day, because we haven't cleaned up some of the inefficiencies in our helping systems.

*Rob Mather:* We live in an age when people need to be more accountable for what they do, and not just anecdotally. There are less excuses for organizations to do that. I believe that the rise of independent, charity evaluator groups or organizations, however they are formed, whether to help wealthy philanthropists decide where to donate their money, or less resourced individuals trying to contribute what they can, this is an important trend, to guide and reassure people in their giving. And at the end of the day, if journalists and media specialists also do their part, and communicate more effectively about these important causes, more and more people will support the good that is going on in the world.

*Amy Bracken:* The word "advocacy" and its whole idea is something that I really struggle with and think a lot about as a journalist. Most reporters I've worked with are conscientious people. They feel passionately about many of the issues that they cover. They want to touch other people's lives and do more for problems like child mortality. But somehow, when you start talking about "advocacy," I think there's a fear of losing credibility. The term can distract us. But I do think that advocacy is very much what we do each day, giving voice to the voiceless.

*Stella Paul:* I'm a strong believer in Gandhian philosophy. But unfortunately, the villages are still not the focus of our news media. The village has become something we take for granted. Some people associate the villages with "bad girls." This is so ironic because the roots of this alternative journalism and community media are the

villages, which are usually not in the news. But the villages are where the stories need to come from. They have children in need of help.

*Marian Hassan:* The truth of these heartbreaking stories is that the subjects are human beings, our brothers and sisters. The same could have happened to anyone of us, anywhere on earth. And it's women and children who suffer most. Each day in Somalia, 10 out of 10,000 children under age 5 die from malnourishment. The famine has spread to new regions in the country. Somalia is at risk of losing an entire generation due to the magnitude of the famine. As fellow humans we ought to act collectively to save their lives. What we can together is much more effective than what can be done individually. Combining all our efforts can produce positive change to makes this world a better place, for everyone.

**CONCLUSION:**  
**Taking Inventory**  
**on Comfort to the Young Afflicted**

**Summary of Findings**

A hermeneutic study is like a mountain hike full of switch backs, traversing forests , valleys, and streams, looking forward, back, up and down, each new place offering another view of a different horizon, the immediate surroundings, and the entire landscape. Any place along the trail one can come across a relevant finding or a meaningful link that adds to a more correct understanding of the journey. So it has been with this interpretive study of media reporting on life-threatened children. The weaving between three knowledge bases or conceptual horizons, i.e., the author’s presuppositions, the larger context of the child mortality problem, and the interviews, has led to many discoveries, not of a causal nature, but of “transferable” value (Koch, 1994). The most salient findings are summarized below, according to knowledge base, followed by the author’s reflections.

Presuppositions

1. *Not alone, but often apart:* The author found that he was not alone in this thinking, that there were other sources like philosopher Peter Singer, human rights law, journalism ethics, and a tradition of social justice in American journalism, that provided support for the basic premise of the thesis: journalists and media systems have a moral responsibility to report on the situations of life-threatened children, and ideally, to do so in a compelling way that inspires audiences towards generous action. If not framed carefully, however, this assumption can be misinterpreted by many as a threat to traditional journalism values

of independence, accuracy, and thoroughness. Defense can go up unnecessarily, and become another reason for helping inertia. It is not an either-or conflict. Intentional and ethical journalism can be complementary and effective.

### The Larger Context

2. *Good enough statistics*: Child mortality is a thoroughly researched and documented global problem. The data provided by UNICEF and IGME (Interagency Group for Child Mortality Estimation) comes from rigorous and elaborate statistical analysis. While their numbers do represent best estimates and high probabilities, they are sharply convincing, like the scientific evidence on climate change, close enough to warrant global action.

3. *101 related reasons not to help*: The reasons for journalists, media systems, and U.S. citizens not to help with solving the child mortality problem comprise a formidable list, feeling as long as our neural networks and their abilities to create other mental priorities for our news stories, charitable causes, and money. But there are connections as well between factors, linking the nightly news and morning paper with the web shopping and daily lattes into a “communication buying system,” distracting citizens from the severe needs of life-threatened children and creating a costly “scope insensitivity” to global problems (Huber et al., 2011).

