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Restoring U.S. foreign aid to health

By Members of the Steering Committee of the Global Health Technologies Coalition - 06/01/10 04:26 PM ET

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President Obama, his foreign policy team, and Congress are on the cusp of redefining how the United States approaches foreign assistance. As they undertake their aid reform effort this year, they're promising to get serious about ensuring that American funds are used wisely.

They're right to focus on results. And one of the best ways to guarantee that our aid dollars actually deliver for those in need is to use them to develop innovative new tools for combating the health problems that plague the developing world.

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The need for research breakthroughs is as urgent as ever. Almost five million people die each year from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Yet vaccines for HIV and malaria do not yet exist and existing tuberculosis vaccines are outdated and ineffective. For many other neglected infectious diseases, effective prevention, diagnostics, and treatments simply do not exist, and many tools that do exist are not effective against some conditions.

Since the invention of the polio vaccine in the 1950s, the United States has led the world's efforts to develop the vaccines, drugs, diagnostic tools, and other products needed to combat disease and improve public health. America must maintain that position of leadership. Several American officials have recognized the need for an intensified U.S. commitment to global health research. The head of the U.S. Agency for International Development recently stated that "humanity demands" vaccines for AIDS, malaria, and TB, along with low-cost vaccines for pneumonia and rotavirus "that will eliminate hundreds of thousands of child deaths."

How can America accelerate the world's efforts to defeat infectious disease? For starters, our policymakers must ensure that research and development are included in three major U.S. global health and development efforts currently underway.

The first is President Obama's new Global Health Initiative, which is slated to devote \$63 billion to improve health worldwide over six years. The second is a review ordered by President Obama to examine U.S. global development policy, called the Presidential Study Directive. A recently released draft of this review reveals several promising developments in foreign assistance reform, such as increased U.S. commitment to "game-changing innovations with the potential to solve longstanding development challenges." The third is a review launched by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to strengthen and elevate global development and diplomacy as key pillars of U.S. foreign policy.



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 Healthcare

U.S. policymakers can elevate global health research and development in several ways, the first being robust funding for new health tools. As American officials weigh how to spend money allocated for global health and foreign assistance, they should take note of the potentially revolutionary impact that innovative new diagnostics, preventives, vaccines, medicines, and other products can have on global public health. Federal agencies that can deliver the most promising research and development initiatives should be funded accordingly.

American policymakers must also work to streamline regulatory pathways for new healthcare technologies-both at home and in the developing world. Without an effective regulatory system, unsafe or counterfeit treatments can proliferate. Further, patients can suffer needlessly as they wait for promising treatments that may not be approved in time.

U.S. regulators can help bridge this gap by sharing their expertise with public-health and regulatory authorities in endemic nations and collaborating with global health officials to accelerate approval of and access to life-saving products.

Finally, American policymakers should encourage more private-sector research on diseases afflicting the developing world. Products for the developing world are often perceived as risky bets that may not provide enough of a return to justify a hefty research investment.

It need not be so. Policymakers are already exploring incentives and innovative financing mechanisms to encourage private-sector research into the health problems plaguing the world's neediest. These efforts should be expanded and U.S. support should be increased.

One strategy for expanding research is the Advance Market Commitment (AMC), whereby governments, foundations, or other groups aim to create a viable market for a desired vaccine, should a private firm develop one. In

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2007, the governments of five countries, along with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, launched the first AMC—a \$1.5 billion fund to accelerate the development and distribution of a vaccine against pneumococcal disease, which kills 1.6 million people every year. The United States should join with others to establish another AMC, this time focusing on support for a new vaccine in early stages of development. Additionally, the U.S. government should lead the way in exploring new sustainable funding mechanisms that draw upon both private- and public- sector purses to drive innovation in global health research and development for a wide range of global health preventives, diagnostics, and drugs.

Never before has America been better positioned to make a difference in the lives of the world's poor. We must seize the opportunity and ensure that the benefits of prosperity and technological innovation reach those who need them most.

