CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM
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US-AFRICA RELATIONS in UNCERTAIN TIMES

August 11-18, 2025 | Livingstone, Zambia

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AGENDA[1]

MONDAY, August 11:

U.S. participants depart the U.S. throughout the day.

TUESDAY, August 12:

U.S. participants arrive in Livingstone, Zambia throughout the day.

6 – 7 PM: Pre-Dinner Remarks:
U.S. Diplomacy in Africa: A Scene-Setter and Welcoming Remarks

As changes in U.S. foreign policy unfold, American diplomats across the African continent are confronting new challenges as well as seeking emerging opportunities to advance U.S. interests. The delegation will be welcomed by the current American Ambassador to Zambia and hear his thoughts about the top diplomatic priorities throughout the region.

Speaker:
Ambassador Michael Gonzales, *U.S. Ambassador to Zambia*

7 – 9 PM: Working Dinner
Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily. Discussions will focus on American diplomacy in Africa and other topics that are part of the conference agenda.

WEDNESDAY, August 13:

7 – 8 AM: Breakfast available to all participants

[1] *Congressional Program Executive Director Charlie Dent moderates the discussion sessions, recognizes members of Congress who have questions, and is assisted by a timekeeper to ensure the conversation is quick paced and every member of Congress has an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the issues.*

8:15 – 8:30 AM: Introduction and Framework of the Conference

This conference is organized into roundtable conversations, working lunches, and pre-dinner remarks. This segment will highlight how the conference will be conducted, how those with questions will be recognized, and how responses will be timed to allow for as much engagement as possible.

Speaker:

Charlie Dent, *Vice President, Aspen Institute;*
Executive Director, Congressional Program

8:30 – 10 AM: Roundtable Discussion:

America's National Security Posture in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges

While the African continent is rarely perceived as central to U.S. national security and economic interests, currently and in the years to come, the people and countries in Africa will play a critical role in confronting global threats and challenges that are equally vital to America's well-being. For the second year in a row, the Sahel region of Africa has been characterized as the "epicenter" of global terrorism. Terrorist groups, such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Al-Shabaab, take advantage of fragile pockets across the continent, posing direct threats to American interests. Africa retains 30 percent of the world's supply of critical minerals that are essential for U.S. national, economic, and environmental security. Africa also finds itself increasingly entangled in U.S. competition and confrontation with China and Russia. Senior American military leaders express concern over the uptick in China's efforts to replicate American defense training and military education exchanges across the continent. At the same time, these leaders are sending a message to their African counterparts that American efforts are focused on building the capacity of militaries in the region to manage their own security and to conduct independent operations.

A representative from the U.S. Africa Command and a retired senior military officer will survey U.S. national security interests on the continent, the nexus of security with American development and diplomatic efforts, as well as discuss policy opportunities to tackle pressing security challenges.

Speakers:

Vice Admiral Matt Kohler (USN, Ret.), currently a member of the Cohen Group

Ambassador Mark Green, *President Emeritus of the Wilson Center, former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania*

10 – 10:15 AM: Break

10:15 – 11:45 AM: Roundtable Discussion:
U.S.-Chinese Competition on the Continent

For the past 25 years, China has been significantly increasing its presence and influence on the African continent, elevating its investment, educational and cultural programs, diplomatic posture, military cooperation, and political influence. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013 as a massive global infrastructure program, further strengthened its commercial engagement with Africa. For 16 consecutive years, China has been the continent's leading bilateral trading partner, outpacing the United States by roughly four-fold. China surpassed the U.S. in terms of foreign direct investment in 2013 and remains the current leader. While trade and FDI have dominated Chinese engagement in Africa, the United States has provided significantly more development and humanitarian assistance to the continent. As the U.S. downsizes its foreign aid footprint across the region, it is an open question whether China will see this as an opportunity to expand its own health, agriculture and other development programs in order to gain greater influence in areas it has previously maintained a far smaller role compared with the United States. Likewise, with plans by the U.S. to expand trade, investment and commercial engagement in Africa, questions remain if it will be enough to offset the large advantage China has held for many years.

Speakers:
Dr. Cobus van Staden, *Managing Editor at the China Global South Project in South Africa*

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM: Working Lunch
Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on the future of foreign assistance and threats to American national security across the African continent.

1:30 – 2 PM: Drive to educational site visits

2 – 3:30 PM: Educational Site Visits
Community Health Programs Focused on HIV, Malaria and Malnutrition

The delegation will be divided into small groups in order to permit personal conversations with community health care workers and household members to learn about the objectives of each program and hear how these interventions have impacted their lives. Each group will visit two or three of the sites and see the others on August 15.

Members will visit a program that aims to mitigate the impact of HIV and improve the health of adolescents and vulnerable children using a family-centered approach. The project is supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a program launched by President George W. Bush in 2003 and is credited with saving 25 million lives, mostly in Africa. Another site will showcase the work of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria where young members of the community serve as mentors to their peers in confronting sensitive health and social challenges. At another Global Fund site, participants will learn how a small village prevents malaria through spraying, bed nets and medications. Founded in 2002 with the U.S. having been the largest donor, the Global Fund has reduced the combined death rates of AIDS, TB and malaria by 61%. Members will also visit a lab that is part of Zambia's National Multi-Pathogen Diagnostic Program where the state-of the-art facility is able to quickly diagnose infectious disease tests. Finally, groups will observe the work of a Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) clinic where infants who are suffering from insufficient energy, fat, protein and/or other nutrients are treated with the use of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), a highly fortified energy-dense paste. Each of the programs visited during the afternoon have received in the past U.S. government financial support.