4. *Good reasons for hope*: The research on charitable giving to distance victims does offer useful guidelines to journalists and media systems for reporting more effectively on the circumstances of fragile children. The principles of identifiability, tangibility, optimism, and closing subjective distance can help communicate an inspiring story,

one that move an audience to open their conceptual boundaries, make a felt connection, and include distant children in their circles of caring.

5. *Missing science answers*: Social science tends to lag behind social evolution. The bulk of empirical research on helping distant victims focuses on System I factors, or the influence of emotions. But what about the new recognized power of mindfulness? Can people go beyond “psychic numbing,” in the face of hard statistics, to compassion? What about the omnipresent impact of social media, expanding and connecting every second like the neural network of a child? How powerful is a compelling news story? Can it cause a generous response? And then there is the transparent and accountable nonprofit, with its thoughtful donors screening for optimality, to save thousands of children, not just an identifiable one. Our scientific understanding of why and how people reach across conceptual, cultural, and geographical boundaries, to embrace distant victims, suffering others, is still in its infancy.

#### The Interviews

6. *Ethical boundaries awareness*: There is a gray zone between the intentional reporting of stories on sick distant children, which “hopes to inspire” compassion and generosity, and the more explicit communications of nonprofit charities, designed to raise donations. In spite of some overlap, particularly with the shared motivation to save children’s lives, professional journalists and media specialists do recognize the boundaries.

7. *Best not use the word*: When it comes to engaging journalists in an open dialogue on the issue of child mortality, the concept of “advocacy” has little use. It tends to threaten traditional values, provoke emotions, and distract from the central issue of reporting on

fragile children. A more useful frame is “giving voice to the voiceless,” which tends to shift the conversation from “if” to report to “how.”

8. *Pockets of research awareness*: Professional journalists, compared to media teams of nonprofit charities, tend to have less knowledge of and interest in scientific research on charitable giving. This is not a surprising finding. Whereas the former focuses on providing accurate and thorough information to news audiences, the latter welcomes research principles to improve their fundraising and victim relief outcomes. There are exceptions, however, such as reporters with a strong intent to inspire social action.

9. *All agree on a good story*: While traditional journalism may emphasize thoroughness and accuracy of information sharing, the concept of a “compelling story” does maintain a sacred status among reporters. It is a bridge across the “gray zone,” between the hard line of objectivity and the soft edge of intentionality. A good story has the best probability of persuading a news editor, of engaging a busy audience, and of generating public concern.

10. *A positive paradigm shift*: Perhaps thanks to the persistence of UNICEF and other child advocates, there is a major shift underway with the “context of communications” on fragile children, from bleak emaciated pessimism to empowered willful optimism, from pity to dignity, problems to solutions, and doubt to reliability. This is a wonderful change, a long time coming, honoring the struggle of life-threatened children, and their parents, villages, and committed global helpers.

11. *American idol media talent*: Among communication teams of nonprofits charities there exists a promising experimentation to save children’s lives through information, a media laboratory, where “advocacy” is a passionate word of mission statements, and



creative initiatives, even with 20 percent odds, are worth the risk. There is a free spirit, perhaps only second to advertising teams, but in this case, with a “giving to people” incentive, as opposed to “buying a thing.” These media team pioneers are exploring uncharted territory of social media and global communications, with or without the scientific research, in a determined effort to end preventable diseases among children, to realize the just vision of “zero.”

12. *Renewed value of statistics:* When reviewing the empirical research on charitable giving to distant victims, particularly the phenomenon on psychic numbing, one may conclude that statistical data and large numbers have a double edge. Although they are essential to understand and confirm societal problems, they apparently can also inhibit the deliberative thinking of average citizens. The emergence of successful nonprofits like Village Reach and The Malaria Foundation, based on principles of transparency and accountability, appear to add new value to numerical data. A new kind of donor is also arising that wants to know where her money goes, and how it converts to social change. This is the principle of “optimality,” or getting the best results from one’s contribution. In John Beale’s words, “They’re more interested in saving thousands of children’s lives,” than one identifiable child. In short, if they give, they want the data, with big numbers, that show proof of a heroic intervention.