R. Gordon Douglas, Jr., MD, Executive Chair, Aeras Global TB Vaccine Foundation


Mitchell Warren, Executive Director, AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition

Bernard Pecoul, MD, MPH, Executive Director, Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative

Seth Berkley, MD, President, CEO, and Founder, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

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Third world countries need stable governments with personal property rights and a bill of rights to protect the citizens. Given these tools and a free market economy the people can become independent and create wealth. The money we send to third world dictators only serves to strengthen these corrupt governments who torture and starve their citizens.

BY **CYNDIKUS** on 06/01/2010 at 18:38

How about restoring the American economy to health first. Of course, before we do that we need to find somebody that actually knows how to do it. Geithner, Summers, and Fromer are just pawns in the Obama political game.

BY **E PEARSE** on 06/01/2010 at 19:58

this is what Americans want done with foreign aid...keep it at home and use it to pay down our debt! this president and his muslim friends hate us anyway so anything sent there will just be used to kill us...keep our money at home!

BY **MINDY** on 06/01/2010 at 22:47

Ah, yes — more Obama redistribution of wealth, taken from the wallet of the hard-working American taxpayer and poured down yet another Third World rathole, to the benefit of nobody except Third World dictators. Who do you think you're fooling, Mr. President? Balance the U.S. budget before you go committing even more money we don't have to your latest "global" initiative.

BY **NOT THAT NAIVE** on 06/02/2010 at 04:08

This phrase in the article inadvertently says it all: "they're promising to get serious about ensuring that American funds are used wisely." Wow, imagine that — Obama and the Democratic Congress getting serious about ensuring that American funds are used wisely! I guess there's a first time for every thing.

BY **INADVERTENT HUMOR** on 06/02/2010 at 04:10

To: The Hill Editor: please stop insulting your readers with this kind of drivel: "Fiscal Responsibility" and "US Government" should never be used in the same sentence unless you're referring to works of fiction.

BY **CINDY MERRILL** on 06/02/2010 at 06:30

All of the commenters to this post sound nuts! Bitter, isolationist, uninformed, and heartless. The US is the richest nation the world has ever known, and as such, we have a responsibility to improve the lives of the most destitute, the most

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disadvantaged, and the sickest, wherever in the world they may live. The American ideals of freedom and equality of opportunity cannot be realized in a world in which over half the population has no idea where their next meal may come from, or in which they will die from a vaccine-preventable illness, while their rich country counterparts complain about the piddling drops of money their governments "waste on foreigners." Shame on these commenters. Go take a trip and see how the other half lives. You'll be surprised, and a much better person for it.

BY **CHAUNCEY** on 06/02/2010 at 10:49

America's investment in research and development for global health is truly an investment in our own economy and health. We know from experience - the U.S. has saved more than \$3 billion after investing \$32 million in the global campaign to eradicate smallpox because costs to treat and vaccinate against the disease were eliminated. We know from looking at hospitalization costs for diseases here in the U.S., including the \$752 million we spent in one year on over 58,000 TB-related hospital stays - costs that can and have been prevented with global health RD. And we also know looking into the future - the World Bank estimates a global flu pandemic could cost us \$1.5 trillion. Let's be smart and invest in the health of the US and the world. Global health IS America's health.

BY **KG-RESEARCH!AMERICA** on 06/02/2010 at 13:11

Thank you for this article - I know firsthand the importance of this research. As an avid traveler with personal and professional connections abroad, I have benefited countless times from the research we do here and abroad. Many of the countries the US partners with are ahead of us in their experience with certain diseases and ability to study larger numbers of people. Unfortunately it sometimes takes illness to connect the dots and understand the consequences for us, but I'm thankful regardless!

BY **JENNIFER** on 06/02/2010 at 14:21

The only responsibility congress has is to We The People. They are broke and Medi Care is without funds but yes we can throw money around the world and play big shot. I say take care of this nation and our old folks and get jobs going again before you folks in Washington spend any more money we Don't have. Since when did we elect our senators and congressmen to play peace corps. Give us some peace here won't you?

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BY **LIPSTICK** on 06/02/2010 at 19:42

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