

*Founded during Armenian Genocide***NEAR EAST FOUNDATION CELEBRATES 90<sup>th</sup> YEAR;  
FIRST U.S. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION;  
PIONEER OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY ABROAD**

“NEF@90: Celebrating Development; Honoring Philanthropy” is the theme of this year’s commemoration of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Near East Foundation (NEF), which was founded as Near East Relief in 1915 in urgent response to the Armenian genocide and deportations and in the process pioneered international humanitarian assistance. A series of celebratory events is being planned throughout the year, highlighted by a gala banquet to take place September 21 in New York City.

During World War I, the Near East Foundation is credited with saving a million lives of Armenians, Assyrians, Arabs, Persians and others in the region, among them 132,000 orphans. Many an Armenian can trace their lives or those of their parents and grandparents back to Near East Relief orphanages and camps. NEF’s rescue mission and relief operation during war and subsequent reconstruction work in its aftermath employed techniques that reverberated through the following decades and are employed to this day. NEF’s approach created the models for the Marshall Plan, Truman’s Point-4 Program, the Peace Corps, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Program.

Commented NEF President Ryan A. LaHurd, Ph.D., “While the Near East Foundation has an extraordinary record of past accomplishments, we remain on the cutting-edge of practice today. Currently we are at work in a wide range of development projects in a dozen countries of the Middle East and Africa, carrying out this organization’s historic mission--“To help people the people of the Middle East and Africa build the future they envision for themselves.””

Corroborating that view, last year NEF received the prestigious Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) International Prize for Pioneering Development Projects for 2004, for enhancing nursing as a career in Upper Egypt. Announced in Riyadh, the award came as a result of a competition with 83 projects from 32 countries on three continents.



Also, the Near East Foundation received the 2004 Freedom Award, the highest recognition granted by the Armenian National Committee of America for the organization’s “longstanding history of aiding the Armenian people and others in their darkest hours.” In February of this year, NEF was among those honored, and NEF’s President delivered the keynote address, at the “International Relief, Refuge, and Recognition” luncheon sponsored by The Armenian Assembly of America, The Armenian General Benevolent Union, and The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America to honor Near East Foundation’s humanitarian response to the Armenian Genocide.

Further recognition came in the 2003 museum exhibition, “Near East/New York: The Near East Foundation and American Philanthropy,” of 300 photographs and objects from the Near East Foundation archive chronicling its early work. The show debuted at the Museum of the City of New York in Manhattan, and has subsequently toured this past winter to the Doheny Memorial Library at the University of Southern California. It will next be on view at the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Watertown, Massachusetts, opening April 24, the commemorative date of the Armenian Genocide. In 2004 NEF’s history and its current work in Morocco and Egypt were featured in two, half-hour, television programs, produced for “The Visionaries,” a series on “philanthropies that make a difference” broadcast nationally on PBS.

## ORIGINS

NEF was created in response to an alarming cable from American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau to the U.S. Secretary of State stating that the Turkish “destruction of the Armenian race is progressing rapidly,” and it was urgent that something be done. Within two weeks a group of civic, business and religious leaders, led by Cleveland H. Dodge, formed a committee, mostly comprised of distinguished New Yorkers, to rescue over a million people caught up in the tragedy. Dodge’s grandson, David S. Dodge, still serves the Near East Foundation, having been for many years the chair of its board of directors. He is representative of the intergenerational commitment of many of the founding families and their ongoing financial support through the years.

The volunteer committee quickly met its \$100,000 goal, thanks to donations from those early board members. By 1919 the committee was chartered by Congress and designated the primary channel for U.S. postwar aid to the region. From 1915 to 1930, Near East Relief raised \$110 million for refugees—that is about \$1.25 billion in today’s dollars—including \$25 million in in-kind food and supplies. This remarkable outpouring occurred at a time when bread cost a nickel a loaf.

More than one million people had been rescued from certain death by starvation and exposure. Some 12 million people had been fed, and at one point between 1919-20, an average of 333,000 people were fed daily. Forty hospitals were built. Over 130,000 children were housed, fed and taught in orphanages and provided with medical care. One of these Armenian children was Phoebe Kapikian, who thinking back to her memories of being a two-and-a-half year old in the village of Sivas recalled only “confusion...driven out...groups with bundles on their backs of things that belonged in the house going on ahead...60-70 children left behind and I was clinging all the time to my older sister Ashan...a long, hard journey....”