13. *Northern journalist as southern mentor:* As it becomes increasingly unfeasible for U.S. news agencies to maintain the old tradition of foreign correspondents, even the contemporary trend of parachute journalism, it leaves both a void and an opportunity, a decrease in northern reporters in foreign countries, but a rise in domestic storytellers. Perhaps by default, American journalists are being nudged into a new role with regards

to world news, referred to by some as “mentoring,” that is, a skills sharing, supportive partnership across hemispheres. It makes good sense, and this change may have also been a long time coming, to move beyond the top-down legacy of Western imperialism. Al-Jazeera has seen the need for years, and wisely invested in southern capacity building. Along with organizations like Internews, The Advocacy Project, and World Pulse, from professional reporters to citizen journalists, local people are reclaiming their power to tell their own village stories, including the struggles of their sick children.

14. *Women of the world unite:* Perhaps the most hopeful finding of this thesis project was found in the story of World Pulse, seeming to link together all the knowledge bases into a genuine “fusion of horizons” in Gadamer’s (1985) terms. It is a story of women and child advocacy, participatory empowerment, social media innovation, journalism mentoring, social distance closing, giving voice to the voiceless, comforting the afflicted, and leaping into the pond of drowning children in their own villages, without hesitation, like a mobile rescue squad. Already with 11,000 members, growing each cyber second with each story posting, one feels that these sister reporters may actually weave together the world again, into a global culture of caring. As a human quilt of guardians, they may ensure that all the children’s stories are told thoroughly and accurately, with compassion.

15. *Respect and dignity of children:* Lastly, UNICEF should be proud. While likely having shortcomings as with any human system, it has clearly established itself as a trusted voice for fragile children, successfully embedding the principles of respect and dignity into the global conscience. This is no small accomplishment. It has made the world “believe in zero.”

## **Author Reflections**

Tic...toc...tic... toc... We know that somewhere in the world, probably in South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, a child is dying this very second from a preventable illness, likely from pneumonia or diarrhea, or maybe malaria or HIV/AIDS. The numbers and statistics, although close approximations, are certain enough. And we know that the majority of humans do not wish for any child, anywhere on earth, to die unnecessarily. We are genetically conditioned to care for the young. And so we also know, embedded in our conscience, that the high rate of child mortality, or the 22,000 little ones passing each day for no good reason, is simply not OK, not at all. Any honest priest, minister, rabbi, or imam would agree, as well as any doctor, lawyer, teacher, plumber, or journalist, and certainly every mother and father. And therefore, we should also realize, as philosopher Peter Singer and others try to remind us, that we should do something to help these children, every one of us who can.

And we know that we can. There are low cost, effective interventions , proven to save children's lives, as well as transparent, accountable, and reliable organizations, ensuring this rescue work, in remote villages, this instant. We know that a financial contribution, no matter what the amount, to one of these helping systems, which are monitored by independent evaluators, can make the difference of a child's survival. What we give up in a latte, soda, or beer, can go towards medication, a mosquito net, or health clinic transportation. In spite of the snags in our world aid system, this is

“not rocket science,” says Andrew Hurst of the Global Fund. “Things are proven to work. It can be done.”

We also know that there is solid experimental research, identifying factors that tend to increase charitable giving to distant victims. One core principle is that the higher degree of perceived social closeness between a potential giver and an unfamiliar victim, or the less subjective distance, the greater the possibility that the victim will receive aid. Human beings, no matter how geographically distant, tend to help others more when they experience “felt connection.”

In this digital world of high speed internet, multimedia technology, and social networks, we know that effective communication still comes down to making a good connection, and that journalists and media specialists are stewards and guides of this rapidly expanding territory of global information exchange. We also know all journalists, citizen reporters, public relation teams, and news media organizations are included in this “we,” that is, the “we” that should do something to help save the lives of sick children, faraway or close to home.

