

February 28, 2014

Mr. Bill Gates
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
500 Fifth Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109



Dear Bill,

I am writing in response to your annual letter in which you and Melinda discuss “Three Myths That Block Progress for the Poor.” On behalf of the All Stars Project, a major American anti-poverty initiative where I serve as president and CEO, together with our Board vice chair Hunter Hunt and founder Dr. Lenora Fulani, we commend you for your tireless philanthropic work on behalf of poor people the world over. You have raised important issues in your letter which urgently need to be addressed. In particular, I am moved to write to you because I am concerned with how you and the Gates Foundation are defining the problems of poverty, and therefore progress in this arena.

You express concern that progress is being made but not always acknowledged. “People don’t see progress,” you told Charlie Rose recently. I could not agree more. Of course, what people see is very much a function of what they’re looking for. Whether or not people see progress is based, presumably, on how people define progress. You and the Gates Foundation have worked to create a definition of progress, and are now designing and implementing programs based on your definitions, while presenting a set of metrics that demonstrate success on those terms.

In our 30 years of work in the arena of anti-poverty and human development, we have found that it is important to engage the definitions — the operating premises — as much or more than the metrics used to measure success. How the problems of poverty are defined are, for us, and for the hundreds of thousands of poor, mainly Black, Latino and immigrant communities we impact in the United States, inextricably tied to being able to solve them.

Some thoughts on your definitions. As you know, poor countries and poor people are not the same thing. Still, you seem to subscribe to the idea that growing a country’s GDP is equivalent to and results in alleviating poverty. Many prominent economists have noted that increases in the GDP of developing countries have not necessarily meant that poor people living there are doing better. (This is also true in the developed world; this very contradiction currently has American policymakers tied up in knots.)

Joseph Stiglitz points out in his book, *Globalization and its Discontents*, that in the last decade of the 20th century, the total world’s income increased by an average of 2.5% while the number of people living in poverty also increased by 100 million people.

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Politics and policy must be engaged for GDP growth to impact poverty. And, we believe, so must the issue of the social and individual development of poor people.

In your definition of the problem, you identify longevity, literacy and economic freedom as measurements of “what counts” as progress for the poor, as well as a place to live with a refrigerator, a TV and a cell phone. Surely these things are important. But we need only look at our experience here in America to see what happens when attempts are made to address poverty without a simultaneous engagement of the human side of the equation, i.e., the subjectivity of poverty. America has, arguably, the “best-kept” poor people in the world. Our 45 million poor people mostly have shelter, own many of these electronics, and poor children have largely been protected from dying of curable diseases. Yet, even after 50 years of the government spending 20 trillion dollars for the “War on Poverty,” the richest country in the world remains one in which tens of millions of people live in despair, isolated from the mainstream, forced to raise their children in communities racked by violence, drugs and hopelessness and have their lives too often ruined by gunshots, drugs or prison. One need only walk through the housing projects in Chicago, Newark, Dallas or Brooklyn to experience that poor people’s lives have been deprived not only of material things, but also of opportunities for nourishment, happiness and fulfillment.

The innovation that the All Stars Project has discovered and implements, using performance and sophisticated understandings of “being” and “becoming,” specifically addresses the issue of how to help people develop in ways that equip them to transform themselves and their lives. The late Dr. Fred Newman and Dr. Lenora Fulani, who co-founded the All Stars Project, are leading pioneers in new approaches to engaging poverty. Dr. Fulani is a grassroots educator and developmental psychologist, and Dr. Newman was a Stanford-trained philosopher; together they have made new discoveries in the social sciences pertaining to poverty and individual and social growth, where breakthroughs have been very hard to come by. Fundamental to these breakthroughs is the raising of a set of questions that challenge the traditional definitions of poverty. For example, insofar as poverty becomes intractable due to economic and social circumstances, and insofar as changing those circumstances are largely political and policy questions, what role — if any — does subjectivity play in transforming those circumstances? Newman and Fulani have discovered that human development, our capacity to recognize possibility and ability to act on it, plays a crucial role in poor people — individually and socially — beginning to transform their lives.

How does our methodology express this? Our work is based on the understanding that development is possible at all ages and stages of life. We use performance and pretending as tools for growth. And we engage the subjectivity of poverty, helping poor people to expose and to grow beyond the terrible stigma that being poor inflicts on them.

Additionally, we are convinced that any lasting effort to engage poverty needs to go beyond charity, to growth. It is essential to create a direct partnership between rich people and poor people, so everyone grows together and creates something new in their lives. The All Stars Project has raised over \$100 million in private funding from individuals

who aren't just giving but who are partnering with the poor. That is essential to what the All Stars is able to accomplish.

Education is another key area in which the impact of poverty is tragically misunderstood, as I imagine you would agree, given your and Melinda's experiences in trying to impact the education system in the U.S. Education is regarded as the most effective pathway out of poverty. And yet, poor kids are underperforming in school at alarming rates. This paradox cries out for new approaches to the problem, including a redefinition of the problem.

We are not simply facing an achievement gap between poor and minority youth and their white, middle-class counterparts. We are facing something much more serious: the development gap. There is substantial cutting-edge research that has proven that learning and development are inherently connected, but not the same thing. As Hunter Hunt is fond of saying, "You can't educate what isn't developed."

This is why the All Stars focuses on development and is creating a new field of afterschool development. Right now thousands of young people are growing and developing in afterschool, becoming creators of their lives and their learning. You have stressed the importance of funding "the upstream inventions" that make progress possible. We believe that a massive investment in afterschool development needs to be added to in-school reform efforts for the world to make real progress.

Poor people the world over need to be exposed to developmental opportunities. While there are certain conditions that are unique to the American situation including our level of wealth, it is universally true that living in poverty impedes the capacity to see possibility, to make smart choices and to create one's life in new ways. While good health, nutrition and disease inoculation are basic human needs so, too, is the capacity to create, to transform oneself and one's society. This includes having the capacity to make choices about social policies with regard to poverty, wealth creation and economic development. Additionally, there are moral questions to be decided, such as whether we, as a world community, are going to allow poverty to exist? Poverty is not simply a quantitative economic issue. With its long history, it is a cultural, social and emotional issue.

Growing GDP is important and does begin to create a middle class. But we must also have a plan to address the accompanying underdevelopment and despair that impede social development, even when GDP is growing. As Dr. David Grusky, the prominent sociologist and director of the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality who is an outspoken supporter of the All Stars approach, says, we must now have a second war on poverty. And this time, we must be willing to ask ourselves all the hard questions raised by the failures of the first one.

We'd like to introduce you and Melinda to the innovative models, programs and definitions the All Stars Project has created. We are already impacting on hundreds of thousands of lives, and seek nothing less than scaling-up development opportunities to

reach everyone. Hunter Hunt, Dr. Fulani and I would like to meet with you to discuss this.

Human beings, when given opportunities for growth, have the capacity to be agents of personal and social transformation. To make long-term progress in eradicating poverty, we cannot simply prevent people from dying. We have to give them the tools they need to live, in every sense of the word.

Again, my congratulations on your important work. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabrielle Kurlander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

Gabrielle L. Kurlander
President and CEO