

Interview With Johnathan Rodgers of the Discovery Channel in Johannesburg March 28, 1998

African Education Initiative

Mr. Rodgers. Mr. President, I was in Uganda when you announced your African education initiative. It was very, very impressive. Is there a role for foundation and the private sector in helping us?

The President. Oh, absolutely. There's no way that just through Government aid from the United States and other countries we can do all this. And a lot of operations like the Discovery Channel can even more efficiently hook up these schools, give them the basics that they need, a television set, a satellite, the VCR's. Then eventually we'll be able to come in with the computers, and we'll be able to have interactive access to the Internet and even interactive communication across national lines.

But we have to begin to put in place a technological infrastructure in these schools. And since we can now leapfrog a lot of the early investments that schools would have had to make 10 or 20 years ago, we can actually do it more cheaply. In other words, they won't have to have a thousand volumes in their library that they could never afford if we can do enough through educational television.

Mr. Rodgers. You also talked about the relationship, in this case, between one school, I believe it's in Silver Spring, Maryland, and a school in Uganda.

The President. That's right.

Mr. Rodgers. Are there other things American kids can do to help here in Africa in terms of education?

The President. Oh, yes. First of all, I think it's important to set up as many partnerships as possible. And if the children have access to the Internet in the African schools, if we can get that done, then they can actually communicate directly through the Internet.

But there are lots of other things we can do. If we have partnerships—children in American schools, for example, could have book

drives and send books to children—a lot of children in African schools don't have access to any of the books that American kids take for granted. Then they could write back and forth and talk about the books they're reading. Or they could make sure they have a television and access to some of your "Discovery" tapes, and then they could write back and forth and talk about what they'd seen together. I think that this is the kind of thing that we want to promote more of.

Mr. Rodgers. Great. And the last question, Mr. President: I think a lot of Americans would be surprised that in many of the African countries boys are treated differently than girls. Do you see a change coming there?

The President. Yes, we're working hard to support that. But you see this in a lot of developing nations around the world, where boys and girls have a different role in traditional society and where girls have not traditionally been educated. Now, as they move to a more modern society, young girls have the same aspirations: They want to develop their minds; they want to go out and live their lives. And we've worked very hard to support education for young girls.

One of the things I like best about the Ugandan educational initiative is that they want universal primary education for all their children. And they're going out and recognizing the schools where the enrollment and the graduation rates are just as high for girls as for boys.

That's a big priority. But it's a big change for Africa, but Africa is not alone in that. That's a worldwide issue we have to keep working on.

Mr. Rodgers. Thank you very much, sir.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:12 p.m. at the R.P. Maphanzela Primary School. Johnathan Rodgers is president of Discovery Networks, U.S. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.