3:30 – 4 PM: Drive Time Return to Hotel from Site Visit

6 – 7 PM: Pre-Dinner Remarks:
The Impact of Vaccinating Africa's Children

With the support of the United States and other international aid donors, since 2000 Gavi has reached 469 million children in Africa with routine immunizations and averted an estimated 12 million future deaths across the continent. Gavi is an important contributor to global health security efforts with a portfolio of 21 infectious disease vaccines, including Ebola, malaria and mpox. Dr. Nishtar will discuss the state of child immunizations in Africa and challenges Gavi faces as financial support for the Alliance faces growing headwinds. At a June 25, 2025 pledging conference, the United States announced that it would no longer contribute to Gavi.

Speaker:
Dr. Sania Nishtar, *CEO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance*

7 – 9 PM: Working Dinner with Local Aid Implementing Offices
Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas with representatives from non-governmental organizations, including CARE, Project Concern Zambia, Save the Children, CGIAR, and Wildlife Crime Prevention Zambia. Scholars and lawmakers are

rotated daily. Discussions will focus on challenges faced by these organizations during a significant transition in U.S. foreign assistance policy and resources.

THURSDAY, August 14:

6:30 – 7 AM: Optional Briefing about Presidential Visit

7 – 8 AM: Breakfast

8 – 9:15 AM: Roundtable Discussion:
Chartering a New Course for the Future of U.S. Foreign Assistance: Implications for Africa

Since January 2025, the Trump Administration has both implemented and proposed substantial changes in America's foreign aid policies and resource allocations. In recent months, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been dismantled with thousands of staff losing their jobs. Over 80 percent of the Agency's programs have been terminated while what remains is being folded into the State Department. The President's FY2026 budget request cuts to the State Department and other international affairs agencies by 49 percent compared with current levels and seeks the additional rescission of $21.6 billion in previously appropriated funds. Secretary of State Rubio justifies this reorientation of foreign aid, stating that going forward, the Department will only fund programs that make America "stronger, safer, and more prosperous" and eliminate divisive and ineffective foreign assistance activities.

For Africa, as U.S. foreign assistance downsizes, the State Department has outlined another approach for engagement with the continent based on commercial diplomacy with greater emphasis placed on supporting market reforms in coordination with African governments, strengthening the region's private sector, investing in infrastructure projects in priority countries and expanding opportunities for American businesses. The goal, according to senior State Department officials, is "to increase U.S. exports and investment in Africa, eliminate trade deficits and drive mutual prosperity".

Panelists will discuss the implications of this reorientation of U.S. engagement with Africa and what might be the vision of foreign assistance moving forward.

Speakers:
Ambassador Mark Green, *President Emeritus of the Wilson Center, former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania and former Member of Congress*

Ambassador Mark Dybul, *Professor at the Medical Center of Georgetown University, former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and former U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator leading PEPFAR*

9:15 – 9:30 AM: Break

9:30 – 10:45 AM: Roundtable Discussion:
Global Health Challenges Across Africa

The importance of a healthy population has long been recognized as a critical element of society's economic and social development. The United States has a long record of commitment to supporting Africa's severe health challenges, including the creation of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the President's Malaria Initiative (both first implemented by President George W. Bush), and as the largest donor to Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The U.S. has also played a large role in strengthening healthcare systems throughout Africa, building healthcare infrastructure, and promoting access to essential medicines and vaccines.

As part of the Administration's reorientation of foreign assistance, however, proposals to reduce funding for health programs, including those in Africa, are before Congress. The President's budget request for FY2026 would cut appropriations for global health programs by 62%, including reductions for PEPFAR and the Global Fund, and the elimination of funds for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. The State Department says the request prioritizes life-saving assistance to those suffering from HIV/AIDS, TB, polio, and malaria, and for global health security programs that protect Americans at home. But health advocates express deep concerns over these proposed funding cuts, including those for AIDS prevention efforts, and worry that the enormous achievements of programs like PEPFAR could be erased in the coming years.

This panel will focus on the impact of already terminated U.S. health activities in Africa, the implications of steep resource reductions proposed for next year, how governments across the continent are responding and what longer-term policy and financial options are available to maintain and improve a healthy Africa.

Speakers:
Peter Sands, *Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fights AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria*
Dr. Quarraisha Karim, *Associate Scientific Director, CAPRISA; Professor in Clinical Epidemiology, Columbia University*

11 AM – 1:45 PM: Roundtable Session with President Hakainde Hichilema
Meeting with President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia to discuss the state of US Zambia relations and issues including trade, immigration, health and economic development.

1:45 AM – 2:30 PM: Working Lunch
Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on food security and health challenges facing Africa.

