



The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty

By Nina Munk

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The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty By Nina Munk

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY
Bloomberg • Forbes • The Spectator

Recipient of *Foreign Policy's* 2013 Albie Award

A powerful portrayal of Jeffrey Sachs's ambitious quest to end global poverty

"The poor you will always have with you," to cite the Gospel of Matthew 26:11. Jeffrey Sachs—celebrated economist, special advisor to the Secretary General of the United Nations, and author of the influential bestseller *The End of Poverty*—disagrees. In his view, poverty is a problem that can be solved. With single-minded determination he has attempted to put into practice his theories about ending extreme poverty, to prove that the world's most destitute people can be lifted onto "the ladder of development."

In 2006, Sachs launched the Millennium Villages Project, a daring five-year experiment designed to test his theories in Africa. The first Millennium village was in Sauri, a remote cluster of farming communities in western Kenya. The initial results were encouraging. With his first taste of success, and backed by one hundred twenty million dollars from George Soros and other likeminded donors, Sachs rolled out a dozen model villages in ten sub-Saharan countries. Once his approach was validated it would be scaled up across the entire continent. At least that was the idea.

For the past six years, Nina Munk has reported deeply on the Millennium Villages Project, accompanying Sachs on his official trips to Africa and listening in on conversations with heads-of-state, humanitarian organizations, rival economists, and development experts. She has immersed herself in the lives of people in two Millennium villages: Ruhiira, in southwest Uganda, and Dertu, in the arid borderland between Kenya and Somalia. Accepting the hospitality of camel herders and small-hold farmers, and witnessing their struggle to survive, Munk came to understand the real-life issues that challenge Sachs's formula for ending global poverty.

THE IDEALIST is the profound and moving story of what happens when the abstract theories of a brilliant, driven man meet the reality of human life.

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Editorial Review

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Jeffrey Sachs is a rock-star economist and advisor to leaders with struggling economies from Bolivia to Poland to Russia. He switched from hard-edged economist to humanitarian when he undertook to end world poverty, writing *The End of Poverty* (2005) and launching the Millennium Villages Project in 2006. It was a daring five-year project, financed by George Soros and like-minded donors, seeking answers to end poverty that were sustainable and transferable. Munk spent six years traveling with Sachs between African villages and donors' meetings, living among villagers and project managers to get a sense of the progress of Sachs' grand experiment. She chronicles efforts to reduce malaria and develop sustainable farming projects as well as head-on clashes with development officials and worries about encouraging dependency even as the project pushed for more market-oriented programs. Her accounts of the experiences of programs in Somalia and Uganda highlight the ebb and flow of enthusiasm, disappointment, resentment, and frustration among camel herders, farmers, and villagers as they struggled to survive while theories on poverty relief confronted harsh realities. --Vanessa Bush

Review

Recipient of *Foreign Policy's* 2013 Albie Award

Bloomberg "Best Books of 2013"

Forbes "Best Books of 2013"

The Spectator "Best Books of 2013"

Canada's National Business Book Award Finalist

ISI's Henry and Anne Paolucci Book Award Nominee

"Munk draws a nuanced portrait of Sachs and his Millennium Villages Project....worth taking the time to read it. It's a valuable – and, at times, heartbreaking – cautionary tale."

--Bill Gates

"A sharply rendered and deeply disillusioned account of [Jeffrey Sachs'] personal quest to end poverty.... With impressive persistence, unflagging empathy and journalistic derring-do, Ms. Munk returns over a five-year period to Dertu and one other village to document the project's progress.... Heartbreaking."

--The Wall Street Journal

"One of the most readable and evocative accounts of foreign aid ever written, *The Idealist* shows that virtually nothing about such aid is ever easy.... A masterful tale of good intentions gone wrong."

--Barrons

"*The Idealist* is the profound and moving story of what happens when the abstract theories of a brilliant, driven man meet the reality of human life. Munk's masterpiece . . . is a classic account of how technocratic and externally directed economic development must fail. Munk, a reporter for *Vanity Fair*, wanted to work on global poverty, and who better to shadow than Sachs, the 'idealist' of the title? But idealism comes with ignorance and hubris, and Munk's documentation of the failure of the Millennium Development Villages, in two of which she lived, ranks with Joseph Conrad in documenting an African descent into failure, destruction and betrayal."

—Angus Deaton, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (UK)

"Writing accessibly about development economics is a high-wire act, but Munk accomplishes it brilliantly. She shadows Sachs as he cajoles world leaders to fund his Millennium projects, and also visits those places to tell the whole story. The final chapter, in which Munk interviews a chastened Sachs (usually an oxymoron), is particularly devastating."

--Foreign Policy

"A fascinating portrait of an innovative thinker as well as a fair-minded examination of his methods. It's also a testament to the enduring value of old-fashioned, shoe-leather reporting—it should be read not just in policy circles but also at J-schools."

--Vanity Fair

"Magnificent.... An absolute must-read for anyone who is interested in doing good for those in need."

-- The Christian Science Monitor

"Munk tracks a messianic economist's quixotic attempts to show that he can end African poverty. In one village his team gets farmers to grow maize instead of traditional matooke; there are no buyers for the bumper crop, and rats end up eating much of it. Munk describes a growing gulf between good intentions and hard reality with nuance and sensitivity."

