Soon-Kwon Kim
Fighting Famine with ‘Miracle Corn’

Soon-Kwon Kim takes pride in introducing himself as “Dr. Corn.” For more than 30 years the South Korean agricultural scientist has been fighting poverty and famine through the development of high-yield, disease-resistant corn hybrids first in Asia, then Africa. His remarkable success, bucking conventional wisdom that corn that thrived in developed countries wouldn’t grow in the developing countries of the third world, earned him the nickname he wears as a badge of accomplishment.

Through the International Corn Foundation, he’s continued a dream that began at Kyungpook National University in the early 1970s, became a reality at the University of Hawai’i through an EWC scholarship and has matured over the decades as he worked first in South Korea, then throughout Africa and now in northeastern China and North Korea.

Born in 1945 in Ulsan, the son of a poor farmer in a rural area, Kim “had a lot of experience with hunger.” He attended an agricultural high school, then Kyungpook National University and Korea University on scholarships. That — along with his EWC scholarship and the Center’s mission — instilled in him “a strong responsibility first to help my country, next to help other countries.”

In 1971, Kim arrived at the East-West Center with a keen interest in reducing hunger. His solution: to develop miracle corn by revolutionizing corn breeding. Field study took him through the U.S. corn belt, traveling by Greyhound bus to Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio and Illinois. The corn he saw growing in fields was “better than I dreamed,” he remembers. In Ames, Iowa, he looked out the window of the bus and started to cry — “The corn was so beautiful.”

Back in Hawai’i, aided by his mentor, Dr. Jim Brewbaker, he developed corn seed resistant to insects, parasites and diseases in South Korea. He mastered hybrid techniques to produce high-yielding crops farmers could grow without relying on chemicals. “With this corn,” he thought, “I can change the world.” When he completed his thesis three months before the semester ended, he immediately returned to Seoul without attending graduation ceremonies, eager to get to work.

But first he had to persuade his agricultural institute, the government and farmers that the seeds he brought home would thrive in their fields. “I told them if I fail, I will go to jail for 10 years,” he says. “I had strong confidence I can do this.”

By 1978, his team had doubled the national corn yield twice and tripled farmers’ net income. His success in Korea caught the attention of the International Institute of Agricultural Technology (IIAT). Kim accepted a job at its headquarters in Nigeria, developing corn for countries in Africa to combat hunger on the continent. Kim moved his family, expecting to spend 12 months — and stayed 17 years. His research team succeeded in developing 100 varieties of maize resistant to Africa’s No. 1 enemy, maize streak virus. IIAT and Kim received the CGIAR King Baudouin Award for international agricultural research in 1986.

“Without the EWC, there will be no Dr. Kim. No corn green revolution in Korea. Combating hunger in Africa with maize would be far behind.”
In the late ’90s, alarmed by reports of famine in North Korea, he decided to return to South Korea, intent on helping fellow Koreans. Since 1998, Kim has made more than 50 trips to North Korea to introduce corn-breeding techniques to cooperative farms in an effort to alleviate famine and foster better relations between the north and south. “You know,” he says, “corn doesn’t know Korea is divided.”

Under the watchful eye of Endy Bayuni, The Jakarta Post plays a critical but constructive role as Indonesia’s leading independent English-language newspaper. Bayuni is chief editor, a position he’s held since returning in 2004 from a prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University.

Bayuni’s widely read columns provide clear-eyed commentary and analysis of Indonesian domestic politics, including Political Islam and foreign policy issues. At a presentation in Europe on the role and responsibility of a free press, he was recognized as “an advocate of press freedom and the free flow of information.”

It’s a well-earned salute that reflects the editor and his editorial team’s commitment to “pushing the envelope through vigorous reporting.” Freedom of speech and freedom of the media in Indonesia were hard won. For years under the rule of President Suharto, the press was held in check; it wasn’t until the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, followed by a democratic election and reforms, that the Indonesian press was able to enjoy freedom of expression and opinion.

Bayuni is often called on to speak internationally of U.S.-Indonesia relations, issues involving Indonesia and Muslim societies, and events in Southeast Asia. His perspective is informed by experiences overseas, including at Kingston University in Surrey, England, where he received his bachelor of arts degree in economics in 1981; a Jefferson Fellowship at the East-West Center in 1999; and the Nieman Fellowship year. At Harvard, he took advantage of the opportunity to attend classes at the Kennedy School of Government.

