

# The power of hope is real

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
*New York Times News Service*

An awkward truth for bleeding hearts like myself is that there has never been much rigorous evidence that outside aid can sustainably lift people out of poverty.

Sure, evidence is overwhelming that aid can overcome disease, boost literacy and save lives.

But raising incomes is trickier — and the evidence in that arena has been squishier.

Now that’s changing. A vast randomized trial — the gold standard of evidence — involving 21,000 people in six countries suggests that a particular aid package called the graduation program (because it aims to graduate people from poverty) gives very poor families a significant boost that continues after the program ends. Indeed, it’s an investment. In India, the economic return was a remarkable 433 percent.

The heart of this aid package? A cow. Or a few goats. Even bees.

Why would a cow have such an effect? This gets interesting: There’s some indication that one mechanism is hope. Whether in America or India, families that are stressed and impoverished — trapped in cycles of poverty — can feel a hopelessness that becomes self-fulfilling. Give people reason to hope that they can achieve a better life, and that, too, can be self-fulfilling.

In the graduation program, recipients of livestock were inspired to work more hours, even in areas unrelated to the livestock. They took more odd jobs. Their savings rose. Their mental health improved.

“Poverty is not just poverty of money or income,” noted Sir Fazle Abed, founder of a Bangladeshi aid group called BRAC that developed the graduation program. “We also see a poverty of self-esteem, hope, opportunity and freedom. People trapped in a cycle of destitution often don’t realize their lives can be changed for the better through their own activities. Once they understand that, it’s like a light gets turned on.”

Esther Duflo, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a co-author of the study, believes that’s right. “The mental health part is absolutely critical,” she said. “Poverty causes stress and depression and lack of hope, and stress and depression and lack of hope, in turn, cause poverty.”

Could hopelessness and stress create a “poverty trap” — abroad or here in the U.S. — in which people surrender to a kind of whirlpool of despair? Some economists and psychologists are finding evidence to support that theory, and experiments are underway to see if raising spirits can lift economic outcomes.

One study found that Ethiopians randomly assigned to watch an hourlong inspirational video ended up saving more and spending more on their children’s education, compared with participants randomly assigned to watch an hour of comedy television. The forward-leaning behaviors persisted in a six-month follow-up.

Researchers are now studying whether exposure to religion might have a similar effect, improving economic outcomes. If so, Marx had the wrong drug in mind: religion would not be an opiate of the masses but an amphetamine.

The graduation program is a bit similar to the model of the well-known group Heifer International, which I’ve written about before and provides “gifts of hope” such as heifers, goats and chickens to impoverished families. “There was a lot of excitement — with just a hint of smugness! — at Heifer at the published results,” said Pierre Ferrari, the president of Heifer. But the graduation model includes a couple of other elements.

The graduation program starts with a cow or other animals, as well as training on how to raise them. It includes months of food or cash support, partly to reduce the need to eat or sell the animal in a financial crisis. There’s a savings account (micro-lending has disappointed in randomized trials, but microsaving works very well), health education and regular coaching to reinforce skills and build confidence.

The study, which was just published in the journal Science, found that the graduation model was enormously successful in India, Ethiopia, Ghana and Pakistan, and somewhat less effective in Peru and in Honduras (where some animals died). A follow-up found the effects still strong three years after the donation of the animals.

Dean Karlan, a Yale economist who is co-author of the study, said that aid groups focused on very similar approaches include Trickle Up, the Boma Project, Village Enterprise and Fonkoze. Karlan’s students in a seminar on philanthropy were given a pool of money from a foundation and the challenge to donate it where it would do the most good; they spent the term reviewing the evidence and, in the end, voted to donate it to Trickle Up.

So bleeding hearts, rejoice! Much of the news about global poverty is depressing, but this is fabulous: a large-scale experiment showing, with rigorous evidence, what works to lift people out of the most extreme poverty. And it’s exhilarating that one of the lessons may be so simple and human: the power of hope.



Nicholas Kristof

## Support public lands

Thanks so much for writing about Vet Voice member and Astoria resident Matthew Zedwick and his continuing mission to serve our country by protecting the outdoors (“Veteran on a mission to save outdoor spaces,” *The Daily Astorian*, May 1). We both also really appreciate your related editorial calling for full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Public lands are important to all Americans, and one of the many reasons I was also proud to serve in the military.

The LWCF does, indeed, have bipartisan support in Congress. And I am thankful we have Pacific Northwest leaders like U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden working diligently to pass their bill to reauthorize and fully fund this vital program for public lands.

However, I wanted to respectfully clarify one point in the article. We are unfortunately far from the scenario described by the paper (“All indications are the LWCF will be reinstated with bipartisan backing.”). We have much work to do in the five months left before the program expires — we need all hands on deck.

