

Book Review of George Kent's "Caring About Hunger"

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Reading George Kent's 2016 book, "Caring about Hunger" (Kent 2016) is refreshing and helpful, as it is a reflective essay on the interrelations between and among the various facets and factors that produce hunger. At the same time, it is an attempt to produce a conceptual and informative foundation as to how to reconstruct a response to the problem at all relevant levels, i.e., international and global institutions, the government, local, and the personal, emphasizing the care for children.

The fact that the book was completed in 2016 and is even more pertinent today, in 2023, shows the continuities and worsening of trends such as caring, but not caring enough, in terms of both first and second-order consequences of the quality and mixing of, for example, industry made milk for babies and the highly preferred mother's milk. The many and manifold exposures George had to virtually each of the less than fully caring institutions that created worsening realities in the food production, distribution, and trade were in geographies of the advanced countries and the less developed and in virtually all levels of hunger, where food production did not accord with actual supply at household level. His dealing with fisheries, for example, started with Hawaii Coastal Zone Management (1975), then he got a sabbatical to study fisheries as a model for global resource management (1977-1978), and later continued to the nutrition objectives that were to be achieved in fisheries' policies (1985) in Thailand and Indonesia. He then continued with UNFAO in the very same area of concern. Thus, he was able to view hunger creation and response at all relevant levels. He has devoted more than 40 years to developing the conclusions and insights he reviews in 8 chapters of key concerns in this book. He took the same type of gradual collection on the spot of lessons re fisheries into the other key components of the food machinery globally and within many countries.

In the early parts of the book, terms like holocaust and genocide are used to define the magnitude, de facto, of hunger's disastrous reality, even when it is not caused by intervention or willful programming but by lack of compassion and leadership's inadequate comprehension. This is why a better understanding of caring is timely. George's emphasis is on better connections with others and empathy in both business and polity circles toward the needy. It brings him to identify the connection between wealth and health, as business elites seem far more concerned with gaining more wealth than a proper response to the consumer. While poor people work hardest for food, their efforts seem bypassed by the food or medicine providers. Exploitation of the poor seems to be a reality by both outsiders and local leaders. Global food trading and inflation make the situation worse. Children seem to be the main suffering community in all countries. Breastfeeding is often rejected in

favor of industry products that never fully match health needs. Food that comes from distant sources is costly and malnutrition is prevalent in numerous countries.

One of the most imaginative and concrete alternatives among possible solutions to the hunger problem that is offered in the book is an emphasis on designing new local communities that have a built-in perspective of caring for one another. By drawing on evidence from places like Kerala in India, Kent is able to show that poor communities can perform better than richer ones by developing a caring order for the needy. An example from his many case studies:

"Hunger is less likely to occur where people care about one another's wellbeing. Caring behavior is strengthened when people work and play together. Hunger in any community is likely to be reduced by encouraging its people to work and play together, especially in food-related activities." (Kent 2016)

Others have also provided illustrations of Kent's three pivotal considerations (the values of community self-reliance, timely help to organized groups within the locality, and partnership instead of domination in economic arrangements), for example, the pleasure of sharing food with others, of celebrating communal culinary traditions, and life at large (Middelmann 2010). Kent also considers the effects of neighborliness, technology, and internet on the growing effectiveness of the local community to shape new types of caring about hunger.

The significance of the book is in provoking food establishments at all levels, with evidence. In 2022, the UN Chronicle reacted to a piece George had written (2008) entitled, "The benefits of world hunger." It is clear that his intention was to show that there are industries and people that benefit from world hunger -- and the time has come to address this issue. Yet, years later George was alerted to how confused this made people and had to explain that he did literally mean that hunger could be beneficial (Kent 2022). The challenge being faced by scholars like George is not readily or easily understood or accepted by the industry and institutions as shown by the 14-year lag in response to his article. I spent almost 10 years as Principal Advisor to the UN Secretary-General and observed the delay, lack of concern, lack of required skills, and minimal appreciation of solutions needed to combat hunger among the agencies and officials mandated to handle the disaster. When you add the dimensions of climate change and the chaos and disasters it is causing, particularly among those most prone to hunger catastrophes, the challenges seem even more critical.

This is why this book is important for genuine growth of educated concern, particularly for designing local response systems by entrepreneurial and public officials that care. Project design building into program planning (Ben-Dak 1999) allows the avoidance of widespread causes of failure. Borrowing from particular success stories, as visualized by Kent, an action framework to combat hunger can be created. This planning revolution started when Kent was collecting his insights and more recently has brought more UN institutions to use identical language in dealing with climate and hunger projects -- which helps the case in addressing this book's concerns. Science and knowledge can be built in with the many

innovations that can digest a complex data set required by using the new forms of artificial intelligence that may overcome a few of the mentioned short-term insensitivities explored by Kent in industry and in the community. For example, food sorting is one area AI that prevents contaminated foods from reaching consumers (see for example Ghiya 2022).

Clearly, the key to a better future is still dependent on a fresh and explicit human vision like that of Kent. As he has pointed out, the opportunity is there and calling.

References

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