Sustainable Global Health and Development

Recommendations & Actions

In order to increase the effectiveness of U.S. global health assistance, the U.S. government should ensure U.S. resources support comprehensive and integrated approaches focusing on prevention and treatment of prevalent diseases that have a major impact on health. This would also require an increase in U.S. investments to strengthen health systems and reduce inequity in access to quality health care. All U.S.-funded health programs should be accountable to the communities they serve. Donors and implementing organizations should actively engage community members in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating health strategies, policies and programs.

• Fully fund and implement the President’s Global Health Initiative (GHI), which calls for the development of an integrated, comprehensive global health strategy across all U.S. Government agencies.

• In beneficiary countries, build health workforce capacity and reduce inequalities of health care coverage and access, which primarily affect women, children and other marginalized groups, to help achieve U.S. global health goals.

• Adopt holistic practices that provide a broad spectrum of interventions and address the linkages between health and other sectors of development, such as water and sanitation, infrastructure planning, nutrition, agriculture, microfinance and the environment.

• Scale up U.S. efforts in fragile and disease-burdened states, and incorporate health programs in relief environments to lay the foundations for strengthened health systems and establish building blocks for a transition to development.

• Sustain and increase funding for proven interventions and current commitments, while increasing capacity through investment in new tools and interventions.

Results

U.S. investments in global health are proven successes. Continued funding and improving effectiveness will result in more lives saved, fewer health threats for Americans and more stable societies around the world.
Background

Global health has been a bipartisan priority for more than half a century. Relatively modest investments by the United States have saved more lives and improved economic growth and public perceptions of the U.S., as well as contributing to regional stability. Global health is also relevant to American security needs for the simple reason that borders do not stop diseases. We are now at a critical juncture: budget pressures threaten gains we have made and jeopardize critical funding despite the growing consensus within Congress, across government agencies, and throughout the broader global health community about what is working and what remains to be done. Capitalizing on our success and meeting our goals will require increased and sustained commitment.

On May 5, 2009, President Obama announced a six-year, $63 billion Global Health Initiative (GHI), which calls for the U.S. to develop an integrated, comprehensive global health strategy that moves away from the fragmented and disease-specific approach of the past and instead emphasizes results. The GHI is meant to maintain the U.S. commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS and malaria, while scaling up programs in maternal and child health, family planning and neglected tropical diseases. This initiative complements the momentum in the House and Senate, including efforts in the House to reform and streamline the disjointed foreign assistance architecture and the push by Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar for more efficient, effective, accountable and transparent foreign assistance. But this opportunity will be wasted unless the GHI principles are implemented and funded.

Support comprehensive, integrated approaches

Integrated approaches have the potential to increase efficiency and address the critical, underlying factors that contribute to good health. Holistic practices also address the linkages between health and other sectors of development. Integration includes strengthening the systems that support routine care and focus on the health outcomes of people and not just the outputs devoted to particular diseases. At the same time, integrated approaches should support and complement the prevention and treatment of prevalent diseases that have a major impact on health, including noncommunicable diseases and conditions. A comprehensive strategy also includes whole-of-government approaches and coordination by donor governments and agencies to leverage comparative advantages while reducing duplication.

Strengthen health systems

Like other development initiatives, global health efforts are most effective and sustainable when they align with country priorities and help countries build their own capacities. Strengthening health systems means training a capable health workforce, along with supporting local jobs and opportunities. Complementary strategies including engaging diaspora communities abroad and investing in the global health research and development capacities of countries with endemic diseases so that researchers can earn paychecks and contribute to new breakthroughs without emigrating. Strengthening health systems also includes developing and deploying new diagnostic tools and an increased focus on monitoring and evaluation. The U.S. Government should also partner with the countries and communities it is trying to reach, including national and district-level governments, civil society and the business community.

Increase health equity

One goal of U.S. global health investment in lower-income countries and communities should be to reduce inequities in access to quality healthcare. This requires special engagement with vulnerable and traditionally marginalized populations, including women and the disabled. It includes attention to gender, to make sure that all members of a family benefit from improved health care. Additionally, since existing products were generally developed for the industrial world with an assumption of higher costs and reliable infrastructure, health equity will require continuing efforts to develop and adapt health tools that are culturally, financially and technologically appropriate for low-income settings. Implementation and operations research is also necessary to ensure that interventions which reduce illness and save lives get to the people who need them.

Keep commitments

Enormous strides have been made in cutting diseases, and when it comes to global health, we have a growing body of evidence about what works. The U.S. has already made important commitments; and there are global plans to tackle several of the leading causes of death and illness. All of this knowledge and goodwill will only matter, however, if it is supported through sustained funding. Otherwise, the investments and progress we have already made risk being lost and health problems will be only more expensive and difficult to resolve in the future.