And although our mass media stewards may differ over terms like “advocacy,” somewhere in the neural networks of their moral conscience, they too are not OK with the monthly death toll of hundreds of thousands of children. “Most reporters I’ve worked with,” says Amy Bracken, “are conscientious people. They feel passionately about many issues they cover. They do want to touch other people’s lives and do more for problems like child mortality.” Most reporters or news storytellers probably also “believe in zero” like UNICEF. While they may squabble over “how to” cover the stories of endangered children, most acknowledge the ethical imperative to do so, to give voice to the voiceless

or comfort the afflicted, especially little ones, “vulnerable people already” as Lee Wilkins points out, “in both philosophical and practical ways.” Most journalists also recognize the boundaries between a fair, accurate, and thorough story, which addresses the complexity of a child’s plight, and biased, inaccurate, and shortsighted reporting. Journalists “worth their salt” maintain their independence, explains Patrick Plaisance, while at the same time, producing a compelling story on a child health issue, or risking a creative initiative in the uncharted realm of social media.

We know that speaking up, telling stories, can make a big difference, that information does change people, and that our mass media, with all its multiple platforms and technologies, is our world vehicle of information exchange. In a sense, speaking up for vulnerable children, “giving” them a voice, is a form of generosity, of opening “news space.” While media teams of nonprofits may take more creative risks and cross the thin line into “advocacy,” candidly asking audiences for financial support, the professional journalist can contribute just as much from the other side, “shining a spotlight” on this issue, as Nicholas Kristof tries, “and projecting it on to the agenda.” And we know that when an issue makes the media’s agenda, like a natural disaster, the world can respond with an outpouring of generosity, in a matter of seconds. In truth, a lot happens these days, both hopeful connections and painful tragedies, within seconds. Time need not be a problem to saving children. This very instant, women in remote villages of Asia and Africa, in our Global South, are sharing stories of their children’s struggles, Skyping, emailing, asking each other for help, and making felt connections with their sisters in the Global North. The word is out among mothers of the world: “believe in zero.”

In conclusion, knowledge is not the obstacle to solving the problem of child mortality, or to reach U.N. Millennium Goal No.4.A., or more justly, to realize zero. We have, and have had, plenty of knowledge. It is not information alone that changes people, or that creates altruism. Knowledge is not a firm intention or a moral decision, and certainly not an act of giving. It is just a step in a change process. Ultimately, when statistics are recorded, and research findings examined, and individual opinions expressed, the challenge of child mortality still comes down to a moral choice, as Peter Singer clarifies, of whether or not to act with one-minded resolve, to leap into the pond and save children. As Stella Paul explains, reporting from villages in India, this moral will, or this motivation to help an unknown other, “has to come from inside.” Maybe not from our prefrontal cortex or our emotional limbic system, not from a good idea or even heart strung sympathy, but from a wave of neural connections linking several regions of our brain, resulting in an unequivocal response, a splash of hope and ripples of caring.

“As fellow humans we ought to act collectively to save children’s lives,” Marian Hassan reminds us from Somalia. “What we can do together is much more effective than what can be done individually. Combining our efforts can produce the positive change to makes this world a better place, for everyone.” As a citizen journalist, Hassan is telling us that we need to leap into the pond together. Of course, it may create others problems. We’d probably bump a few heads, and some of us may stray far from shore. But we would realize the just vision of “zero,” and we could then move on with our evolution, with less burden on our collective conscience, to other global problems.

Boldly speaking, however, concluding that child mortality is deep down, mostly an “ethical challenge,” may underestimate its evolutionary significance to our species. As a preventable, massive loss of human lives, continuing at a horrific daily rate, it hangs over our heads as perhaps our toughest obstacle to social and moral evolution. What is our purpose here on Earth, really, if we cannot take care of its children, every one of them? A problem like climate change, in comparison, seems small. Eventually we’ll solve global warming, if only for the survival of the species, as well as world capitalism. Even war seems more fixable than the endless flow of child casualties. Wars too can drain economies, and inevitably, they end. But distant children can continue to die quietly, in hard to reach villages of the Global South, as people in the northern hemisphere go about their daily business, taking care of their “own families.” Like malaria, the remote losses do not touch them. The children just disappear.

