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Philanthropist Gives \$50 Million to Help Aid the Poor in Africa

By [CELIA W. DUGGER](#)

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 — The financier and philanthropist [George Soros](#) said Tuesday that he was contributing \$50 million to support a sprawling social experiment, organized and led by the economist Jeffrey D. Sachs, that aims to help villages in Africa escape grinding poverty.

Mr. Soros's money will, among other things, pay for fertilizers and improved seeds to raise crop yields, classrooms to improve literacy and health clinics to reduce deaths in 33 villages in 10 African countries. The hope is that poor subsistence farmers will begin earning more income by selling crops at market.

The strategy, which Mr. Sachs has been pursuing through his nonprofit group, the Millennium Promise, since 2004, is to tackle the myriad problems of poverty all at once by providing villagers with relatively inexpensive technologies and approaches, including mosquito nets that prevent malaria and stoves with chimneys that reduce deadly indoor air pollution.

Mr. Soros's contribution is a philanthropic departure for him. He has largely focused on fostering democracy and good government. But he said in an interview Tuesday that he believed that this undertaking had humanitarian value for the participating villages, as well as some chance of building a successful model that could be copied.

"It requires the support or at least benevolent attitudes from the governments concerned," he said. "In my view, most of the poverty in the world is due to bad governance. And whether the project can overcome that is a big question. If it succeeds in 5 of 10 countries and can be scaled up, that would be a tremendous achievement."

Mr. Sachs said he believed that just as donors' spending on global health in recent years had reduced deaths that could be prevented with vaccines, mosquito nets and [AIDS](#) drugs, so it could help jump-start economic growth in rural areas through the distribution of fertilizers, higher-yielding seeds and inexpensive small-scale irrigation methods.

Mr. Sachs began the experiment with a single cluster of villages in western Kenya, but it has since expanded to 79 such clusters in a dozen countries. About 400,000 people live in the areas receiving assistance.

His nonprofit group estimated that the cost of the package of village-level investments was \$110 per person a year for five years. Millennium Promise is putting up \$50 a year of that cost, with the balance coming from African governments, other donors and the villagers themselves.

