

Purchase for Progress

Howard Buffett: "We Need To Connect Poor Farmers To Markets"

Published on 07 June 2010

A philanthropist who's donated millions to the fight against hunger, Howard Buffett talks with WFP's Nancy Roman about his experiences in the developing world and why he supports a WFP pilot project that helps farmers escape poverty by growing more and better food and then selling it at a fair price.



Howard Buffett during a 2008 trip to Nepal. Copyright: WFP/Laura Melo

You've travelled extensively to the countries where WFP works. What's your most vivid personal memory of hunger and malnutrition?

It was in a village in [Huambo province](#) in [Angola](#). There had been a really severe [drought](#) for two years in a row and every village we passed on the way had a grave site of may be 20-30 graves. Most of them were three to four feet long. They were children. When we arrived, you could see the death – you could pick out the children that weren't going to make it. That's when I really started learning about how WFP helps.

Once you feel the need to take a stand, how does a philanthropist like you decide how to use the money?

I've visited a lot of projects and one of the things I've learned is how important it is to have the right people and the right systems in place to make things work long term. With WFP, we saw that they had done an incredible job of putting together very effective teams of people with innovative ideas who were willing to take risks.

Who is Howard Buffett?

With that in mind, how did the Howard Buffett Foundation decide to invest in Purchase for Progress?





Howard Buffett is a farmer, photographer, philanthropist, and director of the [Howard G. Buffett Foundation](#), which every year gives millions of dollars to development projects that help poor farmers and rural communities.

[Read the complete interview here](#)

I'm very familiar with the difficulties small farmers in poor countries encounter in gaining access to markets. When I looked at [P4P](#), I thought here is an opportunity to connect poor farmers to markets on a scale that's never been tried before, and we have the people and the systems in place to make it work.

You've seen P4P projects at work in at least seven of the 21 countries where it's been introduced. What are some of the challenges you've encountered?

One of the problems is overcoming deeply rooted [gender divides](#), where you have women responsible for agriculture but men wanting to take control. It's a big challenge to make sure that all people engaged in the process are being treated fairly and equally. Another problem are contracts. In order to work, P4P depends on contracts and in a lot of places, that's not an arrangement small farmers are familiar with.

How would you define success at the end of P4P pilot projects?

Ideally, a successful project will take 8,000 to 12,000 farmers and move them permanently into the economy, so that when we look back in three or four years time, they won't need to sell us their corn anymore because they'll be selling it somebody else.

What do you hope to achieve as an Ambassador against Hunger?

I may not be as good-looking as some of the other [ambassadors](#), or as famous, but I have learned a lot from the field. I think my job is to share my experiences with people and help them understand that hunger is a disaster – like an earthquake or a tsunami – that strikes every single day. If I could accomplish that much, it would be something to be proud of.

Interview by [Nancy E. Roman](#), WFP Director of Public Policy, Communications and Private Partnerships

What is P4P?

The Purchase for Progress Programme builds on WFP's longstanding tradition of buying locally to help smallholder farmers improve quality, raise quantity and gain access to local markets. [Find out how it works](#)