The Vet Voice Foundation continues to work in Washington, D.C., alongside leaders like Cantwell and Wyden to educate members of Congress who are less familiar with the benefits of this historic program. For one, LWCF helps vets by protecting public lands where they can get into nature, recreate and heal. And it helps our children be healthy and happy, by providing places for them to play and explore, from neighborhood ballfields to national parks.

Our hearty thanks to *The Daily Astorian* for also recognizing the value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

RICK HEGDAHL  
Pacific Northwest director, Vet Voice Foundation.  
Bellevue, Wash.

## Humbled by help

The Koch-Fish Family would like to thank the community for all your support after our house fire. We are humbled by the love, concern and generosity of the people in this community. We have a sense of awe at how many people have stepped up, in so many ways, to help us get back on our feet.

If we could, we would send out personal thank-you letters to each and every one of you, but for the lack of addresses, we will have to express our gratitude this way. Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts. Not just for the donations, but for showing us the goodness of this community. We will never forget your kindness.

ANGELIQUE KOCH  
Warrenton

## Intervened in dog attack

Sunday, while I walked my dog along SG Street in Gearhart, two pit bulls approached and attacked my dog. At the same moment, a car stopped. The man jumped out of his car and parted the two pit bulls from my dog. This was a very courageous act. He got into his car and drove away and I never got his name. I want to thank this good Samaritan, whomever you are.

CLAIRE MCINTYRE  
Gearhart

## Blame game

In observing the recent race riots in Baltimore, I was appalled but not surprised by the horrific scenes displayed on the television. After all, that city, as are most major U.S. cities, is controlled politically by the Democrats and has been a one-party city — Democratic — for the past 50 years.

The eruption was sparked by the death of a black man, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old with a rap sheet as long as one of his arms, who died while in police custody following his arrest. The alarm bells rang out for the “usual suspects,” aka thugs — time to go shopping; no cash or credit cards required — just bring your bricks and torches. Well, you know the rest: Millions of dollars of destruction including burning stores, cars, buildings and the usual screaming.

One of the nation’s top race demagogues, as expected, entered the scene: None other than the Rev. Al Charlatan (I mean Sharpton), a top adviser to the president, who elbowed aside the so-called mayor and the police commissioner, both Democrats, of course, and took over with this usual line of “No justice, no peace!”

Then the old blame-game took over. What caused these riots? The usual: racism, poverty, Republicans not shoveling enough money into the cities (more than \$22 trillion has been spent since the “War on Poverty” was declared in the mid-1960s) but mainly the police — the racist police. Then of course, the community organizer in the White House added his pathetic 2 cents worth of blame. In addition to all of the above, the affirmative action president added slavery as one of the causes.

Reminds me of an old adage: “Yuh gets what yuh pays for,” or, in this case, “Yuh gets what yuh votes for.” The liberal Democrats’ favorite whipping boy — after the Republicans — is the “racist” police, six of whom have been charged in the victim’s death, by a rookie state’s attorney, a Democrat puppet named Marilyn Mosby, who by doing so, has apparently ventured far beyond her depth. Stay tuned for a lengthy tragedy to unfold.

E. ROBERT NASSIKAS  
Astoria

## Say no to biosludge

This is in response to “Top state court greenlights using treated human waste as fertilizer” (*The Daily Astorian*, May 10): The



## Letters welcome

The Daily Astorian welcomes letters from its readers for publication in the Open Forum.

Letters must be signed, include the writer’s address and phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar and taste. *The Daily Astorian* offers two ways to send letters electronically. Either email directly to editor@dailyastorian.com or call up the newspaper’s Web page at www.dailyastorian.com and click on the Letters to the

Editor button.

Electronic letters must include the writer’s name, address and phone number for verification.

*The Daily Astorian* welcomes short “in gratitude” notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event sponsors. They must be signed, include the writer’s address, phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar, etc.

right of towns and counties to put in place more protective local ordinances is embedded in the federal regulations that govern the land application of sewage sludge, 40 Congressional Federal Regulation (CFR) Part 503. No court should take away that right.

It is outrageous that the Department of Ecology, whose mission is to protect human health and the environment, should actually sue those counties who have done their homework, and who concur with a growing body of independent experts that spreading biosolids on farms is neither safe, sustainable, nor beneficial.

Processed sewage sludge generated in industrialized urban centers contains much more than human waste. It is probably the most pollutant-rich mixture of the 21st century. Under a little known law, 40 CFR 261.30(d) and 261.33(e), every entity connected to a sewer — every industry, hospital, and business — can pipe its hazardous waste into sewage treatment plants. Here the pollutants, many highly toxic, persistent, and able to be absorbed by plants, are removed from the waste water and concentrate in the resulting sludge.

