June 15, 2017

InterAction’s Statement on the Impact of Foreign Aid Reform

We, the undersigned humanitarian and development non-governmental organizations and partners, share a commitment to alleviating human suffering to make the world a more peaceful, just, democratic, and prosperous place. As organizations working in the humanitarian space in nearly every country on the planet, we represent American citizens’ instinct to make a positive difference in the lives of the world’s poorest and most marginalized people. Therefore, in the context of ongoing discussions about foreign assistance reform, our focus is on the impact any reforms will have on people whose lives are affected by our programming.

Because the United States’ foreign assistance infrastructure supports positive, life-changing programs for people all over the world, reforms that reduce its effectiveness or reach also alter our community’s ability to support human dignity, livelihoods, and the voice of local civil society. As a result, we are concerned that efforts with the stated goal of finding efficiency in foreign assistance but which are hasty or unexamined will cause harm to the very people we work to serve.

We believe that strong bipartisan congressional support for foreign assistance has been a key element of the United States’ positive presence in the world; and that responsible, appropriate reform requires collaboration between Congress and the executive branch. Over the last decade, Congress had led reform efforts to improve USAID, with exciting and powerful results.

We therefore support congressional engagement to study the administration’s foreign assistance reform proposals. We especially call for explicit consideration of any proposal’s full impact in human, economic, and institutional terms. Over the last 50 years, the development and humanitarian community has learned a tremendous amount about what works and what does not in programming and management. We ask Congress to use its authority to continue to put that learning to work to inform and guide how this country engages with the world through development and diplomacy.

To inform that process, we also propose below the core values, observations, and principles that underpin our community’s vision for U.S. development assistance.

- For decades, a key purpose of foreign assistance has been to alleviate poverty and promote decency, dignity, and hope, while promoting American goodwill. Addressing root causes of poverty, promoting development, and preventing and responding to humanitarian crises are important elements of U.S. moral leadership and reputation around the world.

- The U.S. depends on a robust and independent U.S. foreign assistance agency to achieve sustainable impact. Successful development and humanitarian programs support a safe and secure world, but they operate on different timelines than immediate-term diplomacy. An independent aid agency preserves the United States’ ability to address immediate and future challenges and supports long-term development objectives.

- The goal of any reform or reorganization should be to improve the United States’ ability to deliver different types of positive outcomes. This requires detailed
consideration that extends beyond costs and into the way reforms alter the effectiveness of proposed reforms. What works for global health is likely different than what works for food security or disaster response.

- **U.S. foreign assistance programs can and should be made more efficient and effective, but we oppose mergers that ignore differences in strategic objectives, purposes, or professions.** American diplomats, development specialists, international health workers, and humanitarians are trained professionals with different, meaningful skills. Combining offices or accounts with incompatible goals and staff requirements will reduce effectiveness more than it reduces overhead.

- **Private actors are not a substitute for official U.S. presence:** InterAction members manage the vast majority of the $15.4 billion committed annually to international development from private and voluntary organizations. Only 25% of which is from the U.S. government. While civil society organizations are critical partners to the U.S. government for the implementation of foreign assistance neither private sector actors nor charitable giving can replace the critical, convening power, and overarching framework provided by the United States government.
1. ACDI/VOCA
2. Action Against Hunger
3. ADRA International
4. Adventist Development and Relief Agency
5. Alliance for Peacebuilding
6. Alliance to End Hunger
7. African Development Solutions
8. American Jewish World Service
9. Basic Education Coalition
10. BRAC USA
11. Bread for the World
12. CARE
13. Catholic Relief Services
14. ChildFund International
15. Church World Service
16. Concern Worldwide US
17. Congressional Hunger Center
18. Doctors of the World / Médecins du Monde USA
19. Feed the Children
20. Global Communities
22. Global Links
23. Handicap International
24. Heart to Heart International
25. Helen Keller International
26. International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
27. IHC Global
28. IMA World Health
29. INMED Partnerships for Children
30. Institute for Sustainable Communities
31. International Center for Research on Women
32. International Development, Community, and Environment Department, Clark University
33. International Fund for Animal Welfare
34. International Medical Corps
35. International Rescue Committee
36. International Youth Foundation
37. IntraHealth International
38. Islamic Relief USA
39. Management Sciences for Health
40. MedShare
41. Mennonite Central Committee
42. Mercy Corps
43. Mercy-USA for Aid and Development
44. NCBA CLUSA
45. ONE
46. Operation USA
47. Oxfam America
48. Plan International USA
49. Planet Aid, Inc.
50. Population Action International
51. Project Concern International
52. Refugees International