--Forbes

"An engaging, eye-opening read"

--The Guardian

"A highly readable examination of Jeffrey Sachs's Millennium Villages Project in Africa"

--Financial Times

"*The Idealist* tracks the messianic economist Jeffrey Sachs's doomed attempt to solve African poverty by establishing a network of model villages where his pet theories could be tested before being escalated. The author, Nina Munk, who spent six years interviewing Sachs and visiting the Millennium Villages, is a delicate, careful writer. She not only reminds us that there are good, solid reasons why certain areas of the world remain desperately poor, she raises troubling questions about the credibility of an economist embraced by rock singers and film stars."

--The Spectator

"A fine writer with a gift for deploying spare, vivid detail, Munk overcomes the burden of what could be duller-than-dirt subject matter—the politics of foreign aid; the ins and outs of Uganda's matooke market; NGO infighting over anti-malaria efforts—into a lively and at times, quite funny book."

--Fortune

"A deep and important book....*The Idealist* tells the stories behind the numbers and its evidence is as compelling and as important as anything in the data"

--The Lancet

"Munk is a sly, relentless reporter with a gift for wedding her observations to a fluent, even graceful, writing style"

--The Globe & Mail

"This book is stark proof that approach just does not work....The world needs to pay attention to these lessons and stop wasting resources."

--Bloomberg

"Nina Munk's brilliant book on [Jeffrey] Sachs' anti-poverty efforts, chronicles how his dream fell far short of reality"

--Reason

"A devastating portrait of hubris and its consequences."

--Pacific Standard

"Written over six years, with exhaustive on-the-ground reporting from two African communities that are part of MVP village clusters, [Nina] Munk's book is a readable and fast-paced chronicle of the real-world consequences of elite intellectual arrogance....Munk's authoritative telling of Sach's story is most valuable as an exhortation to intellectual humility, and a compulsively readable portrait of a man without any."

--Commentary

"A fascinating and essential exploration of what goes wrong when unchecked audacity and clinical precision encounter the frailties, ambiguities, and unpredictabilities of human beings, societies and histories."

--The Cleveland Plain Dealer

"Not only an important book, but a truly enjoyable read. She does not boast, but the reader cannot avoid the impression that her intrepid years in Sachsland have demanded all the inner steel of the most hardened explorer or war correspondent."

--The Weekly Standard

"Students of economic policy and altruistic do-gooders alike will find Munk's work to be a measured, immersive study of a remarkable but all-too-human man who let his vision get the best of him."

-- Publishers Weekly

"Trenchant and thought-provoking."

-- Kirkus Reviews

"A fine contrarian polemic full to brimming with excellent reporting."

-- The Globe & Mail

"Heart-rending.... The catalogue of bright ideas that go awry would be funny if it weren't so tragic."

-- National Post

"A testament to the enduring value of old-fashioned, shoe-leather reporting—it should be read not just in policy circles but also at J-schools."

-- Vanity Fair Daily

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-- Pacific Standard

"A fascinating and essential exploration of what goes wrong when unchecked audacity and clinical precision encounter the frailties, ambiguities, and unpredictabilities of human beings, societies and histories."

-- The Cleveland Plain Dealer

“Nina Munk has written a fascinating book about a fascinating man—and even more important, about a set of ideas that are intriguing and important.”

—**Fareed Zakaria, editor-at-large of *Time* magazine and author of *New York Times* Bestseller *The Post-American World***

“Jeffrey Sachs is a global phenomenon: no one thinks as big, makes a more passionate case for foreign aid, and works as hard to make the dream of ending global poverty a reality. This terrific book gives you a ringside seat on Sachs’s tireless global quest to get donors, governments, international agencies, private firms, and poor farmers to buy into his vision of economic development. Nina Munk’s portrayal goes beyond the man and his dream; it is a clear-headed depiction of the challenges the world’s poorest face as they struggle to improve their lives.”

—**Dani Rodrik, Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard University and author of *The Globalization Paradox***

"A riveting narrative that must be read to understand why the over \$700 billion pumped into Africa by the West since 1960 has achieved so little. This powerful book will shake up the foreign aid development community."

—**George Ayittey, President of the Free Africa Foundation, and author of *Africa Unchained***

“Nina Munk’s book is an excellent – and moving – tribute to the vision and commitment of Jeffrey Sachs, as well as an enlightening account of how much can be achieved by reasoned determination.”

—**Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics and author of *Development as Freedom***

"A powerful exposé of hubris run amok, drawing on touching accounts of real-life heroes fighting poverty on the front line."

—**Robert Calderisi, author of *The Trouble with Africa***

“*The Idealist* confirms that in the quest to end extreme poverty in Africa, the truly wise and resonant voices are those of the Africans themselves.”

—**Roger Thurow, author of *The Last Hunger Season***

"Nina Munk’s incisive, moving and elegantly written report takes us to Africa to see first-hand that the poor don’t need one more central planner with the prescription for prosperity. What the poor need is what really made the rich rich – the legal devices to join their continent’s vast, dispersed natural and human resources into valuable combinations through their own collective action."

—**Hernando de Soto, President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, and author of *The Mystery of Capital***

About the Author

NINA MUNK, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, is a journalist and the author of *Fools Rush In: Steve Case, Jerry Levin, and the Unmaking of AOL Time Warner*. She was previously a senior writer at *Fortune*, and before that a senior editor at *Forbes*. Her work has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Times*. She lives in New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edward Baca:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book allowed The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have various other opinion?

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