Biosolids consists of a complex mixture of nutrients, toxic metals, polychlorinated biphenyls, carcinogens, neurotoxins, pharmaceuticals and hundreds of other unregulated industrial chemicals that do not belong on the land where we grow our food and graze our live stock.

For more information visit www.sludgefacts.org and www.sludgenews.org

CAROLINE SNYDER  
North Sandwich, N.H.

*Editor’s note: Caroline Snyder is emeritus professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology where she designed, taught, and administered interdisciplinary environmental science courses, and chaired the Department of Science, Technology, and Society.*

## Proud and strong

I have been confused: the people of Clatsop County have voted several times to prevent liquefied natural gas in our community. However, the efforts to inflict it on us continue.

After reading *The Daily Astorian*, I realized that it is not that LNG does not hear us, it is they believe we do not count (“Oregon LNG contends land use ruling not a setback,” May 7).

Peter Hansen, you really do not know the proud and strong people who are Clatsop County.

MARILYNN KNOWLSON  
Astoria

## Good place to be

I have just moved into the Sunset Lake Park. People warned me that the park was a bad place to live. Against the advice to look somewhere else, we made a home here, anyway. We have camped here, and now live in a trailer, and are very comfortable here.

The manager has made us very welcome, and has made sure we had everything we needed. From what I have seen or heard, she has cleaned up the park and made it safe to walk around at night. People who have negative thoughts about Sunset Lake Park: Time will show that this park is good place to be.

JOY HARDMAN  
Warrenton

## The new Astoria

I found R.J. Marx’s article “What would Washington Irving do?” (*The Daily Astorian*, May 13) of particular interest as I grew up in Portland, but spent several years living on the East Coast before moving back to Oregon and settling in Astoria a year ago. While I am

still very new to the Astoria community, I believe I can provide at least an Oregon-centric response to some of the questions he asked.

Rain: No, it really doesn’t rain that hard out here, even during the rainy season. You can get a steady, driving rain, but not the gully washing torrential downpours that you get on the East Coast. I recall getting caught in one of those shortly after moving east — the rain was coming down so hard, I couldn’t see the road, and then suddenly I drove out into sunshine. I was so astonished I had to turn around to verify there was an actual demarcation line on the street. That definitely does not occur on the West Coast.

Is Astoria the new Portland? No. Astoria is quite proud of the fact that it is the oldest settlement west of the Rockies, predating Portland, San Francisco and Seattle. While it may not have grown much in size since its heyday, it still deserves first billing. Personally, I like to think of Portland and the others as “the new Astoria.”

ELISABETH KORNIA  
Astoria

## Furious

If the salmon are so endangered that it’s necessary to murderously blame other creatures, why aren’t the real culprits charged, shot and having their eggs oiled? The birds, or sea lions, or something that can’t stand up for itself, are the scapegoats. Yet canneries, restaurants famous for fish canning, meals, etc., entice non-human fish-eaters all along the river. We invited the critters with fish. That’s an excuse to kill them?

If it’s not OK to waste (i.e. kill and leave unused) deer, elk, etc., why is wasting innocent (or in this case, 10,000 innocent) cormorants tolerated? Oh yeah, they’re not such a tasty feast for the slaughterer’s table. Some would say that’s precisely the dish the Corps of Engineers and their contracted minions need to be required to eat. Yum, and oily eggs, too.

If you think this letter is unseemly, consider the cormorants being stalked in the dead of night on their home island by mercenaries and shot, then having their eggs, still warm in their nests, painted with oil so they can’t hatch.

KATHLEEN ANDERSON  
Warrenton

## A generous food drive

Every spring, on Mother’s Day weekend, our local postal workers hold their annual food drive for our local food pantries. This year’s event was on Saturday, May 9. All day long, letter carriers return to the Astoria Post Office with trucks filled with bags of donated nonperishable food (as well as mail), and local food bank volunteers unload, check each item, load banana boxes with product, then reload the boxes of food into trucks, to be delivered to the local food pantries.

Our food pantry, the Clatsop Emergency Food Bank, located in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church, received nearly 1,600 pounds of food from this effort. This food makes it possible for our pantry to continue feeding the 400-plus families we serve each month with a four-to-five day supply of supplemental food. Since our average food basket contains about 16 pounds per person, we can serve about 100 more hungry neighbors as a result of the postal workers’ food drive.

Thank you to the postal workers, and to all our generous neighbors in Astoria who donated food for their neighbors in need this year. This effort would not be possible without your generosity and hard work.

TOM SCOGGINS  
Clatsop Emergency Food Bank  
Astoria