



## The Millennium Promise

**The Millennium Promise, which runs some 80 villages in sub-Saharan Africa, aims to help communities move towards sustainable development. It is also trying to encourage the private sector to find solutions to key problems contributing to extreme poverty in Africa, such as Malaria, which kills between one and three million Africans a year.**

The president and co-founder of the Millennium Promise is US economist, Jeffrey Sachs and the mission of the organisation is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.



“The projects were put into truly rural areas,” says **Rustom Masalawala**, Director of Business Development at Millennium Promise and Associate Director, The Earth Institute at Columbia University. “When it started, Jeffrey Sachs went to the heads of state and said to them: “Look we are going to do this work, we want to do this work, where shall we do this work?”

“And they of course selected the hardest places for us to do this work and to Jeff’s credit he said: ‘Fine, if that’s where you want it done, that’s where we’ll do it. And so these places, most of them have no

electricity, very little water, very poor infrastructure.”

Students from major universities in North America are already working on a detailed business plan and the Millennium Promise is also hoping to enlist the support of students from INSEAD and London Business School.

As for entrepreneurs, Masalawala says he has not “seen that many running around rural sub-Saharan Africa.”

He maintains that this is an issue that has to be thought through to find out how entrepreneurs can be created.

He says one way would be to bring them in, teach, support and grow them and then basically begin to expand that ripple.

### Rotting harvests

Like many other participants at the EMRC Africa Finance & Investment Forum, Masalawala highlighted the problems presented by Africa climate. Top quality crops frequently go to waste because of a lack of processing facilities such as

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electricity for refrigeration, canning and packaging plants, let alone access roads for swift transportation. And under the African sun, fruit and vegetables can deteriorate as quickly as they are picked.

“In Mali, in season you can buy a basket of mangoes for a dollar – and even that goes wasted,” Masalawala explains. “They are begging you to buy them for a dollar.”

“And they are world-class mangoes – trust me, I’m an Indian, I know my mangoes. They are very good quality mangoes and yet once the season is gone, it’s gone, because there is no ability to post process this, to store it, to do anything with it.”

“And so there is no economic return on that absolutely fabulous crop.”

### Partnerships with big business

Major corporations want to do business with sub-Saharan Africa, asserts Masalawala. The problem is, he says, there are two ways of doing business. One is the ‘plantation model’. This is where South Korea, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East have come in and bought huge areas of land.

“This is something that Jeff is absolutely totally, totally against and will absolutely not have anything to do with it, because it displaces people and has its own implications.”

On the flip side, it is virtually impossible for large corporations to work at a household level. Big corporations just cannot deal with half-acre farms, household to household.

According to Masalawala, this is where the Millennium Promise is unique. It can organise 6,000 households, 10,000 hectares, and be able to grow a certain crop in a size and scale that will be of interest to a large corporation.

And increasingly, businesses have been responding and are wanting to work with the organisation.

Initially, the project was focused on health care, education, infrastructure and agriculture to help create societies that are healthy and prosperous, so they can begin to move up the economic value chain.

“Having built the first two years of this project, we are now looking at bringing in business development. Because clearly, we have to create the engines for sustainability in these projects,” he says. “Otherwise projects come and go and the place is left sort of where it was when it first started and slowly decays away.”

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