



FUNDAMENTALS FOR U.S. DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Foreign assistance is a long-standing part of U.S. foreign policy that works. [Over one billion](#) people are no longer in poverty. Eleven of America's top 15 trading [partners](#) were once recipients of foreign aid. From 2000 to 2017, 1.8 billion people [gained access](#) to basic drinking water services, and overall access to lifesaving health services sharply [increased](#). America's investments have yielded tremendous dividends. However, the need for poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance persists, especially in fragile states, and the work continues.

Transnational challenges—including an increase in civil conflicts and declining democracy, threats from a changing climate, and growing displacement—are now combined with a global pandemic and a projected [increase](#) in global poverty for the first time in 30 years. The role of China and the great power competition further exacerbate these challenges. It is crucial that the U.S. government address these issues to stem growing human suffering and ensure that development gains are not lost.

The COVID-19 outbreak and resulting movement restrictions and economic downturns have disrupted all aspects of development and humanitarian progress. The [World Bank](#) projects the deepest global recession in decades. The number of people facing acute food insecurity is expected to [double](#) in 2020, and nearly [ten million](#) children are now expected to never return to school. COVID-19 is anticipated to lead to [31 million](#) additional cases of gender-based violence in the next six months and result in 13 million child marriages. Child malnutrition, death, and loss of protection are already on the rise. Further, the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated deep inequalities within societies, leaving those who were already marginalized, including women, girls, and refugees, to bear some of the worst effects of this crisis. Without an immediate global response, the COVID-19 pandemic will [continue to erode](#) years of progress.

The need for strong U.S. global leadership is higher than ever. Without America's support, these challenges will leave lasting scars and hobble a generation of human potential. Poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance is integral to American engagement with the world and remains a strategic, economic, and moral imperative for the United States.

Congressional support for U.S. foreign assistance is strong on both sides of the aisle, with a long record of bipartisan support for U.S. foreign assistance among Congress and the American people. International NGOs, including InterAction Members, mobilize significant funding annually from American citizens.

[Now is the time for America to lead. Our current assistance delivery system, however, compromises what development and humanitarian assistance should be. Leadership should adhere to these fundamentals:](#)

1. **Assistance must be human-centered and effective in accomplishing its long-term goal of ending poverty, hunger, disease, injustice, corruption, and conflict. It should not be instrumentalized or used to leverage short-term political, foreign policy, or military objectives.**
 - U.S. foreign assistance should be needs-based and promote equity and equality.
 - Humanitarian assistance must be undergirded by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.
 - U.S. foreign assistance should be tethered to an internationally recognized human rights-based approach. Such an approach recognizes that aid alone does not end poverty but can play a valuable role in strengthening good governance, empowering individuals to claim their rights, protecting vulnerable communities from rights violations, and strengthening accountability to humanitarian laws. Such assistance should also represent American values like compassion and support political rights like rule of law, religious freedom and freedom of speech.
 - Foreign assistance must be inclusive and must address critical cross-cutting issues, including gender equality, the leadership of marginalized and vulnerable communities, and environmental sustainability.

2. **The goal of foreign assistance is to build sustainability and capacity for the eventual transition away from assistance, paving the way for other forms of partnership and international cooperation.**
 - Sustainability is achieved when U.S. foreign assistance is built around the principle of country ownership - when U.S. foreign assistance enables governments and civil society to own the development process and when it supports the citizen-state compact by actively breaking down barriers to participation, decision-making, and accountability.
 - U.S. foreign assistance should work to prevent and mitigate crises, reducing the need for emergency humanitarian action.
 - U.S. investments in global development should make communities and our world more resilient to shocks and stresses, including from the increasing damages caused by climate change.
 - Aid should aim to increase global prosperity by advancing inclusive, sustainable economic growth underpinned by effective governance and accountable institutions.

3. **Foreign assistance should be transparent, data-driven, accountable, and outcome-oriented. It should be evidence-based, cultivate learning, and use best practices.**
 - U.S. foreign assistance must be transparent and accountable to the American people and the communities it serves.
 - Programs should be cost-effective, utilize appropriate and disaggregated data, and produce measurable results. They should also be designed, adaptively managed, and implemented based on the best available data, and they should be in line with partner countries' own development plans.



- 4. Foreign assistance should support locally-led development and humanitarian response to better address community needs and achieve impactful and effective results.**
 - Historically, local communities were not always consulted about the provision of aid, especially from governments and multilateral organizations. The NGO sector is committed to a development model that centers upon the voices and leadership of local communities. U.S.-based international NGOs should be considered vital partners in building the capacity of local organizations and involving them in an inclusive development process.
 - Local, sustainable ownership is best achieved when the U.S. is aligned with the priorities of, implements programs through, and jointly contributions resources with credible and accountable local institutions.
 - All different types of local actors are vital to effective and inclusive humanitarian response and development programs. U.S. foreign assistance should seek to reduce or remove unnecessary barriers to entry for local organizations and communities, faith-based organizations, and local civil society groups, putting them at the center of decision-making processes and emphasizing sustainable local delivery of assistance.

- 5. As an investment in U.S. global leadership, foreign assistance funding should be robust, dependable, and timely. Funding levels should be commensurate with global needs, based on locally determined priorities, and reactive to changes on the ground. Once the U.S. commits assistance, it should be delivered.**
 - Foreign aid must be appropriated and distributed promptly, which is critical for effective planning and execution. Funding delays undermine lifesaving work, compound inefficiencies, damage American credibility, and waste taxpayer dollars.
 - U.S. assistance should reflect the urgency, rapidly evolving nature, and magnitude of global needs. It should focus on fragile contexts and the most vulnerable populations.
 - Foreign assistance programs have the greatest impact when aligned and coordinated with U.S. allies, the private sector, and multilateral institutions.
 - The U.S. must continue to partner with, invest in, and support constructive reform in key multilateral institutions. Effective U.S. foreign policy relies on a strong multilateral system that fosters collective problem solving, sustainable development, and improving the well-being of communities worldwide.

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InterAction is a convener, thought leader and premier network of NGOs working to eliminate poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people. Learn more at InterAction.org.