
The Philanthropist interview: Danny Glenwright

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Last month, Save the Children Canada announced that Danny Glenwright would join the organization as president and CEO on March 1, after six years as the executive director of Action Against Hunger Canada. Glenwright has more than 16 years of experience in the non-profit and media sectors and has travelled to more than 60 countries as part of his work. He sits on the board of the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH) and is a member of the advisory committee for the Centennial College International Development program in Toronto.

In addition to his work in international aid, Danny has been the managing editor of *The Philanthropist* [since fall 2016](#) – working many nights and weekends to balance the two roles. He has played a key part in the development of our publication, including the lead-up to the launch of a new web platform this June.

He has formerly held positions as the managing editor of the Gender Links news service in South Africa, with the United Nations in the Palestinian territories, and in media development roles in Sierra Leone, Namibia, and Rwanda. He was also previously the managing editor of *Xtra* newspaper in Toronto and the executive director of Journalists for Human Rights.

We are pleased to see Danny take on this critical role with our colleagues in the international sector and look forward to engaging with him as he continues his work in improving the lives of children and their communities, in Canada and around the world. As he departs the journal, we talked to him about his work at Action Against Hunger and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Although we're sad to say goodbye, we're grateful for his contributions to our publication – and we look forward to inviting him back as a contributor to *The Philanthropist*.

Looking back over your past few years at Action Against Hunger (ACF), what were the

most important challenges and accomplishments?

Over the past six years, we grew our foundation and made it sustainable in Canada. We are well regarded as the leading organization internationally that responds to humanitarian nutrition challenges. We focused on strengthening the financial side of the operation, governance, and raising its visibility and profile through talking about the work we do and its effectiveness. Malnutrition is treatable and preventable. All it takes is an investment and knowing where the malnutrition is, while so many of our development challenges are incredibly complicated and not so easily solved. Over the past six years, we went from being a relatively unknown organization here to one of the top partners of Global Affairs Canada. I am leaving the organization with lots of great funding for the future, to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and the challenges it presents in years to come.

All the work we did paid off in the year of COVID, but this was also partly because there were food insecurity issues in Canada as well, and so something resonated there, and Canadians continued to support our work this year. That is a good thing because the challenges today are immense. Four years ago, we were happily talking about halving hunger globally and we had made a huge dent in global hunger. Now, due to the pandemic, a lot of these gains that took 30 years to make are at risk of being rolled back. Food security and nutrition are going to continue to be a priority, and hunger and malnutrition is still the number-one cause of death for children globally, and so we need to just keep working on this issue.

Could you elaborate on how COVID-19 has exacerbated food insecurity challenges?

Lockdowns were initially the issue, as people were prevented from going out and engaging in food production. In many parts of the world, climate change is already having a major impact, so we are talking about countries already dealing with changing weather patterns, year-on-year droughts, even locust infestations in east Africa. On top of that you get the pandemic, which massively impacted people's ability to produce food and leave their homes. And global supply chains have been impacted as well, and it affected a lot of the good work being done to mitigate the effect of climate change – and the longer it's gone on, the worse it's gotten.

Is food insecurity also going to be one of your priorities at Save the Children, and are there commonalities in issues you must deal with in both organizations?

Both organizations work closely together here in Canada and globally. The Canadian sector has become much leaner and more collaborative as the funding gap has increased and needs have grown. So we all must work together, and that will continue to happen. When I think about Save the Children, a huge priority is going to be the number of children, in the millions, who are out of school because of the pandemic, and many are at risk of not going back. Those of us in the sector who want to make the world a better place, the best way to do that is with the next generation and making sure that children around the world right now get education and the food they need to focus at school so they have opportunities to advance their families and communities.

What was on your mind when you were contemplating taking on your new role at Save the Children?

I was a journalist for many years, and many of those years were in developing countries. I saw

up close the impact of conflict and humanitarian emergencies. Journalists can have an impact at raising awareness, but as a person I wanted to do more than that, to contribute to social change in some of these places. I am immensely privileged to be a Canadian, and in my background and the opportunities I have had. When I joined the sector, it was with the goal of learning as much as possible so I can contribute the most, and I learned so much about that at Action Against Hunger.