Bayuni’s newspaper career began in 1983 as a cub reporter for The Jakarta Post. He also worked as Indonesian correspondent for Reuters and Agence France Presse news services from 1984 to 1991. At The Post, he’s held various positions, including production manager/night editor, national editor, managing editor and deputy chief editor. Now The Post, with Bayuni at the helm, is recognized as a vigorous watchdog of the people’s interests and good governance in the fourth largest country in the world.
More than half the population of Laos is under 20 years of age, with few opportunities for a better life in one of the world’s poorest nations. Yet to Sombath Somphone, those 3 million young Laotians represent his country’s “best hope.”

In 1996, he founded the Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC) in Vientiane to train and motivate a new generation of leaders to provide education for sustainable development. Guided by Somphone and a small staff, teams of youth volunteers conduct development work throughout the country, reaching as many as 9,000 people a week. These volunteers are also learning by doing — “to think, to plan, to act, and to lead.” Somphone calls this participatory learning.

As executive director, he often refers to PADETC’s many programs — which emphasize eco-friendly technology, micro-enterprise and education — as “tentacles.”

Somphone returned to Laos in 1980 after earning degrees in education and agriculture at the East-West Center. Initially he focused on food security for rural villages, but soon came to believe the future hinged on engaging Lao youth to find appropriate solutions. He began to build a youth program bolstered by hundreds of enthusiastic young volunteers who advance programs aimed at reducing poverty.

One of its most effective programs transforms the learning process inside and outside the classroom. Youth volunteers assist teachers in activity-based learning that takes grade-school kids outdoors. They use play, storytelling and drama to make learning fun. University-level volunteers, called Green Ants, popularize environmental awareness. Post-graduate trainees conduct fieldwork on drug-abuse prevention and HIV awareness. Through PADETC, these volunteers gain both leadership skills and hands-on experience.

For his efforts “to promote sustainable development in Laos by training and motivating its young people” to become leaders, Somphone received the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. The prestigious Magsaysay Awards, established by the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, are often called Asia’s Nobel Prizes. The award applauded Somphone’s conviction that the young are more receptive to new ideas when they are empowered through practical experience.

“We had to try out different things over the years, to find an entry point into what we really want to achieve,” he says. “So everything we did was like little pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which we have developed and pieced together.” Through the efforts of Lao youth and the 14-year-old training center, Somphone can see “a picture is slowly taking shape.”

Sombath Somphone
Prepared a Generation of Leaders in Laos
Ann Dunham Soetoro
Trailblazer for Microcredit in Southeast Asia (1942–1995)

Ann Dunham Soetoro found her life’s work in the villages and small towns of Indonesia. Fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, she conversed easily with women in village marketplaces, got to know them in their homes. And in the process she became familiar with the multiple roles and burdens they shouldered as they struggled to raise their families out of poverty.

Clad in garments of batik, with fair skin and expressive eyes, the American anthropologist stood out among the Indonesian villagers. But in many ways Soetoro was more comfortable in Indonesia than she was in Honolulu, where she’d attended the University of Hawai‘i on an East-West Center scholarship.

Soetoro had come to the fourth most populous country in the world in 1967 after her marriage to Lolo Soetoro, an EWC grantee. With them was her six-year old son, Barack Obama. When Barack was nine, she returned him to Hawai‘i in the care of her parents while he completed school. Yet despite the physical distance, Soetoro instilled in her son — who would become President of the United States — a shared concern for social change and social justice. A journalist friend in Indonesia calls Soetoro “a reformer who committed her life to the idea that was the key slogan of her son’s 2008 presidential campaign, ‘Change We Can Believe In.’”

When her marriage to Lolo Soetoro ended, she began an academic and professional journey that took her across the Indonesian archipelago. She eventually completed a Ph.D. in anthropology on peasant blacksmithing in Indonesia. By then, she was recognized as a trailblazer for work she’d initiated at the Ford Foundation in microcredit in the Southeast Asian nation’s rural villages.

Colleagues found her “purposeful.” They recall she rarely softened her opinions to please others as she pushed to improve the lives of the poor in the developing world, particularly Indonesia. Consistently Soetoro raised awareness of gender equity issues and women’s roles in their communities, years before this became accepted policy in the NGO world.

A landmark project involved the East Javanese Women’s Central Cooperative, then a fledgling organization and an incubator for economic empowerment programs for women in low-income and rural areas. The project successfully provided microcredit in the form of loans and assistance to village-level sustainable cottage industries. She continued similar work with other organizations, including the Asia Development Bank in Pakistan and the oldest bank in Indonesia.