2:30 – 3:30 PM: Drive time to site visit

3:30 – 5:45 PM: Educational Site Visits
Improving Food Production and Livelihoods and Building Resilient Farming Systems

Members will travel about an hour north of Livingstone to visit a demonstration farm and learn about CGIAR's Southern Africa Rapid Delivery Hub. The program's goal is to provide smallholder farmers with information and innovations needed, using market-based approaches, to mitigate the impact of price spikes for fertilizer and other inputs due to global events such as the war in Ukraine. The delegation will meet with Veronica Mushupa, owner of the farm, and observe innovative techniques of irrigation, planting and mechanization for thrashing and shilling. Members will also be able to interact with other farmers who can speak to the impact on their livelihoods of farming practices they are learning through CGIAR support. Several agriculture scientists and researchers affiliated with CGIAR will also be able to answer questions the group may have.

5:45 – 6:45 PM: Drive time return to Hotel from site visit

7:30 – 9 PM: Working Dinner with Peace Corps Representatives
Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas with Natalie Gill-Mensah, Zambia Peace Corps Country Director, and Peace Corps volunteers. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily. Discussions will focus on the work of the Peace Corps in Zambia and the opportunities and challenges confronting Volunteers.

FRIDAY, August 15:

7 – 8 AM: Breakfast

8:30 – 10 AM: Roundtable Discussion:
Severe Weather Patterns: Implications for African Food Security

Africa's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, contributing 20% to the continent's GDP and employing more than 60% of the workforce. Nevertheless, recent estimates project that agricultural production will slip by 18% at a time when food supply demands will triple by 2050 due to rapid population increases. Food insecurity and malnutrition, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, already have grown significantly in recent years as a result of the global pandemic, a deepening climate crisis, land degradation, high energy and fertilizer costs, weakened supply chains, and protracted conflicts, including the war in Ukraine. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in 2024, over 295 million people faced acute hunger in Africa following crop failures and six consecutive dry seasons.

Africa, however, also maintains untapped potential that could help close the agricultural "yield gap" that is less than 25% of what crop production could be. Strengthening local industries would also result in economic diversification and expand millions of skilled jobs. The United States has been at the forefront of partnering with African governments and communities to combat food insecurity through programs supported by USAID's Feed the Future initiative and humanitarian food assistance, various Millennium Challenge Corporation compacts, and investments by the Development Finance Corporation. Funding for these activities, however, is now in question as the administration has proposed budgets for FY2026 that would essentially eliminate Feed the Future, cut humanitarian aid by over 60%, and reduce MCC funding by 75%. Panelists will discuss the impact of these cuts by the United States and other donors and offer thoughts on innovative ideas to address Africa's agricultural "yield-gap" through science and research and the expansion of private sector investments.

Speakers:
Dr. Appolinaire Djikeng, *Director General of the International Livestock Research Institute and a Senior Director of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)*
Christopher Barrett, *Professor of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University*

10 – 10:15 AM: Break

10:15 – 11:45 AM: Roundtable Discussion:
Policy Reflections and Actions Wrap-up for Members of Congress

This time is set aside for members of Congress to reflect on what they have learned during the conference and discuss their views on implications for U.S. policy. Drawing on the full range of conversations throughout the week, members will seek to identify for each other the most promising takeaways for the United States policy process, with a special focus on opportunities for bipartisan cooperation. This is a members-only conversation.

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM: Working Lunch
Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on reflections throughout the week's presentations and potential policy options for enhancing U.S.-Africa engagement.

1:30 – 2 PM: Drive time to educational site visit

2 – 3:30 PM: Educational Site Visits
Community Health Programs Focused on HIV, Malaria and Malnutrition

Similar to the August 13 afternoon schedule, the delegation will be divided into several small groups to permit personal conversations with community health care workers and household members to learn about the objectives of each program and hear how these interventions have impacted their lives. Today, group members will be able to visit the sites they did not see on August 13.

Members will visit a program that aims to mitigate the impact of HIV and improve the health of adolescents and vulnerable children using a family-centered approach. The project is supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a program launched by President George W. Bush in 2003 and is credited with saving 25 million lives, mostly in Africa. Another site will showcase the work of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria where young members of the community serve as mentors to their peers in confronting sensitive health and social challenges. At another Global Fund site, participants will learn how a small village prevents malaria through spraying, bed nets and medications. Founded in 2002 with the U.S. having been the largest donor, the Global Fund has reduced the combined death rates of AIDS, TB and malaria by 61%. Members will also visit a lab that is part of Zambia's National Multi-Pathogen Diagnostic Program where the state-of the-art facility is able to quickly diagnose infectious disease tests. Finally, groups will observe the work of a Severe Acute

Malnutrition (SAM) clinic where infants who are suffering from insufficient energy, fat, protein and/or other nutrients are treated with the use of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), a highly fortified energy-dense paste. Each of the programs visited during the afternoon have received in the past U.S. government financial support.

3:30 – 4 PM: Drive time back to Hotel from site visit

6 – 7 PM: Pre-Dinner Fireside Chat:
Access to Critical Minerals – Supporting U.S. Interests and Promoting Economic Growth on the Continent

Africa is home to roughly 30% of the world's reserves of critical minerals essential for the global energy transition and technological advancements. Minerals, such as graphite, cobalt, lithium and rare earth elements, are crucial for production of electric vehicles, renewable energy infrastructure, and digital devices. With this degree of mineral wealth, Africa is positioned to leverage these resources that will drive economic development, create jobs, and foster sustainable growth. At the same time, it also raises concerns over how mineral extraction is managed through sustainable and transparent practices that guard against the potential for exploitation.