She was piled into one of the many carriages hired to rescue abandoned orphans and taken to the Island of Syra. “The buildings already were in construction. We were taken care of very well by the Near East Foundation. We would rise on time, wash our faces. There was plenty of water. They tested every child for his or her capacity of how much they could read and write. So we had to go to school and we had food,” she explained, recalling her years at the orphanage.



Executive Committee taken upon the return to this country of Ambassador Morgenthau and William W. Brewster from Constantinople in January, 1911. Left front: Henry Morgenthau, Cleveland H. Dodge, James L. Brown, Samuel T. Dutton; left standing: Alexander J. Ebenhill, Harold A. Hatch, Stanley White, William W. Brewster, Edwin M. Halsey, Charles V. Vickrey. Three of these men, Moore Burton, Horatio L. and Dodge, led in the creation of the Committee. Five were members of the Executive Committee in 1930.

Nearing the age of 10, she was chosen to join a group of children being sent to England, later joining her older sister in America--thanks to the tireless efforts of Katharine Reynolds McCormick, an philanthropist who traveled the United States lecturing about the plight of orphans, raising funds and finding homes. “She was a mother for all that she did for me and my sister too,” said Miss Kapikian in an interview shortly before her death in 2004 after a rich life and career as a librarian in Queens, New York.

Very early in the relief effort attention focused on helping the rescued orphans to become self-supporting and contributing members of the communities that absorbed them. Both in its orphanages and in foster care homes under NEF auspices, attention shifted to teaching agriculture and industrial skills, primarily at NEF demonstration centers. A generation of poultry raisers, dairymen, mechanics, shipbuilders, cabinet makers, masons, shoemakers, tailors and nurses grew up and moved out into their adopted countries. Thus NEF moved beyond relief to become the first true international development organization.

In the Middle East, NEF became a symbol of American generosity and a prototype for the Peace Corps, besides its work with orphans, providing medical aid to six million patients. NEF was the vehicle for service to the region by hundreds of American volunteers—doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers. In short, NEF provided hope, home, training and education to a generation “without a childhood.” NEF saved the remnants of Armenians, helping resettle them in Armenia, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Greece and the United States; and helped rescue other wartime victims including Assyrians, Greeks, Turks and Kurds. NEF was at work in Armenia, Turkey, Persia, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the Caucasus.

**PHILANTHROPY**

An unsurpassed achievement at the time and remarkable even today, all this was accomplished by pioneering philanthropic techniques which continue to be used today. Among the innovations, NEF produced a series of compelling posters created by top American illustrators. Their national fundraising campaign feature Madison Avenue-style slogans like “Hunger Knows No Armistice” and “Clear Your Plate—Remember the Starving Armenians.” NEF Bundle Days encouraged Americans to send used clothing overseas, which they did—by the tons. Celebrities became spokespersons. Child-actor Jackie Coogan spearheaded the NEF Milk Campaign; and cans of condensed milk were collected at screenings of his films at movie theaters around the country. He even visited the region, traveling on a “milk ship” out of New York. Americans were urged to “adopt and orphan,” being told “\$60 a year cares for a child.” On International Golden Rule Sunday, families across the country ate a simple orphanage meal and donated the equivalent cost of their average Sunday dinner. Based on population, each American town and city was asked to contribute. President Woodrow Wilson issued proclamations and wrote endorsement letters.

The lingering impact of NEF fundraising is evident in today’s attention-grabbing graphics on through celebrity endorsements. And the Milk Campaign continues as well. Twenty tons of milk were distributed by the Near East Foundation to malnourished children in the West Bank from December 2003 to early May of 2004. Since then milk, cheese and other local dairy products were delivered to the families of 836 children enrolled in all 17 kindergartens in the cluster of West Bank villages north of Nablus, where NEF currently is at work on a range of development projects.



Forty tons of water, much of it to be mixed with powdered milk for children, were trucked to Baghdad by NEF at the height of the Iraq war along an extremely dangerous route during U.S. bombings. Also despite extreme risk to humanitarian personnel, NEF delivered 50 sheep to the Abou Shashir refugee camp in Darfur, Sudan, for the special occasion of the recent Eid Al-Adha celebrations. For a brief time, despair in the camp lifted and life seemed almost normal for people who feel preyed upon by all sides. NEF was the only non-Islamic, Western agency participating in the feast with the local people of Darfur. An NEF shipment of medicines and blankets followed.

**FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT**

While providing emergency relief in these circumstances, the Near East Foundation has been a force for the human and economic development of the region since 1930, when it had successfully completed its refugee activities. NEF aimed for long-term change, particularly attending to vocational education and agriculture, including experimental projects and instruction in raising sheep, poultry and cattle and the use of fertilizer’s, seeds and mechanized farm equipment. NEF had become America’s first international development agency, teaching people skills that could permanently improve their lives. The idea expressed in the saying, “give a man a fish and he will

eat for a day; teach him to fish and he will eat for a lifetime” became NEF’s watchword.

“NEF’s approach has had far-reaching significance and has impacted foreign aid programming for the past half century,” according to Dr. Linda Jacobs, a Middle Eastern archeologist and current chair of the NEF board of directors. Dr. Jacobs previously was a member of the NEF staff. The Jacobs Family Foundation, set up by her parents Dr. Joseph and Violet Jabara Jacobs, has been a long-time generous supporter of NEF’s work, and her mother is NEF’s largest individual donor. The Jacobses represent yet another example of the intergenerational commitment of many NEF supporters through the years.

“Today this approach is termed ‘self help,’” Dr. Jacobs continued, “but NEF has been doing this since the 1920s and 1930s, decades before it became widespread practice. And ‘self help’ remains a cornerstone on our development work internationally to this day. In dozens of programs we work at the grassroots where training, technology and community-based organizations touch people’s lives.”

The NEF-American University of Beirut Institute of Rural Life and its specialists provided much of the leadership in the post World War II Middle East in the areas of education, economic development and health. Activities ranged broadly from water purification and sanitation improvements, to decreasing infant mortality and introducing malaria control, to home and welfare demonstrations and small industries employing women, to organizing schools and teacher training and developing rural cooperatives.

The Near East Foundation’s first experimental rural development program was in Greece where they worked in 48 villages on land donated by the Greek government. The program consisted of training in practical farming adapted to local conditions, water management, basic education in literacy, and health maintenance. From the beginning the aim was to develop local leadership and create programs which could carry on after NEF staff departed. Using this Macedonian experiment, NEF’s work spread eastward to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iran. Just one case in

point, in 1946 the Iranian government asked the Near East foundation to establish a rural improvement program for 350 villages based upon their successful Macedonian model. Four years later in 1950, President Truman established the Point Four Program on international aid modeled on NEF’s work in Iran.



“Many of the now standard ways of going about the business of international development,” Dr. Jacobs commented, “can be traced back to the Near East Foundation way before the 1960s cries of ‘power to the people’ and subsequent social movements. I cannot emphasize this enough since it is an amazing fact given the prevalent paternalism or worse at the time.

## PHILOSOPHY

“From its earliest days the philosophy of the Near East Foundation has been never to impose an agenda, never to come into a community with preconceptions of what is best, but to listen and learn about the needs from the people themselves, then get down to work and help,” she continued. “The Near East Foundation has an enviable record through the years of valuing the dignity of people and respecting their opinions way before it was considered the preferred way to proceed,” she summed up, concluding, “And unfortunately many organizations involved in similar work still remain painfully remiss on this issue today.”

Her opinion is reiterated by Steven W. Lawry, Ford Foundation staff person who was former representative for that Foundation’s Middle East and North Africa programs, based in Cairo. He had many opportunities to observe NEF in action up close. According to Lawry: “The Near East Foundation has made remarkable contributions toward alleviating human suffering over the many years since its founding. My

belief is that NEF is best characterized as a humanistic organization, dedicated to giving vulnerable communities the capacity to shape sustainable solutions to their own problems. Their staff are dedicated professionals, highly trained and practiced in sociology, agriculture, engineering, urban planning and other fields relevant to development and change.

“But they also understand the central importance of giving leadership to beneficiary communities in the design and governance of development and change initiatives. Importantly, NEF staff member bring to their work a profound respect for the dignity and knowledge of those they wish to serve. This results in interventions and programs that build community social capital and better enable individuals and communities to constructively address their problems over the long-term. In short, I personally have had very rewarding experiences with the Near East Foundation and the qualities of professionalism, service and imagination that characterize their work.”

