

International Forum
Vol. 15, No. 1
April 2012
pp. 3-4

EDITORIAL

Sustainable Reform in the Developing World

How can we make a difference? In the developing world, far too many people go to bed hungry, too many can't read or write, and far too many children die before they have really had a chance to live. The developing world has experienced more than its fair share of war, famine, and natural disasters, to say nothing of corruption and disease. The accident of the place of one's birth should not create differences this large.

The rest of the world has not entirely stood idly by and watched, but all of its best intentions have not always yielded the results that were intended. The developing world has far too many projects that start well, but end by the time the money runs out, nothing really permanent has been achieved. The concern of this volume of *International Forum* is how we can make reforms in the developing world that will last. What sort of changes will continue long after the initial project has been completed? What sorts of needs do developing countries have that can be met with help from the outside? What kind of help is most useful?

The articles in this issue were selected from presentations at a 3-day Research Forum that was held on the AIIAS campus December 1-3, 2011. The majority of the articles in this issue have to do with education as the avenue to sustainable development. Abadzi and Prouty, who work with the World Bank and other international aid organizations, discuss the current science of literacy and the implications of new findings for literacy programs in low-income countries. Given their unique insider viewpoint, this study documents ongoing literacy initiatives in some of the poorer countries of the world.

Ella Simmons is an educator with decades of experience in administration. As an African-American female in administration of higher education, she understands many of the struggles for equality from the inside, having experienced them in her own career. Her article is a plea for the promise of universal education to actually be delivered to those who need it the most; something that everyone agrees should happen, but it still hasn't.

The next two articles move from broad, theoretical studies to data-driven concerns in small corners of the developing world. Joseph examines special education, particularly speech and language therapy, in St. Lucia. While mainstream education runs fairly well in many developing countries, specialized programs are often far behind where they need to be. This small example is a snapshot of a larger problem that cannot be ignored on a global level. The next study is a picture of education under extreme circumstances: in a refugee camp in Uganda. Far too many people are living in “temporary” circumstances for extended periods of time. In Central Africa alone, there are more than 2 million people living in refugee camps or camps for displaced persons. These people cannot put their lives on hold for the 10 years it might take to get them back to a “normal” place to live. Unfortunately, refugee camps do well to deal with food and sanitation issues—education is far down the list of important items. Wambaleka, himself from Central Africa, interviews teachers working in refugee camps, to get an idea of the challenges they face, and in an effort to learn what we can do to support them.

The last article in this issue is from the field of Health. By Peruvian health educators César Galvez and colleagues, it looks at young people’s attitudes in Peru toward sexual practices and prevention alternatives that might reduce their risk of getting AIDS. Of particular interest in his study is the role of religion in influencing their behavior. Do religious students have a greater risk of AIDS because of the way they are raised?

While these studies cannot begin to resolve the complex issues involved in sustainable reform, they do present some hope. They provide data from developing countries, and in many cases are written by scholars from developing countries, who understand the issues from an insider perspective. As we give space to hearing what works and what doesn’t, and listening to the voices of the people involved on the front lines, perhaps we can gain a clearer understanding of what sustainable reform looks like in the developing world, and find new ways of contributing to it.

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