Another aspect of Africa's mineral wealth is the competition between the United States and China for access to these critical resources. China maintains the dominant position following many years of investment and mining across the continent. The U.S. and Europe, however, are ramping up their own partnerships and activities to counter Chinese influence. The Lobito Corridor, an initiative to link the port in Lobito, Angola, with the mineral-rich areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia through improved transportation infrastructure, is an example of more recent efforts on the part of the United States and the European Union to gain greater access to critical minerals. Kobold Metals, an American company, is a leading player in the Lobito Corridor using its AI-driven mineral exploration technology to develop copper mines in northern Zambia.

Speakers:
Mfikeyi Makayi, *CEO KoBold Metals Africa*

7 – 9 PM: Working Dinner
Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated

daily. Discussions will focus on U.S.-Africa policy issues raised over the course of the week's presentations.

SATURDAY, August 16:

6 AM: Pick up to- go breakfast and board busses for Botswana

6 – 8 AM: Drive to Chobe National Park, Botswana

8 AM – 4 PM: Educational Site Visit:
Focus on Wildlife Conservation in Africa

Conserving and protecting wildlife in Africa yields multiple benefits in terms of preserving biodiversity, supporting local economies through tourism, and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Community-based conservation efforts, involving local populations in wildlife management, have a strong record in overcoming tensions between animals and humans, safeguarding species, and improving livelihoods of local households.

The delegation will travel to Chobe National Park in Botswana and will be hosted by the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF). ICCF is a non-profit global organization helping partner countries develop protected-area strategies and enhance wildlife management and conservation. Members of Congress will learn about ICCF activities in Botswana and elsewhere in southern Africa to build capacity within governments and communities for conservation and sustainable development, promote collaboration across borders in the management of shared conservation areas, combat illegal wildlife trade and strengthen wildlife security, and promote legal frameworks to address wildlife and zoonotic diseases that will prevent future pandemics.

12 – 1 PM: Working Lunch

4 – 5:30 PM: Drive from Chobe National Park to Livingstone, Zambia

7 – 9 PM: Working Dinner
Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily. Discussions will focus on reflections of the day in Chobe National Park and the importance of wildlife conservation.

SUNDAY, August 17:

Participants depart for the U.S. throughout the day.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND THEIR SPOUSES:

Rep. Robert Aderholt

Rep. Jim Baird and Danise Baird

Rep. Ami Bera and Janine Bera

Rep. Julia Brownley

Rep. Salud Carbajal

Rep. Ed Case and Audrey Case

Sen. John Curtis and Sue Curtis

Rep. John Garamendi and Patricia Garamendi

Rep. Morgan Griffith and Hilary Griffith

Rep. Jim Himes and Mary Himes

Rep. Steve Horsford

Rep. Jonathan Jackson

Rep. Ted Lieu and Betty Lieu

Rep. Tracey Mann and Audrey Mann

Sen. Jeff Merkley and Mary Sorteberg

Rep. Greg Murphy and Wendy Murphy

Rep. Dan Newhouse and Joan Galvin

Rep. Randy Weber and Brenda Weber

SCHOLARS AND EXPERTS:

Chris Barrett	*Stephen B. & Janice G. Ashley Professor of Applied Economics, International Professor of Agriculture, and Professor of Public Policy, Cornell University*
Appolinaire Djikeng	*Director General of the International Livestock Research Institute and a Senior Director of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)*
Amb. Mark Dybul	*Professor at the Medical Center of Georgetown University, former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and former U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator leading PEPFAR*
Amb. Michael Gonzales	*U.S. Ambassador to Zambia*
Amb. Mark Green	*President Emeritus of the Wilson Center, former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania and former Member of Congress*
Quarraisha Karim	*Associate Scientific Director, CAPRISA; Professor in Clinical Epidemiology, Columbia University*
Vice Admiral Matt Kohler (USN, Ret.)	*Senior Counselor, The Cohen Group*
Mfikeyi Makayi	*CEO, KoBold Metals Africa*
Connie Mudenda	*Counselor Mentor, Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ)*
Sania Nishtar	*CEO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance*
Peter Sands	*Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria*
Cobus Van Staden	*Managing Editor at The China-Global South Project in South Africa*

CONFERENCE RAPPORTEURS:

Matt Rojansky	*Rapporteur and Counselor to the Aspen Institute Congressional Program*
Larry Nowels	*Co-Chair, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network*

FOUNDATION REPRESENTATIVES:

David Barron	*Chairman, The ICCF Group*
Paloma Dallas	*Senior Program Officer for Democracy around the Globe, Charles F. Kettering Foundation*
Vilas Dhar	*President and Trustee, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation*
Mindy LaBreck	*Vice President for People & Culture, Charles F. Kettering Foundation*
Susan Lylis	*Executive Vice President, The ICCF Group*
William Moore	*President and CEO, Eleanor Crook Foundation*
Amit Paley	*Special Advisor and Head of Global Advocacy, Eleanor Crook Foundation*
Naveen Rao	*Senior Vice President - Health Initiative, The Rockefeller Foundation*
Ritu Sharma	*Vice President, Policy Advocacy, CARE*

