



Leveraging research in foreign assistance

What global health successes can teach us about the crucial role of innovation to reach long-term international development goals

The United States is set to reform its approach to foreign aid and international development, with several major efforts currently under way. As US policymakers consider how to make foreign assistance more effective at reducing poverty and spurring economic growth, innovation through research and development—and the fundamental role it plays in achieving global development objectives—should be top of mind.

This reform is moving on several fronts. One is a **rewrite of the Cold War-era Foreign Assistance Act of 1961**, led by Representative Howard Berman, chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has also introduced and passed legislation supporting foreign assistance reform, which is awaiting action by the full Senate.

President Obama's new **Global Health Initiative (GHI)**, which is slated to devote \$63 billion to improve health worldwide over six years, incorporates key components of the foreign assistance reform agenda. The GHI's approach is to help partner countries improve health outcomes through strengthened health systems, with a particular focus on improving the health of women, newborns, and children. The GHI also emphasizes integrated approaches, improved consultation and partnership with developing-country governments and citizens, and improved monitoring and evaluation. The new initiative promotes research and innovation as a core principle, and policymakers should make the development of new and more effective global health tools a key goal.

President Obama has also ordered a review to broadly examine US global development policy, called the **Presidential Study Directive-7 (PSD-7)**, and is expected to sign a policy directive pursuant to the PSD-7 shortly. The **Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR)** is a process undertaken by the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to recommend updated approaches to diplomacy and development. The QDDR is expected to wrap up in September. USAID recently established a new **Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning** that will support the agency's priorities and goals, including a renewed focus on science, technology, and innovation. USAID also has established a new **Budget Office** to budget, plan for, and monitor and evaluate the agency's foreign assistance activities.

The time for foreign assistance reform is now

Foreign aid reform comes at a critical time, when the United States faces a complex set of global challenges, such as the current economic crisis, terrorism, poverty, and disease. US global leadership in tackling these challenges is more important than ever. If global development is to become a pillar of US foreign policy, the foreign aid system must be modernized to reflect current challenges.

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Recommendations for modernizing foreign aid

US international development efforts will be most successful if they are enhanced and streamlined to work toward a stable, prosperous, and peaceful global future. Specifically, US foreign aid efforts should:

- Be designed, allocated, and spent transparently and accountably.
- Make long-term, strategic investments in the capacity of national governments, local governments, and local civil society to meet the needs of citizens.
- Give governments and all citizens the lead role in setting priorities and managing development efforts, and building an inclusive, pluralistic society and economy that respects human rights and can fulfill human needs.

The central role of global health innovation in foreign assistance

As the Obama administration and Congress work to reform how the nation manages foreign assistance, they should consider how crucial research and innovation are to global development efforts.

Key past successes in this area can serve as a model for US policymakers throughout the foreign aid reform process. For instance, the United States has long been a leader in global health research, and American innovation has contributed to remarkable progress in preventing, diagnosing, and treating conditions such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis (TB), neglected tropical diseases, pneumonia, and diarrheal diseases. Since 1988, global polio cases have decreased by more than 99 percent in part because of US efforts to eradicate the disease. And 26 countries have reported cutting in half the number of malaria cases and deaths between 2000 and 2007 due in large part to US-driven efforts.

For example, a recent study supported by USAID has lifted hopes for research and development for tools to prevent HIV. The study showed a significant reduction in the risk of HIV infection among women who used an experimental HIV prevention gel, called a microbicide. Although further research will need to be conducted to confirm the findings, it is a landmark study that demonstrates the crucial role of research in providing women with effective HIV prevention options. The study also demonstrates the unique role USAID—in partnership with other US agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—plays in global health research.

Recommendations for elevating global health research in foreign aid

A strengthened dedication to health and development research in US foreign policy will contribute to gains across the world. It is crucial that innovation includes a focus on global health research and product development and that these components are elevated in US foreign policy. Policymakers can achieve this in several ways, including:

- Ensuring that research and innovation to develop global health tools are included as key principles in the QDDR and the Congressional rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act, as in the GHI and PSD-7.
- Bolstering documentation of US investments in research and development. In 2006, USAID outlined its five-year health strategy and has released subsequent annual progress reports. 2010 is the final year of the strategy and the documentation. Policymakers should request that USAID develop a new six-year research strategy and that the agency continue to produce reports.
- Supporting USAID's new Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning. Specifically, the bureau's efforts to elevate science, technology, and innovation need full support from US policymakers.

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About the Global Health Technologies Coalition

The coalition seeks to engage and inform U.S. policymakers about policies to accelerate the creation of new solutions to longstanding global health problems in low-resource settings through increased and effective use of public resources, incentives to encourage private investment, and improved regulatory systems. The coalition's secretariat is housed at PATH. For more information, please visit: www.ghcoalition.org.