In 1964 the Near East Foundation began working with the newly-independent African countries on agricultural development, recruiting hundreds of technicians trained in livestock improvement, water management, and scientific crop improvement. As its work evolved, NEF established a separate African Endowment Fund that by 1980 funded development of experimental projects in new areas. In the 1980s the Near East Foundation responded to the threat of famine in Mali with a program that embraced livestock rehabilitation, village seed and cereal banks, agricultural credit, literacy, and soil and water conservation. Even before the end of Lebanon's civil war, in 1988 NEF had launched a vocational training initiative in that country, including projects to assist those disabled by the war to find employment.

In the competition between population growth and food shortages in Africa and the Middle East, throughout the 1980s NEF continued to work on agricultural improvement tailored to local conditions and the strengthening of local institutions and communities—what historically they had been very good at accomplishing. Increasingly NEF worked in cooperation with other donor agencies to implement projects ranging from beekeeping in Sudan and Swaziland to community development projects in Egypt and Jordan and seed and cereal banks in Mali.

It was in Mali that Steve Lawry of the Ford Foundation first became acquainted with the Near East Foundation. He was there supervising a University of Wisconsin team researching forest rights and management. “The locally-based NEF team asked us to help evaluate their efforts to build an efficient, low-cost system for better harvesting rainwater for agricultural and forestry purposes. What we found was astounding,” he still sounds astounded to this day.



“NEF staff had designed a simple water harvesting technology based on surveying natural water run-off patterns and constructing, with village volunteer labor, low-level earthen ridgelines that channeled water to cultivated areas. The practice reduced stress to crops and improved food security. It represented in important ways an adoption and extension of traditional and locally-familiar water conservation techniques.

“However, traditional harvesting practices were limited to individual farms,” Lawry continued, “To successfully extend the design to a larger water catchment area, NEF helped community members work through a number of complex questions around land tenure, water rights and labor management. NEF staff worked with intelligence and sensitivity at every level, the technical as well as the social, in helping shape an intervention that yielded sustainable benefits and could be managed by the local community permanently.” He remains an NEF fan to this day and later, as the Ford Foundation representative for the Middle East and North Africa, recommended Ford funding for a variety of NEF research and community development initiatives.

## CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

A major NEF milestone occurred in 1990 with the establishment of the Center for Development Services in Cairo, with assistance from the Ford Foundation to support their initiatives in community development. The center maintained that early focus on self-help in dozens of programs and brought together a cadre of professionals who could become a “think tank” of practicing development workers to refine techniques and mentor local talent. Current projects range widely from a number of local Egyptians initiatives on through working with street children to recover their lost potential in five Arab countries and a six-country initiative on Islamic philanthropy.

Lawry again: “After working in the country for several years, NEF leadership had concluded that the most enduring contribution it could make to Egypt would be to help establish an Egyptian development support organization, embodying many of NEF’s own traditions of professionalism and service, but bolstered by the added knowledge, experience and legitimacy that Egyptian staff would bring to the fore over the long-term.”

He adds, “It is rare for international development organizations to design initiatives with the explicit aim of putting themselves out of business. But this was

effectively the goal of NEF in establishing the Center for Development Services as a resource for Egyptians to struggle with complex problems on their own terms,” he continued, adding, “This initiative distinguishes, in my mind at least, NEF as a humanistic as well as a technical assistance organization.”

One of those Egyptians was Montasser Kamal, a medical student 20 years ago at Cairo University when he first became associated with the Near East Foundation’s work in Egypt, and later at manager at the Center for Development Services. “NEF has had a profound impact on my life,” he states categorically, “work ethos, team work, mutual respect and having an investigative mind are all qualities which I gained while at NEF, and which I carry with me to this day. As NEF ‘pushed the envelope,’ its ethos was embraced by its staff throughout their professional and even personal lives and in turn by the communities where NEF worked.” Dr. Kamal also obtained a Ph.D. in medical anthropology and is now with the World Health Organization.

He elaborates further: “NEF has without doubt come to be one of the most influential institutions in the lives of many disadvantaged people in Egypt and other countries of the Middle East. NEF also became influential in my life and the lives of many other development practitioners in the region. The influence of NEF, however, cannot be attributed to the scale of its financial resources, which was always modest. Rather, the influence can be attributed to the ability of NEF’s leadership to tackle key cutting-edge development issues before they became ‘flavor-of-the-

month’ and pursuing them long after others were swayed away from them because of their inherent challenges.



“The abilities to make timely decisions, charter new strategic directions, and create alliances have helped so many poor because, in part, these were qualities that inspired new generations of professionals to enter the field of development,” he believes.