ASPEN INSTITUTE CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM:

Charlie Dent and **Pamela Dent**	*Executive Director, Congressional Program and Vice President, Aspen Institute*
Tyler Denton	*Deputy Director*
Jennifer Harthan	*Senior Manager of Congressional Engagement*
Galen Voorhees	*Senior Conference Manager*

RAPPORTEURS' SUMMARY

Matthew Rojansky
Rapporteur and Counselor to the Aspen Institute Congressional Program; President and CEO, The U.S.-Russia Foundation

Larry Nowels
Co-Chair, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network

From August 11 to 18, 2025, the Aspen Congressional Program conference brought Members of Congress together with African leaders, U.S. diplomats, development experts, business leaders, and scholars to assess the context and future of U.S.-Africa relations in an era of geopolitical competition and historic change. Convened in Livingstone, Zambia, at the heart of southern Africa's trade, agricultural, and environmental crossroads, the conference examined how the United States can advance its national interests by engaging with African nations to build prosperity, security, and resilience.

The conference took place against the backdrop of substantial U.S. foreign assistance, trade, visa, and other policies over the previous six months that significantly impact Africa. On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order that froze all foreign aid while a 90-day review of American assistance programs took place. Shortly thereafter, the Administration issued a stop-work order on all foreign aid awards (with some waivers), and changes at USAID began, including the termination of some staff and the placement of many others on administrative leave. The Millennium Challenge Corporation paused work on all operational compacts, including one in Zambia. By March 10, the Administration announced that 83% of USAID contracts were cancelled. Later that month, the White House notified Congress of plans to move some USAID functions into the Department of State and end the Agency's remaining activities. In July, Congress approved a request to rescind nearly $8 billion in previously appropriated foreign assistance, including sizable amounts for Africa. The Administration further proposed a 49% reduction in International Affairs appropriations for fiscal year 2026, with substantial cuts to foreign aid programs in Africa.

Zambia was a fitting host for this conversation. Peaceful and politically stable, the country is rich in copper, cobalt, manganese, and other critical minerals essential to the global energy transition. Its fertile land positions it to be a regional agricultural hub, while its youthful population offers a dynamic labor force. Yet Zambia also reflects the challenges facing much of the continent: high poverty rates, uneven economic growth, food insecurity, and pressure from competing global powers. As China, Russia, Gulf states, and other actors expand their influence through trade, infrastructure, and resource agreements, Zambia and its neighbors are navigating how to safeguard sovereignty while securing the investment and partnerships they need.

The setting itself carries a layered history of outside powers and contested visions for Africa's future. In the mid-19th century, missionary-explorer David Livingstone, at the same time a missionary and a harbinger of the European colonial "Scramble for Africa," had traveled and eventually died in what is now Zambia, leaving a legacy of humanitarian zeal, cultural disruption, and geopolitical consequence. A few decades later, British imperialist Cecil Rhodes envisioned a "Cape to Cairo" railway stitching together colonial possessions; the Victoria Falls Bridge, completed in 1905 and still the only rail and road link between Zambia and Zimbabwe at this site, is one of its enduring legacies. These reminders of how foreign ambitions once shaped the region's destiny framed questions about how today's great powers, including the United States, will choose to engage in Africa's next chapter.

Site visits likewise brought these themes into the present. Over the course of three afternoons, Members traveled to five locations near Livingstone to witness programs related to topics discussed at the morning roundtables. At two sites, Members visited homes where the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis (TB), and Malaria support adolescents born HIV-positive. Services provided ensure that children living with HIV are healthy, safe, schooled, and stable. At one of the homes, Members met with the Chikondi Savings Group, a collection of 25 vulnerable women who meet weekly to save their money in a safe space, access small loans to support small businesses, and discuss social issues that are relevant to their livelihood. This program supports 82 similar saving groups in Livingstone with a combined sum of over $39,000 in savings.

At another site, the delegation saw how a Global Fund project addressed the fight against malaria and the tools utilized to test individuals and protect families from the disease. Community members demonstrated methods to eliminate mosquito breeding areas, indoor spraying applications, and the distribution of bed nets. Over the past 20 years, similar Global Fund programs have resulted in 28% fewer malaria deaths in countries where the organization operates.

Members also visited the Livingstone University Teaching Hospital and learned about Zambia's National Multi-Pathogen Diagnostic Program that enhances the country's ability to detect and respond to infectious diseases. With significant support from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the state-of-the-art laboratory not only protects the health of Zambians but is an important element in the broader global health security agenda, protecting populations worldwide. Adjacent to the laboratory, the delegation also toured the Hospital's Pediatric Center of Excellence, which focuses on ensuring that HIV-positive mothers give birth to HIV-negative children and that HIV-positive adolescents remain healthy. Members also saw the Center's malnutrition ward and learned about how the interventions for severely acute malnourished children have dramatically reduced deaths in the past two years.

At a demonstration farm sponsored by the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research outside of Livingstone, the delegation learned how investments in technology and training can strengthen local food production, build climate-resilient farming systems, and create jobs. Members were able to interact with farmers and seed dealers, hearing how these investments had impacted their families and resulted in increased household income.