The malignant core of the child mortality problem, to risk another controversial term, may more precisely be described as a “spiritual” challenge, not in a faith-based or religious sense of the word, or even a matter of belief. It appears to be an issue of “consciousness,” yet another prickly term, or more simply put, the awareness of our interdependence as a species, our ties as a *Homo sapiens* family. Using psychological terms, one can also describe the challenge as one of conceptual boundaries, rooted in the fixed assumption, for example, that a child from Tanzania is “over there” with those “other people,” not a member of “our tribe.” As a more concrete example, if one of our nephews or nieces were to become ill, and suddenly die, we would experience the loss as “one of our own.” We would also do everything in our power to help prevent such a tragedy. “It could happen to any of us,” Marian Hassan sincerely reminds us,

“anywhere on the planet.” And from a spiritual perspective, or from the awareness of our interconnectedness, common to all our spiritual traditions, the death of a child “over there” in Somalia, is a death of one of our own, here in Colorado or Georgia or Alaska.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of this interpretive study, that this present gap in human consciousness, or the inability of people to open their conceptual boundaries, to recognize the empirical reality of our interdependence, and to include distant children in their circles of caring, may well lie at the heart of this morally painful problem. And if it is, then the solution, ironically, may be our digital technology, electronics that connect us whether we like it or not, and social networks like World Pulse, bringing together women across continents, telling the stories of children, joining forces, and as Peter Singer encourages, creating “cultures of caring.” Throughout human history, women have crossed boundaries of kin and clan to take care of each other’s children, in spite of male dominance. Perhaps men have explored more new territory, but women have made it their home. Both tendencies, expanding and including, are necessary for social evolution, along with useful tools. If the Internet has taught us anything, it is that there’s room for all our voices. So there is hope for our little ones, suffering from pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria. Optimism is rising, every cyber second, in a blog, tweet, or story posting, speeding back and forth, quilting our world together. And it is only such a collective quilt, with strong threads of felt connection, that will fully cover, with lasting comfort, our young afflicted. “Ubuntu,” advise African elders. “Ubuntu.”

One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu – the essence of being human.

Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all



by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads. It is for the whole of humanity. – Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2008)

**An EPILOGUE:**  
**The Story of a Seed Planter**

In the summer of 2008, the author set off on a trip to Tanzania, to the Gombe Stream National Park along Lake Tanganyika, as a second step in the production of an envisioned documentary on child mortality, to be called “Every Few Seconds.” After having the good fortune to shoot an interview with philosopher Peter Singer, one of the strongest advocates of our moral obligation to save the lives of distant children, the author decided that the next voice needed to be heard was Jane Goodall, the legendary primatologist. Familiar with her writings and deep insight into human nature, he hoped that she would speak to our evolutionary conflict as an emotional thinking species, capable of compassion and generosity, that also creates conceptual boundaries, terrible wars, and extreme poverty, and that allow thousands of children to die unnecessarily each day. He knew Dr. Goodall would have wisdom to share. But meeting Jane, who spends more than 300 days a year on the road, can be a big challenge, let alone trying to interview her – on film. The Goodall Institute, her offspring, global nonprofit “that empowers people to make a difference for all living things,” protects her like royalty, and for good reasons. She is a treasure.

So after numerous letters and phone calls with the Institute, which set strict conditions and sidestepped dates, the author gave up on the idea of a Goodall interview. “I’ll go to Gombe instead,” he concluded. He would shoot the chimpanzees in their natural habitat, and hopefully interview the on-site primatologists.

As in many parts of the southern hemisphere, time has its own local speed and travel its own domestic snags. Upon arrival in Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, on a Thursday, the author proudly secured a seat on a flight to Kigoma, the town closest

to the Gombe Reserve, for the following day. Or so it seemed. A chance to practice patience, there were no Kigoma planes on Friday. Nothing on Saturday. When a stewardess and pilot did appear on Sunday, and the author passed through ticketing, feeling like it might really happen, he noticed in the modest lobby upstairs that there were only a few other passengers. It seemed he was the only “mzungu,” or white person in Swahili, heading to Kigoma, except for an elderly woman with straight silver hair, writing on a laptop in the corner of the room.

“I swear,” the author said to himself, “she looks a lot like Jane Goodall. “But no way. It can’t be,” he thought. “The Institute said she was somewhere else.” And as he fidgeted with his belongings, taking inventory of his camera equipment, he could not help looking across the lobby at the thin “mzungu” lady. So he got up and walked casually across the room, pretending to look in the window of a gift shop, while studying the reflection of the elder woman. He began to feel anxious, as he quietly snuck by her, realizing that “You know, it really might be her.” He hadn’t gotten a good look because her face was buried in the laptop. Next to her, however, sat a stuffed animal, a monkey. He remembered reading about Dr. Jane travelling with an inseparable mascot called “Mr. H.”