Last year, I was in Ethiopia in a camp with refugees from South Sudan. I was in a clinic that we run, and I was looking in the eyes of the moms there who were terrified for their babies. But they were in a clinic where their babies were being treated, and because of our expertise we could make sure that they were safe and healthy. I will be able to learn a lot more about the development side of this at Save the Children. How do we prevent these moms from even ending up in that clinic? What can we do so that that clinic and refugee camp are not necessary? And both facets of the sector are so important, but because of climate change and the other numerous challenges that we face right now, working on that resilience side and making societies stronger to help people where they are – that is the long-term solution.

“Build back better” is the buzzword for building up resilience and sustainable development in societies after the pandemic. Can you talk about how things will change in terms of development work on the ground?

The beauty of the UN Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] is that every nation has a challenge to meet. COVID-19 has reminded us of how connected we all are and the importance of local solutions to local problems. For a long time in the sector, there has been a push to localize our work and to make sure that people in the countries where we work have the skills to respond to crises in their own country and work with local actors to do so. It is not a top-down approach and is one of the SDGs. That is my focus.

A leader I look up to is the mayor of Freetown in Sierra Leone, Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr. When she came in as mayor, she decided to solve the problem of annual flooding in the city – which caused immense health challenges – collaboratively. She had big ideas like planting a million trees to stop the flooding. What I love about her is she is very much behind the scenes doing the unsexy work to make these ideas happen, like going door to door with a smartphone to enable the collection of property taxes to raise money for the project.

The localization approach is not just about giving development funding to local agencies. We must shift our thinking and the metrics that we look at in Canada. Growth and more funding are important, but we must also look at collaboration and local partnerships for long-term sustainable change.

Are you particularly proud of any of your interventions at Action Against Hunger?

I am proud of the ones that you hear about the least, particularly in the hard-to-reach places that don't get reported on often, such as the Lake Chad region. I [spent time in northeastern Nigeria](#) a couple of years ago, and there are tens of millions of people in that region who are food-insecure. Life for women and girls is horrifying. Many girls are married by the time they are 14, and the fertility rate is one of the highest in the world, with some women having as many as 10 children. Life is very difficult, and conflict and climate change are making it worse, and most people have no clue what's happening there even though it's one of the worst humanitarian

crises on the planet. Action Against Hunger has a very large project there that is keeping people alive.

I also think of the situation in Bangladesh and Myanmar and the exodus of the Rohingya. [I visited that refugee camp](#) shortly after that happened, and we were the first agency on the ground and worked for three days straight with little sleep. At one point we were feeding 86,000 people a day.

What do you hope will be the impact of the pandemic on international development work in Canada?

I just hope it shows us that we are all connected despite the walls and borders we put up, and that the prosperity of Canada depends on a prosperous world. There is an economic argument that says that if we do not support the rest of the world to make sure all get vaccinated and their countries do not suffer and end up worse off because of climate change and all the other challenges, it will impact us economically. We are a country that depends on trade and our connections to the world, and Canada is a country with people from all over the world.

How is inequality contributing to the challenges you will be facing in your new role?

It is a huge and growing issue. The immense wealth accumulated this past year by the wealthiest among us is coming at the cost of the poorest among us, both here in North America and globally, and we need a concerted push to make sure that governments here in Canada and the West do something about this inequality. Most Canadians have not looked into the eyes of a baby who is dying from hunger because her mother cannot provide for her, because she has been driven away from her home by conflict or climate change, while knowing that this problem is solvable. With some support, that child could have survived. That is what drives me.

What is a surprising fact that you learned while with Action Against Hunger?

The immense number of people who are malnourished. Three million children die every year from causes related to malnutrition. Even more horrific is the number of children who are chronically malnourished, the stunting you see in many parts of the world, where kids just aren't getting the nutrients they need to fully develop cognitively. It creates a vicious cycle of people whose brain development is stunted, which imperils their society's future development. We hear about war and conflict and natural disasters, but we often think hunger is something that we solved in the 1980s after Live Aid. Well, we did not. We got close to solving it, but it is back again, partly because of COVID but also in large part because of climate change.

What are the three main crises globally that you want people to pay attention to?

The crisis of gender-based violence is a hidden crisis, but the rates globally are out of control, and COVID has exacerbated them in many parts of the world. Misinformation is another, and a growing one as well. The other one I will mention is close to my heart because it also affects my own country. I am appalled at the racism in Canada and the tragic inability of our country to make life better and equal for Indigenous Canadians. I think as a country that should be our number-one priority, especially if we are going around the world advocating on behalf of impoverished people globally. Our history around Indigenous issues in Canada is horrific, and we should continue to invest in reconciliation. I think it is imperative for the future success of our

country.