Finally, the delegation traveled to Botswana and learn about the importance of wildlife conservation and how mitigating conflict between humans and animals can generate sustainable livelihoods via tourism and environmental stewardship. Members heard from government officials and the leadership of the International Conservation Caucus Foundation about the connection between support of intelligent management of natural resources and benefits to U.S. national and economic security.

These experiences grounded the week's discussions in real-world results while framing urgent policy questions: How should the U.S. respond to the dismantling of development programs such as USAID missions in Africa? What strategies will maintain U.S. leadership in health, food security, and governance while leveraging private investment to drive economic growth? How can the U.S. compete with China and others for influence without asking African nations to choose sides? And what role should Congress play in shaping a coherent, sustained Africa policy that advances American values and interests while respecting African priorities?

U.S. Relations with Africa and Zambia

Opening the conference, a senior U.S. diplomat framed Africa's growing significance to the United States in stark terms: by 2050, one in four people on the planet will live on the continent. The challenge for U.S. policymakers is to help shape whether Africa emerges as a valued partner, one that is innovative, productive, and able to contribute to solving global challenges, or as a source of persistent instability, hunger, and insecurity that fuels migration pressures toward Europe and the United States. Congress, the diplomat stressed, plays a critical role in determining that trajectory.

Over the past six decades, U.S. engagement has delivered major benefits, from the Peace Corps in Ethiopia to anti-hunger programs in Southern Africa. In Zambia, U.S. health assistance—particularly through PEPFAR—has helped double the life expectancy since 1998, reduced malaria deaths by three-quarters since 2016, and touched virtually every community. Yet, the diplomat argued, these achievements coexist with underperformance. U.S. assistance often assumes African leaders' interests align with those of their citizens; in reality, competitors like China work directly to appeal to leaders' political and personal financial interests, securing resource access and debt leverage. U.S. policy, by contrast, attempts to appeal to leaders' "better angels" and offers benefits without always insisting on reciprocal advantage for the American people and U.S. companies.

Zambia itself offers a vivid example of both promise and frustration. Rich in copper, cobalt, manganese, lithium, graphite, and arable land, and with 40% of Southern Africa's fresh water, it is peaceful, youthful, and strategically located. It could serve as the hub of a 250-million-person subregional market. Yet per capita growth has barely risen since independence, poverty and malnutrition have deepened, productivity has fallen, and the country ranks among the world's most inequitable economies. U.S. trade with Zambia remains below $300 million annually, with little American investment, while Zambia votes with China roughly 70% of the time in the UN.

The diplomat urged a recalibration of U.S. policy to focus on clearly defined outcomes that serve both U.S. and African interests. Current policy, he noted, is largely assistance-focused, inconsistent across administrations, and often sends mixed signals. An "America First" approach that emphasizes tangible commercial engagement, open competition for U.S. firms, and streamlined interagency coordination between State, Treasury, Commerce, and other Departments and Agencies, could help align rhetoric with reality. This would involve pairing incentives with conditionality, ensuring U.S. resources advance shared priorities in governance, market access, and political openness. He further noted several examples where the U.S. Embassy in Zambia had not been consulted by Washington on matters impacting American-Zambian relations.

In discussion, Members explored security assistance, noting recent U.S. Foreign Military Financing for Zambia tied to its peacekeeping role and move away from Russian equipment. Questions about Chinese-backed infrastructure projects underscored the competitive geopolitical environment. The recent closure of USAID programs was cited as both a shock to local systems where people suffered and a wake-up call for Zambian policymakers, prompting some reforms. Participants debated whether the withdrawal of U.S. development engagement would have lasting negative effects, with the diplomat emphasizing the need to cultivate a new generation of principled African leaders and to insist on a level playing field in politics and business alike. Discussion set the stage for the conference's central tensions: how to balance values and interests, assistance and trade, and strategic competition and partnership in the next phase of U.S.-Africa relations.

Charting a New Course for the Future of U.S. Foreign Assistance: Implications for Africa
A scholar and former senior U.S. official opened this session with a personal reflection from his time as a volunteer teacher in Kenya during the 1980s. Every student knew why they were there, because simply put, education was their family's investment in the future. When parents could not pay school fees, children were expelled, yet many risked sneaking back into class. That experience, the scholar said, taught him that development is fundamentally about unlocking human potential, not simply delivering aid. Years later, as a member of Congress himself, he had helped design landmark initiatives like PEPFAR and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), aimed at addressing the "root causes of despair" and preventing instability. At that time, the U.S. faced few competitors in Africa. Now, China has more diplomatic posts and invests far more overall, Russia remains a persistent security player, and Gulf states have become influential financiers.

The scholar noted that the displacement crisis has grown to unprecedented levels: roughly 500,000 children are born into refugee status annually, and millions of young people are growing up without education, health care, or civic engagement. This is a ticking time bomb for governance, security, and stability. Another scholar, a retired senior military intelligence officer with Africa-wide experience, underscored how these humanitarian challenges are now colliding with climate volatility, food insecurity, and violent extremism. In many areas, shortened growing seasons are forcing farmers and herders into direct conflict over shrinking arable land. Even when effective treatments are available—such as the Ebola vaccine—lack of trust in government and institutions prevents people from seeking care. They emphasized that the U.S. can play a decisive role in professionalizing African security forces, supporting demobilization and reintegration of armed groups, and offering alternative livelihoods to former combatants. Over 90% of U.S. engagement in the region, they stressed, falls into the "soft power" category of advisory support, training, and expertise, yet it delivers outsized returns when sustained over the long term.

