

International

Health and Development

D OES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Thirty years ago, a typical woman in a village in Bangladesh had 7 children, 3 of whom died from diarrhea or other preventable illnesses. She did not have access to safe water and did not know how to space her children. Her sons had some chance of learning to read and write, but her daughters were unlikely to attend school. Today, what is the outlook for this woman, for her family, and for people like her in other developing countries?



What Are the Realities of Life in the Developing World?

Despite the significant progress that has been made, many challenges remain.

- ◆ Thirty-four thousand children under the age of five die every day from malnutrition and preventable diseases. That's 24 children a minute or the equivalent of three 747 jets crashing every hour, every day, all year.
- ◆ The population of the developing world increases by the equivalent of an additional New York City every month.
- ◆ By the year 2000, between 30 and 40 million people will be HIV positive. That's equal to the entire population of Spain or Argentina.
- ◆ More than half a million women die each year in pregnancy or childbirth.
- ◆ Almost one billion adults are illiterate, two-thirds of them women; 100 million children around the globe will never attend school.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Today, the outlook for a typical Bangladeshi woman and her family is far more optimistic. She uses family planning services and limits her family to 4 children who will have a good chance to survive into adulthood. They are immunized against serious infectious diseases, their mother knows how to prepare a simple oral rehydration solution that can prevent deaths from diarrhea, and the village water supply is safe. Her sons—and their sisters—go to primary school. These changes from 30 years ago hold true not only for this woman but for millions of women in developing countries all over the world.

How Do International Development Programs Improve Living Conditions?

HEALTH: Health programs address a variety of issues, ranging from nutrition to HIV/AIDS prevention, from family planning to the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases. Simple interventions can save millions of lives.

WATER AND SANITATION: The construction of latrines and safe water supplies decreases the occurrence of diarrhea and other common causes of death in developing countries.

EDUCATION: Girls in developing countries attend secondary school at less than three-quarters the rate of boys. Closing the gender gap in education—and making school more accessible to everyone—helps to slow rapid population growth, improve child survival rates, and enhance economic development.

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: A new approach to economic development—small business loans to people with few economic resources—creates jobs and expands opportunities in desperately poor communities.

AGRICULTURE: Appropriate methods of farming become more and more important as the population increases and more food must be produced.



What Are the Current Health Priorities?

INFECTIOUS DISEASES: Tuberculosis, pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhea continue to kill almost 11 million people every year. Education, immunization, nutrition, vector control, monitoring and surveillance, appropriate drug use, and environmental improvements must be strengthened to combat these diseases.

IMMUNIZATIONS: Widespread immunization relying on inexpensive vaccines, easy-to-use syringes, and intensive public education, is the most cost-effective way to prevent the deaths of children. Nevertheless, more than 2 million children still die each year from diseases that could be prevented with available vaccines.

MALNUTRITION: Over 200 million children under the age of five are malnourished. Priorities include increasing the use of key vitamin and mineral supplements, fortifying common foods and products, and educating parents.

BREASTFEEDING: One simple measure—encouraging new mothers to breastfeed exclusively for four to six months—could save the lives of almost 1.5 million infants every year.

MATERNAL MORTALITY: A woman's risk of dying during pregnancy or childbirth varies with the level of development in her country and the number of times she is pregnant. In Nigeria, one out of every 16 women dies in pregnancy or childbirth, while in Honduras, one out of 100 women dies. Contrast this with Sweden, where the comparable risk is one out of 12,000.

HIV/AIDS: HIV/AIDS is causing enough deaths in some countries to undermine the reduction of mortality rates of children. With about 16,000 new HIV infections every day, broader and more intensive outreach to vulnerable

populations is desperately needed.

FAMILY PLANNING: There are still millions of couples who want to space their children, but who cannot obtain modern, high-quality, affordable family planning services. If this demand were met, mothers would more easily recover from their pregnancies and attend to their newborn children, and both parents would be better able to provide food, clothing, and education for all their children.

CHRONIC DISEASES: Though infectious diseases are still predominant in developing countries, cancer and diseases of the heart and blood vessels are becoming more prevalent as economic conditions improve. These chronic diseases are closely linked to “modern” lifestyles and the long-term risks of smoking, high-fat diets, and lack of exercise. In the next century, smoking-related diseases are likely to be the leading cause of preventable deaths in the world.



What Has Been Accomplished?

Over the past 25 years, the partnership among governments, private organizations, and the international development community has led to impressive achievements:

- ◆ Average life expectancy in developing countries has risen from about 53 to 62 years.
- ◆ Twenty-five years ago, one out of six children died before the age of five. Today, 90% of children will survive beyond their fifth birthday.
- ◆ The nutritional status of infants and children has improved through the strong encouragement of breastfeeding and the availability of vitamin A supplements.
- ◆ Eighty percent of children in the developing world are fully immunized before they are one year old—a higher rate than in the United States!
- ◆ Every day, 3000 children are saved from death due to diarrhea. Two key factors are their mothers' use of oral rehydration solutions and the growing availability of safe water and sanitation.
- ◆ In the countries where international family planning programs have been most active, the average number of children per family has decreased from six to slightly more than three.

How Does the United States Government Promote International Health and Development?

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent government agency based in Washington, with field missions abroad. USAID works to improve the lives of people in developing countries by supporting programs in health and family planning, promoting economic growth, advancing democracy, delivering humanitarian assistance, and protecting the environment.

USAID works with teachers, farmers, small-business people, nurses, and other members of local communities in Africa, Asia/Near East, Latin America/the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe, including the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union. Foreign aid is a sound investment in creating the markets of the future, preventing crises, and helping advance democracy and prosperity.

What Other Organizations Support International Development?

The US is not alone in its concern for people in developing countries. Virtually every developed country has a foreign aid program. The United Nations provides technical assistance and supports community-based services through the UN Fund for Population Activities, the UN Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The World Bank and regional development banks provide loans, technical assistance, and policy guidance. These programs often work through local organizations and community groups.



How Does the US Contribution Compare with Other Industrialized Countries?

Economic and humanitarian assistance abroad constitutes less than one-half of one percent of our federal budget. In 1996, the US dropped to fourth place among donor nations in the amount of money it spends on foreign aid. Japan, Germany and France all contribute more than the US.

Differences in contributions to foreign aid are even more striking when considered in relation to gross national product. For example, Denmark contributes approximately 1% of its GNP on foreign aid compared to the US which spends only 0.1%, putting it last place among major industrialized countries.



As a percentage

of gross national product, the United States provides the least foreign assistance of any major industrialized nation.



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