“It had to be her,” he concluded. So after two more passes around the room, he found the courage to approach the woman.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Would you happen to be Dr. Jane Goodall?”

She looked up, surprised by the visitor’s voice. “Yes I am,” she said with a smile. Her eyes twinkled.

“I can’t believe this,” he replied. “I’ve been trying to make contact with you for

months. And here you are. Makes me want to believe in destiny.”

Dr. Goodall invited the author to sit down with her and talk. As the plane was delayed, and time no longer seemed to matter, he told her his life story like a fast forward home video, wanting her to understand his quest to meet her. So he outlined how he had come from San Carlos, California, travelled through Africa after college, become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kenya, stumbled upon hunger in mountains of Zaire, ended up as a psychologist, marrying a woman from El Salvador, raising a girl in New Mexico, and still, after 20 some years, was unable to shake the images of the Congolese children from his mind. So he had made a commitment to study journalism to help give them a voice. “And talking with you,” he explained, “is part of this journey.”

Goodall listened with kind attention, distracted only at moments by a friendly pigeon that had wandered into the lobby and found floor crumbs, likely placed by the nature lover herself. Eventually the author reached his punch line, his hope to conduct a film interview with her for the documentary. Although she graciously declined, “perhaps at a later date,” she invited him to “Ask your questions. We have a little time right now.” So he explained his fixation with the high rate of child mortality, and how he believed that it was an obstacle to humanity’s social evolution.

“Even moral evolution,” she added.

“So what do you think it might take,” he asked, “for our species to take this collective leap and finally embrace distant children as our own, and to stop their preventable deaths.”

“I honestly don’t know,” she replied, to his surprise. “But I do know,” she continued, “that we are capable of doing it. I know that we can do as much good

on this planet, as we can cause harm. We have both these potentials inside us.”

She then spoke of all the positive changes happening in the world, of hopeful programs like her “Roots and Shoots,” which teaches children in more than 100 countries the principles of interdependence, and the need to care for all living creatures, “especially our own kind.” The author also asked how her study of the chimpanzees, our closest genetic relatives, might have something to teach us on this challenge of child mortality.

“They are a lot like us,” she said, “capable of both caring and harm.”

It was the awareness of our complex nature, she emphasized, that made the difference. It seemed as if her years of close relationship with the chimpanzees had allowed her a deeper look into our human nature. In them, she saw us. The chimps in their natural habitat, which the author later observed in Gombe, reflected back how nurturing primates can be with their young, and how they can also hurt each other, even causing death, as they place physical and emotional distance from different clans, in a similar human process referred to as “speciation.” In short, chimps like humans can act as if they are separate from “those over there,” across the forest, mountains, or oceans. We can both internalize geographical boundaries, keeping us from embracing each other as one big family.

During her brief moments of distraction, Goodall would address the hungry pigeon, as if honoring his presence, trying to make an inter-species connection as she so masterfully can. She modeled interdependence. She clearly practiced this no boundary state like a meditation, allowing it to grow into the organizing hub of her neural networks and her navigating compass as a person.

As they boarded the plane and the author sat behind the wise elder, she returned

to her laptop with one-minded attention. Restraining himself to not interrupt her writing, the author did get another chance to chat with Dr. Goodall as she munched on a snack. With only a day on this trip to visit Gombe, her precious refuge, in her busy year schedule of crisscrossing the planet, she was headed to a refugee camp to launch a reforestation project, as well as to bring attention to the plight of the children there.