In the discussion, members cautioned against defining U.S. policy toward Africa solely in terms of extracting critical minerals or outcompeting China. Scholars agreed, stressing that Africa's linguistic, cultural, and political diversity demands tailored strategies, and that the continent's rapidly growing youth population should be viewed as a source of opportunity. Several participants described the situation in Sudan as the largest humanitarian catastrophe in recorded history, warning that sharp U.S. food assistance cuts are already driving scarcity, violence, and instability in refugee camps, which will have negative knock-on effects in Europe and North America. One scholar made the point that it is far more efficient to support a conflict-displaced individual within Africa at $1-2 a day than to address a migrant crisis when it has already arrived on U.S. or European shores.

Members also probed how to balance humanitarian needs with long-term development goals, and scholars cited the difference between humanitarian assistance, which is delivered without regard to host government politics, and development assistance, which comes with greater conditionality and should be aimed at building toward self-reliance. They warned that without sustained, visible commitment, U.S. influence will erode and others will fill the vacuum. Excessive congressional earmarks and directives, they said, can limit U.S. diplomats' and development professionals' flexibility and bargaining power; diplomats on the ground need the authority to set and enforce tough conditions on local partners.

Addressing competition with China, scholars argued the U.S. cannot and should not try to match China's Belt and Road Initiative dollar for dollar. Instead, the U.S. should focus on a "journey to self-reliance" model, which seeks to move partners from aid recipients to equal partners and, ultimately, to fellow donors. They noted that African leaders often express a deep personal affinity for the United States, saying "we want to be who you are," something not heard about China. Whenever the Chinese and American models are compared side-by-side, they asserted, the U.S. model will always win. This enduring soft power advantage is undermined, however, when the U.S. pulls back from visible, sustained engagement.

Several members raised alarm over the recent dismantling of much of the U.S. development architecture, describing it as the largest foreign policy shift in generations. Scholars warned that the most serious loss is human capital, including some 5,300 locally employed USAID Foreign Service Nationals worldwide. These people are trusted partners who not only delivered programs but often became future leaders in their own countries, an incomparable source of U.S. leverage on the ground. Many are now being hired by China. To restore this advantage, they supported folding USAID into the State Department, where a dedicated "development officer" track could be created alongside political and economic officers, restoring pensions and tenure to rehire high-quality experts, and offering guarantees against future reductions-in-force to win back trust. They also urged tighter alignment across the U.S. foreign policy apparatus, noting that the stove-piping of USAID, MCC, the Development Finance Corporation, Treasury's control of U.S. positions in international financial institutions, and State Department diplomacy creates confusion and weakens U.S. bargaining power. Better tracking of U.S. contributions to multilateral agencies like the World Food Program could allow U.S. diplomats to use them more strategically as leverage.

Participants closed on the theme that humanitarian assistance is indispensable for near-term stability, but to be properly rebuilt, U.S. development assistance should focus on measurable, outcome-driven progress. Concentrating resources on high-potential opportunities, insisting on clear metrics, and signaling sustained commitment can help ensure U.S. investments in Africa produce lasting benefits for both Africans and Americans. As one scholar concluded, "It is about showing that we will be here for the long haul, and then proving it through action."

U.S.-China Competition in Africa

A scholar from a leading African-based research institute opened the session by describing the scale and persistence of Chinese engagement in Africa, noting that Beijing's development finance for infrastructure has remained substantial, and in many cases grown, since the COVID-19 pandemic. He observed that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had increased 395% in the past six months, with the size of projects increasing and new models of financing appearing. While much of the world's attention has focused on China's BRI, the scholar pointed out that the trend is not simply about grand headline projects. Increasingly, Chinese companies are targeting African and regional markets rather than those in the Global North, in part because political tension, sanctions, and other trade barriers have made those northern markets more difficult to penetrate.

For its part, Beijing has announced zero-tariff treatment for nearly all African countries' exports to China. However, African leaders often note that the benefits are constrained by persistent non-tariff barriers, such as stringent phytosanitary requirements, which can block agricultural exports. The scholar emphasized that this combination of headline liberalization and quiet regulatory restriction reflects China's pragmatism in protecting its own markets while presenting itself as a champion of the Global South. In the discussion, members pressed on China's business practices and the role of corruption. The scholar responded that while outright cash bribes are not always the norm, Chinese actors often engage in relationship-building activities that operate in ethical "gray zones." These may include preferential contracting, financing packages that blend commercial and political incentives, or orchestrating high-profile visits and official junkets. Such methods build loyalty and influence over time, often in ways that are difficult to counter without equivalent relationship investment.

A central question from members was how quickly the U.S. might recover influence in Africa following its recent retrenchment, given China's growing footprint. The scholar stressed that the answer depends largely on whether Washington articulates a positive agenda for Africa that extends beyond simply competing with China. On a continent with a median age under 20, China's narrative, rooted in techno-optimism, infrastructure delivery, and future-oriented partnership, has strong appeal. By contrast, the scholar warned, U.S. and European messaging can sometimes feel preoccupied with the negatives of political risk and security challenges.