In 1991 NEF began working in Lesotho in southern Africa on a comprehensive rural development program based on the creation of a local non-governmental organization called GROW. In 1993 an Appropriate Technology Training Center was established in Morocco to promote technical alternatives for development by rural women. That same year they started a micro-credit program in the rural villages of Jordan.

## PALESTINE

In 1994 NEF enhanced its program in West Bank/Gaza by supporting water resources with the Palestinian Hydrology Group to help save some 400 springs and ponds. Other programs included a community health unit at Birzeit University; specialized training for United Nations Development Program personnel in multi-village development; technical assistance to U.N.’s Relief and Works Agency providing education, health and social service to 2.8 million registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria; job creation and building up technical expertise.

“The needs were enormous,” commented Dr. Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Foundation, an Armenian, long-time NEF supporter and member of its International Council. “If Palestinian self-

determination and home rule had to become a reality; if its economy had to be viable, its economic infrastructure had to be secured and strengthened. Hence NEF had established several important programs.”

In 1998 NEF expanded its urban development work in some of the poorest sections of Cairo, which in Ford’s Lawry’s opinion “were decisive in saving a low-income community in central Cairo from being forcibly removed to make way for historic conservation and tourism projects.” He says the Center for Development Services demonstrated that the community, though poor, was stable and had a variety of closely-knit economic and financial arrangements that created large numbers of service and small-scale manufacturing jobs. “Importantly, and perhaps ironically,” he commented,

“the research also found that the volunteer efforts by community members had over the years been decisive in saving many revered Islamic monuments from collapse, while wealthier groups had long-ago abandoned the district for the suburbs.

“The Center’s research findings were taken up by the staff members of the Aga Khan Foundation, who were leading restoration efforts in the district, and used to convince Cairo local government authorities that displacement would destroy vital social and economic support networks and that the community should be allowed to remain,” he summed up.

While working at the Center Dr. Montasser saw NEF’s pro-poor ethos and participatory modus operandi in development in action, up front and personally. He credits NEF’s approach with “substantially helping to alleviate the suffering of poor women, men and children in the region” in both urban and rural areas—and impacting the professional development community in the process. “The work of NEF in urban development, in health programming, in local community development and in economic development has helped so many poor to stand up for their right and to become sufficient,” he says. “NEF was there to see them through and is still there to tap into these communities as a resource to help others in need.

“NEF works in many areas where poverty has alienated people and government apathy has left societies disenfranchised,” he continued. “In the context of this all too common picture in developing countries, the extraordinary work of NEF was felt and will be felt for many years to come. The poor and underprivileged who have become independent and vocal; the women who are now more assertive and financially independent; the youth who are now working and are fully engaged in the affairs of their community; and the men who are now more actively engaged in the governance of the resources in their communities—are all extraordinary examples of how local development can change lives if done properly.



“Through gradual and sustained effort, profound changes in the lives of people NEF works with have taken place,” he reaffirmed. “From dependent, expected handouts with a sense of political hopelessness, NEF has helped people to be independent active members of society who are socially engaged in a process of change.

“Perhaps one of the most extraordinary achievements of NEF has been to bring the voice of the poor to policymakers,” he added. “In the absence of democratic processes, people’s voices are often lost to the more powerful. That is not the case where NEF works. Where NEF works, people now know that power is not a zero-sum game and that they have an ally who can help them bridge this power gap in various effective and constructive ways. I remember the time I was working at NEF, when the concept of citizen participation in development was paid lip-service at best. NEF had embarked on a change strategy by which all its projects and programs had to demonstrate that they were participatory in nature. It was not easy. It is still not easy. But progress has been made, and NEF has come to set the ground rules on how to encourage participation and create the social sphere for it take place.”

## CURRENTLY

Today the Near East Foundation continues to provide qualified specialists to transfer technical skills and training, leverages funding for projects with strong local support, and extends its reach through inter-agency cooperation. “Being the oldest, nation-wide, international assistance organization in the United States gives us certain advantages,” commented NEF President LaHurd. “We have the history and experience that attracts a constantly-growing group of

affiliates and contacts as well as highly-qualified staff. And with few exceptions they are all nationals from the countries in which they work.

“So we operate with a strong network of partners and the confidence and trust of local authorities—right now in 12 countries,” Dr. LaHurd continued. “Our Cairo regional office and Center for Development Services are both highly regarded in the Middle East in

particular. That we are the largest publisher of development materials in Arabic is just one of many reasons we are so well respected.”

