The U.S. invests in foreign aid for both humanitarian and pragmatic reasons. From a moral standpoint, the U.S. supports evidence-based strategies to relieve human suffering. By assisting countries that are less developed than the U.S., our nation also helps foster stable societies with which we are able to partner on economic, security, and diplomatic issues. Benefits from foreign aid flow both ways—to the developing countries that receive assistance, as well as to the U.S.

Foreign aid accounts for about one percent of the federal budget

Cuts in foreign aid spending would not make a meaningful contribution to deficit reduction. Foreign aid accounts for only about one percent of U.S. government spending, with poverty-focused development and humanitarian spending representing roughly 0.5 percent of federal outlays. The share of the federal budget allocated to foreign assistance has substantially declined over time, falling by almost 80 percent since 1965.

Foreign aid reduces poverty and promotes economic growth and international development

Studies correlate foreign assistance with economic growth in recipient countries, indicating that U.S. foreign aid helps build the vital infrastructure that countries need to thrive. Although different types of foreign aid programs (e.g., health) have in some cases prompted countries to focus national resources on other areas (e.g., non-health programs), evidence indicates that the overall effect of foreign assistance is to galvanize increased domestic contributions for health, education, and other programs to improve the well-being of populations.

U.S. foreign aid results in real benefits for people in the world’s poorest countries. Annually, U.S. assistance prevents 230,000 infants from becoming infected with HIV, purchases malaria treatments for nearly 39 million people and more than 23 million insecticide-treated bed nets to prevent malaria, and reaches 65 million hungry and malnourished people with essential food and nutrition support. On average, the U.S. responds to 70 humanitarian disasters a year, and since 1975 has settled more than three million refugees.

Foreign aid promotes America’s security

Through foreign aid, the U.S. is able to address societal challenges before they turn into security crises. As former Defense Secretary Robert Gates and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen advised, “Political instability and threats to the United States develop in nations where individuals have few economic opportunities.” President Reagan characterized foreign aid as “an essential complement to our defense effort” and a direct security benefit to the U.S. As the largest financial contributor to international peacekeeping missions, the U.S. helps keep the
The effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. foreign aid is increasing

In the past, critics have questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of some foreign aid programs.17 In response to these concerns and to ensure the effectiveness of its foreign assistance, U.S. programs are increasingly taking a results-based approach, setting clear, time-bound targets and rigorously monitoring program performance to ensure that targets are met. The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), for example, has established concrete targets for the scale-up of HIV prevention and treatment programs and recently unveiled a strategic “Blueprint” to accelerate progress toward an “AIDS-Free Generation.”7

According to a recent review of major international health and development donors, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has the best evaluation policy of any donor agency in the world, enabling the U.S. to clearly demonstrate the impact of its development programs."18

Foreign aid enjoys broad bipartisan support

Support for foreign aid extends across partisan boundaries, uniting Americans of diverse viewpoints and creeds. As John McCullough, director of Church World Service, advised, “Responding to hunger and poverty is not a partisan issue ... it is a moral issue that people of faith, across the political spectrum, agree upon.”16 Every U.S. President since Dwight Eisenhower, both Democrat and Republican, has strongly supported robust foreign aid, with President George W. Bush launching the largest health assistance program in history devoted to a single disease, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).1

Cuts in foreign aid would undermine U.S. leadership on international development

Although cuts to foreign aid spending would make no appreciable contribution to deficit reduction due to the relatively small expenditures involved, they would most certainly inflict enormous damage on the world’s poorest and most vulnerable countries.
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