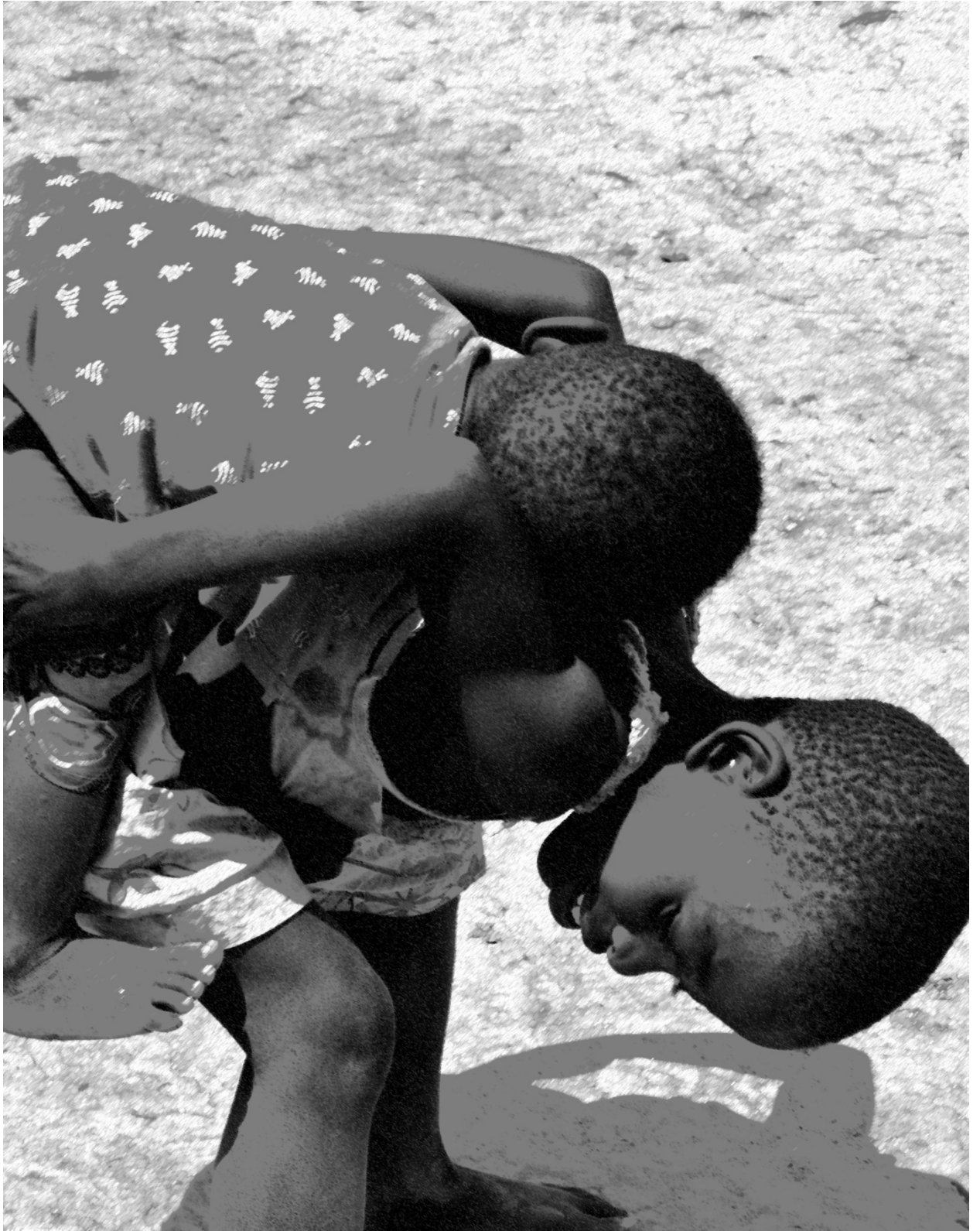
“You look so intent with your laptop,” he added.

“I’m not very good with the thing,” she replied.

“Can I ask what your writing?,” he inquired.

“Oh, another proposal,” she said. “I’m just planting more seeds, trying to make every second count.”

There was a lightness in her words, as well as a serious tone. She seemed as happy with her mission as driven by its calling. Up in the air traversing the plains of Tanzania, home of both mystical wildlife and severe poverty, the words “make every second count” resounded with a dead seriousness – an urgency to act. Well aware of her limited time on Earth, it seemed like she was trying to sow as many seeds as she could, across continents, as her sincere contribution to save the world, and all its life: her beloved chimps, the pigeons, her African brothers and sisters, and especially, the children. With enough positive growth, Jane Goodall continues to believe, with plenty of inclusive roots and long expanding shoots, the good in human nature will overcome. We will make the leap and save the children.



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