When Ann Dunham Soetoro died in 1995 at the age of 52, she’d already secured a legacy that her daughter described in a newspaper interview, “to not be limited by fear or narrow definitions … and to do our best to find kinship and beauty in unexpected places.”
Sachio Semmoto had a promising future with Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT) when he arrived in the United States as a graduate student. His encounter with the West changed his life — and the telecommunications industry in Japan.

Through a Fulbright Scholarship, Semmoto earned a Ph.D. in engineering at the University of Florida. Then in 1978, Semmoto came to the East-West Center as a research fellow in the Communications Institute. His fellowship completed, Semmoto returned to Japan and soon broke with corporate tradition when at the age of 41, he quit a comfortable job at NTT to start a rival company. His move shocked colleagues. “No one stood up to compete,” Semmoto told *The Economist* in a 2008 interview. “But I perceived that if no one stood up, then Japan would not change. So I stood up.”

Today that wireless rival, KDDI, is the second largest telecommunications operator in Japan. Its revenues are estimated at $35 billion. Since then the entrepreneur has gone on to launch four more companies. In 1999, Semmoto started eAccess, a broadband company that helped reduce prices in Japan’s expensive Internet access market. After its first year, eAccess turned a profit.

His latest corporate venture is eMobile, geared to deliver inexpensive high-speed wireless data for any device. Semmoto managed to keep eMobile’s costs low by once again spurning tradition. Rather than rely on domestic equipment, his company is buying from suppliers in Sweden and China.

His successes have earned him a salute from *The Economist* as a “serial entrepreneur.” *Forbes* magazine called him a “Japanese telecom legend.” The former company man turned risk-taker credits his education in the United States — “from my involvement with American universities and my experience with the East-West Center.”

Semmoto’s academic credentials include visiting professorships at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of California-Berkeley, and as a visiting research fellow at Stanford University. In 1996, he joined Keio University’s graduate school of business, teaching entrepreneurial management and information technology.

He is outspoken about the need for Japanese students to study abroad. “Without looking globally, you’re destined to become conservative, less innovative,” he believes. “It’s critical to see outside your own country. One has to find out in the world there are different sets of values. You have to go physically and watch and feel and get the feedback from a different society who has a different set of values. This applies to America, too.

“Being international is increasingly critical for future survival. If you want to survive, you have to see your neighbor,” he says, firmly. “That’s why the East-West Center will become increasingly more important as a bridge between the United States and Asia.”
Long before climate change became a household worry, Rajendra K. Pachauri identified the dangers of global warming and related environmental issues. As director general of TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute, formerly known as the Tata Energy Research Institute) and chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, he is respected internationally as a leading global thinker and researcher in this area.

In 2007, he was thrust into the spotlight when the IPCC shared the Nobel Peace Prize with U.S. Vice President Al Gore. Pachauri, as chairman of the international panel of scientists, shared the podium in Oslo with Gore, and today is highly sought after as an international spokesman for climate change awareness.

He presented an address at the welcoming ceremony at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. And he is to give a keynote address at the East-West Center’s 50th anniversary celebration in July 2010.

Pachauri has maintained ties to the Center since the late ’70s, when EWC Fellow Toufiq Siddiqi approached him to collaborate on a project on the environmental dimensions of energy policies. A series of energy and environment-related projects with Siddiqi and EWC Fellow Kirk Smith brought Pachauri to the Center, including as a visiting fellow with the Center’s Resource Systems Institute in 1982.

Born into a family of educators in the mountains of Nainital, Pachauri, like his father, studied abroad. He received a double Ph.D. in industrial engineering and economics from North Carolina State University, where he served on the faculty.

He returned home to teach in India and by 1982 had assumed the directorship of TERI in New Delhi, growing the organization into one of the world’s best-known research institutes. Research with global institutions, such as the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme, and institutions in numerous countries also prepared him for the role of chairman of the IPCC. Scientists representing all continents comprise the IPCC, “to assemble, assess and compile knowledge on the greatest threat to the planet since the dawning of the industrial age.”

During his two terms as head of IPCC, Pachauri has brought on board once-reluctant developing countries to formulate policies addressing climate change. Work demands have him traveling constantly, yet the scientist manages to find an occasional free moment to compose poetry. And family and close colleagues will assure you that he will always make time for a game of cricket. ✪
Nereus Acosta
Thinking Globally, Acting Locally to Fight Poverty

After Nereus (Neric) Acosta received his Ph.D. in political science in 1994, the EWC Doctoral Fellow returned to the Philippines and quickly began to make headlines. He became the youngest person ever elected to his local provincial council. Four years later, he won a seat in the national Congress.