An up-to-the-moment report on the Near East Foundation’s current activities is available at their website [www.near-east.org](http://www.near-east.org) and detailed descriptions of their projects country-by-country in their 2004 annual report also is online at the site. What is particularly noteworthy is how their successful approaches in one country are replicated in others where they work. A case in point, the generation of supplemental income from fish farming in irrigation ponds of poor farmers pioneered in the 1980s in Jordan and now expanding wonderfully in the Jordan Valley—going soon to Gaza and Sudan when funding is available.

For Abou Baker, a 60-year-old farmer in an agricultural community in the Gor Al-Safi district south of the Jordan Valley, fish farming brought in \$700 last November, a traditional down-season, increasing his family income 15-20 percent. This was very important to him, since he is getting older...now 60; lost a leg because of a landmine accident, has a family of 14 to support on his small farm burdened by water shortages, high production prices, and poor marketing. Abou Baker was one of 25 small farmers who received fingerlings, fish feed, and technical and financial assistance when NEF initiated a fish farming program in his area in 1999.

Then there is the Near East Foundation’s pioneering work in micro-credit dating from long before it was chic and used in many countries where NEF works, like Sudan. Here the so-called “popsicle lady” lives, a widow with a family to support and doomed to beg in the streets...until receiving her \$200 NEF loan. She bought a refrigerator with a freezer and every evening fills small plastic bags with juice. Next morning she heads to the nearby elementary school and sells them to school children at recess—and supports her family. She was able to repay the loan in a year.

In Jordan NEF’s micro-credit activities have recently taken a new twist—home improvement loans for the urban poor. While in Lebanon, where NEF has had long-term involvement in landmine issues, they are now providing loans to disabled victims and their families and caretakers. Like Abo Khalid, a blind man who used his \$700 loan to furnish his small kiosk with goods—tea, newspapers, cigarettes, children’s candies. His average monthly income of \$300 helps feed his children. Thanks to NEF-provided-credit, wheelchair-bound Ali was able to establish a small maintenance service center for computers and electronic

equipment—and a reputation for high quality work. Both have been freed from previous dependency on others, regained control over their lives, and become fully productive members of society.



The Near East Foundation also has particular expertise in desert environments, both adapting agriculture to the harsh conditions and desert reclamation, including 10 years of research on trees best suited to Mali’s Sahel, ultimately fruitful in every sense of the word. Now NEF’s involvement with reclaimed desert around Egypt’s Lake Nasser could in time become the largest agricultural project NEF has ever undertaken in that country.

Speaking of large, the Near East Foundation has completed planning and is now seeking funds for what could prove to be the most far-reaching initiative in NEF’s entire history of development work in Africa, involving nine countries and over 100 million people. It would support local governance in West Africa’s huge Niger River Basin under severe environmental threat and competing demands, building upon successful approaches modeled in Mali since the 1980s.

NEF continues its investment in the people of the West Bank, most intensely involved in a cluster of villages north of Nablus in a wide range of projects, from traumatized children and nutrition, to environmental issues and community organization, to good drinking water and youth centers, even helping train two promising Palestinian athletes bound for the Athens Olympics.

It is a particularly rewarding site to see kindergarteners from the six participating West Bank communities clapping their hands and bursting into grateful song when they see the NEF team approaching to distribute their packages of dairy products. Later, when group pictures were taken, the children held their milk cartons

high above their heads and loudly cheered. As the mother of Sabreen from Ijnisniya put it: “I feel so happy when I see my child drinking the milk, especially the chocolate-flavored—she loves that kind. We put the cheese and yogurt in the fridge to eat later. I am so happy that we have these important foods for such a price. You know how bad our economic situation is nowadays, and without this program, we could not get these milk products for our children.” While there had been some absenteeism in the kindergartens at the beginning of the school year, during the “Cup of Milk” distribution date—there was absolutely none.

In over 70 villages in the Souss-Massa Dra’a area of southern Morocco where NEF has been working, in literacy alone, 92 percent of women participating say they have learned to read, and 72 percent can now add and subtract and report using their skills regularly. Fifty-thousand people in southern Morocco—women in particular—have gained new self-esteem, education and income because of NEF’s programs over the years. Women like Fatima Bouhassi from the village of N’Kob, who can now read and write, has completed NEF-sponsored midwife training, and gathers all the other village women in her house and shares everything she learns. Using innovative theater techniques, NEF promoted Morocco’s new and history Family Code that took effect last July, governing women’s position in society and status. With seven women playing various roles for illustration and clarification, NEF field staff discussed the new laws, particularly marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, with large groups of village women. So unique, it got attention from the BBC in news reports.

The little white house at the GROW compound in Mokhotlong, home to NEF Lesotho country director Ken Storan, has some new visitors, named Hlompfo, Tumeliso, Rorisang, Thabang, Tüsetso.... The latter is about one-and-a-half years old—his exact age is unknown. Before being embraced by Ken, he lived by himself, most of the time in a cold house, sometimes outside, even in the rain. Hungry and skinny upon arrival, two months later he had gained seven pounds and could stand up by pulling on a chair. Tüsetso also can breathe easily since his pneumonia is gone; and has learned to smile and laugh, and likely will soon walk and run too.

This is what the AIDS pandemic really means and the Near East Foundation is helping children—the most vulnerable victims of disease and poverty—in many countries in Africa and the Middle East. Beyond providing individual children with emotional and physical warmth, safety, rehabilitation from

malnutrition and sickness or care with terminal illness; reconnection with family or caring adoptive homes, schooling and mentoring; the Near East Foundation is combating the AIDS calamity with an integrated and comprehensive approach that combines health, agriculture, infrastructure development and more.



In Swaziland, which has the highest HIV infection rate in the world, close to 40 percent, NEF is using that comprehensive approach in 18 chiefdoms in the northern Hhohho area of the country. NEF works with people like Lussy Tfwala, chairperson of the water committee of Nkonjaneni homesteaders. They had a water source in the mountains above, but no means of getting it except by making hours of trips up and down steep slopes, carrying water by oxen cart and upon their heads. With NEF support, the committee, once organized, successfully obtained \$17 from every homestead family who would benefit from a domestic water supply, for the engineering, materials and heavy machinery needed. Contributing their labor, association members carried the material up the mountain and dug kilometers of trenches to bring the pipes from the water source to local taps. Four homesteads share a tap and take rotational responsibility for maintenance chores. The amount each homestead contributed has become a fund for repair and maintenance costs, augmented by a small monthly fee, for ownership leads to responsibility and commitment.

This Nkonjaneni association now has the skills, organization, data to build on, new ways to assign community responsibility, and the means to sustain their critical water supply. It demonstrates NEF’s approach: true development is not primarily about the project, but more about the capacities built in the community that sustain NEF undertakings long after their staff has moved on.

And last year the Near East Foundation returned to Armenia, for the first time since their expulsion by the

Soviets in 1927, to work with street children. Actually they were the only foreign agency allowed to operate in the Caucasus even after the Sovietization of the region, and supervised the welfare of 17,000 children in Armenia alone until being forced out. NEF

Chairperson Linda Jacobs received an overwhelming reception that left her deeply moved by the often teary-eyed Armenian representatives who greeted her so warmly in every sector-- government, education, social welfare, religion—and ordinary citizens.

## IN CONCLUSION

The final word on the Near East Foundation goes to an Armenian, the Carnegie Corporation's Dr. Gregorian. "It is an honor and a privilege for me as an Armenian, Iranian, Middle Easterner and an American to pay tribute to the Near East Foundation as it celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.



"NEF is not a charitable institution. It is a philanthropic one. It invests, it welcomes investors. It builds. Its aim has always been 'to help people help themselves.' It aims to assist the people of the Middle East and Africa in their quest of autonomy in the social, economic and cultural realms. It provides people know-how, wants to endow them with hope, to assist them in their struggle against poverty, disease, hunger and injustice. That is the mission of NEF. NEF stands for dignity. It stands for our community with mankind. It stands for the best ideals and impulses of the American people, its idealism, altruism and generosity."

Dr. Gregorian concludes eloquently: "You, who are a rescuer of a nation, planter of seeds of hope, promoter of economic and social progress in the Middle East and Africa, symbol of America's faith and goodwill, we congratulate you for generating knowledge, generating goodwill, generating hope, generating progress. Building bridges of brotherhood and sisterhood in a world that will transcend religion, ideological, ethnic, regional and racial conflicts, especially now when more than ever we need to stress common values and bonds that unite the 'People of the Book,' the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. May you continue your good work. May you bring peace to the region."

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