In his fight for positive social, economic and political change in the Philippines, his efforts have extended far beyond politics, earning him invitations to speak in countries all over the world about his work in sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

“The worst problem is not poverty with resources, but the poverty of the spirit, the hopelessness and the thought that we cannot make any difference,” Acosta told local legislators and grassroots community organizers in rallying support for policies on population, reproductive health and human development. He’s found these policies can often be a hard sell in a nation with deeply embedded cultural and religious traditions.

But he’s been steadfast. He launched a community college for poor students, especially from the disadvantaged Lumad communities, indigenous to the Bikidnon province of northern Mindanao, who share his roots. He subsidized tuition for up to 3,000 students in high school and college from congressional development funds.

Then there’s a microcredit project with close to 8,000 poor rural women as beneficiaries in 130 villages. It gives out loans of 2,000 to 5,000 pesos ($100 U.S.) for projects such as raising chickens or cultivating vegetable gardens or running small stores. The non-government organization, called BINHI-BULIG, replicates Grameen Bank microfinancing of Bangladesh, where Acosta trained before he entered politics. According to Acosta, this project is the largest of its kind in the northern Mindanao region.

Acosta advocates a world of “glocal” leadership, of “global and local understanding, global and local responses. A leader in today’s world has to look at these ‘glocal’ realities, ‘glocal’ approaches, and think and act on both fronts,” he says. “Policies are great for a legal framework that can be used nationally, but how is that changing the life of the farmer with the water buffalo in Mindanao? Given this context, the dent you make is actually in the local communities and the lives you transform.”

“The East-West Center years were a period of intellectual growth and personal character formation. I learned to deeply value knowledge — both from formal sources and the larger social milieu of vast exchanges with other scholars from the Asia Pacific region — including friendships formed for a lifetime.”
Amanda Ellis
Striving to Empower Women in Developing Countries

Take a look at a map of the world’s developing countries and chances are Amanda Ellis has played a role in economically empowering women in an impressive number of those nations.

Ellis is lead specialist for the World Bank Group Gender Action Plan, a $60 million initiative that promotes gender equality as smart economics. She spearheads an exciting new global research program on Economic Opportunities for Women. On top of that, she manages the World Bank’s Global Private Sectors Leaders CEO Forum.

Ellis traces her interest in gender issues to a political science class she enrolled in at the University of Hawai‘i as an EWC graduate student, pursuing a master’s in communications and political science, and studying Japanese. When she completed her studies, Ellis stepped easily into the foreign service in her native New Zealand, serving posts in Paris, the Pacific and Asia.

In the foreign service, “I saw how important it was from a development perspective that women have access to loans in microfinance,” she says. After roles with the International Secretariat for the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council and as a senior official to APEC, she was headhunted by Australia’s WESTPAC Banking Corporation, as national manager for women in business and the head of women’s markets.

There, Ellis ran a women’s business program that introduced her to many of the country’s women entrepreneurs and led to a book contract with Random House. That book, “Women’s Business, Women’s Wealth,” became a best seller. She followed with a book about women entrepreneurs in New Zealand, “Woman 2 Woman,” which shot into the top 10 best-seller list for nonfiction in its first week on the shelves.

She has donated proceeds from sales of her books to an endowment at the East-West Center for the Amanda and Natalie Ellis Scholarships, a tribute to her mother, Natalie, who retired in 2008 after a long and distinguished teaching career. The scholarships will go to young women leaders in Australia and New Zealand participating in the EWC Asia Pacific Leadership Program.

In 2003, Ellis moved on to the World Bank Group, founding the gender program at the International Finance Corporation and subsequently was named Lead Specialist for Gender and Development at the World Bank itself. In May 2007 and 2008, she gave the keynote address at the APEC Women Leaders’ Network Conferences in Australia and Peru. “It’s fascinating how things I was involved with at the Center in my early career, how these connections have been maintained and strengthened to become a theme in my professional life,” she says.

(In July 2010 Amanda Ellis is expected to return to New Zealand to assume the position of Deputy Secretary – Development in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, leading the unit that manages the government’s international aid and development program.)

“The Center was an amazing opportunity for someone from the bottom of the South Island of New Zealand to learn from 350 students from 53 different countries. I couldn’t have known at the time, but it was the perfect training for my subsequent careers in the foreign service and now at the World Bank — and like many Center grantees, I met my future husband at EWC!”

Amanda Ellis (third from left) with World Bank President Robert Zoellick.