Several participants explored the breadth of China's engagement across trade, infrastructure projects, educational exchanges, training for government administrators, and soft power initiatives. Tens of thousands of African students are now studying in China (substantially more than are in the United States), and Beijing has expanded programs that bring African officials for study tours and technical training. This complements China's long-standing focus on physical infrastructure with an investment in human capital and elite relationship networks. The scholar noted that many African states do not want to be forced into choosing sides in the U.S.-China rivalry, considering themselves "too small" to survive such buffeting. China has an additional advantage: it may be the world's second-largest economy, but it is also a country with its own relatively recent experience of underdevelopment and famine, which can help forge a tighter bond between China and African states as rising representatives of the "Global South."

When asked how China views the new U.S. administration's policies relative to those before, the scholar said that many Chinese stakeholders perceive a consistent long-term U.S. strategy of containment, regardless of changes in style or rhetoric. Some see the U.S. drawdown in development and humanitarian assistance as a major opening for China to expand its soft power. The scholar stressed that the BRI should be understood as a business-to-business "organizing metaphor" rather than a single centrally managed program. It allows disparate Chinese actors, such as state-owned enterprises, private firms, and provincial governments, to align their international activities under one narrative banner, without necessarily being constrained by formal policies. Early BRI projects were dominated by large debt-financed infrastructure deals. Today, many Chinese projects take the form of equity investments in commercially viable ventures such as toll roads, where returns can begin flowing immediately, and where Chinese companies maintain a longer-term stake to protect their investment.

Members raised concerns about China's control of key African shipping ports, with implications for critical minerals supply chains. One pointed out that if U.S. companies source minerals from Africa for refining, most of that refining capacity is currently in China, an obvious strategic vulnerability. On the flip side, the scholar explained that African experts are skeptical about persistent rumors of Chinese plans for military bases on Africa's Atlantic coast, given the logistical challenges and Beijing's stronger strategic focus on the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. He added that African governments feel excluded from global governance decision-making and see forums such as BRICS as among the few venues where they have a stronger voice.

A Zambian business leader offered a personal example of shifting influence: while their own education path led through British, Canadian, and American institutions, many of today's Zambian elite send their children to Chinese international schools. Chinese consumer culture is also visible in the form of large-scale restaurants, ubiquitous affordable EVs and scooters, and practical transport solutions, in contrast to the U.S. focus on high-cost status vehicles like Tesla. The business leader talked about Caterpillar's loss of market share in Zambia due to their inability to match Chinese competitors' willingness to make side deals directly with governments.

A scholar closed by reminding participants that diplomacy is built on long-term relationships. China's decades of steady engagement with Zambia have produced public endorsements of Beijing's positions on issues from Taiwan to Xinjiang. Invoking an African proverb ("When elephants fight, the grass suffers"), they cautioned against forcing African nations into binary choices. Instead, the U.S. should aim to ensure that African partners refrain from actions that directly undermine U.S. interests, while promoting transparency in their engagements with China.

The Impact of Vaccinating Africa's Children

In this session, a scholar described the profound impact of immunization on public health, beginning with a personal memory of childhood in which the local graveyard was filled with the graves of children, showing that life before widespread vaccination was often cut very short. Immunization, the scholar emphasized, is one of the most significant public health interventions in history, credited with saving an estimated 154 million children's lives worldwide and reducing child mortality by 40% globally, and by 50% in Africa. Vaccination, the scholar said, is the "tugboat" that pulls along the rest of the public health system, enabling gains in nutrition, maternal health, and disease control.

The scholar explained how GAVI (the Global Vaccine Alliance) was created 25 years ago as a public-private partnership to address the problem that many life-saving vaccines developed by private companies in the developed world were priced far beyond the reach of lower-income countries. GAVI's model pools demand across nations to drive down costs, enabling vaccines to reach even the most remote communities. Over the past quarter-century, the Alliance has helped vaccinate more than 1.1 billion children and is estimated to have saved over 25 million lives. It also maintains global vaccine stockpiles, such as for Ebola and Mpox, and can respond quickly to outbreaks, citing the example of containing Ebola in Uganda in 2023.

GAVI's approach differs from traditional aid models. It is not a charity; rather, participating countries provide co-payment for the vaccines they receive, starting at $0.20 per dose and increasing their share as national incomes grow. Several countries, including Indonesia and India, have "graduated" from GAVI support and have now become donors. The organization's operational costs are just 3%, and its return on investment is estimated at $54 for every $1 spent. The U.S. currently contributes about 13% of GAVI's budget (compared to 60% from European donors), yet benefits disproportionately, as GAVI purchases large volumes from U.S. vaccine manufacturers, up to $4 billion worth of vaccines, much more than the $1 billion U.S. contribution so far in 2025.

The scholar outlined ongoing reforms under the "GAVI Leap" initiative, which are focused on country ownership, sustainability, clear mandates for international organizations, and defined timelines for graduation from GAVI support. Partnerships with the private sector have included innovative financing like vaccine bonds, which have raised $7 billion, and operational collaborations with delivery innovators like drone-based logistics company Zipline in Rwanda (capable of reaching even the remotest rural corner of the country in 45 minutes or less).

Eighty percent of GAVI's budget is spent in Africa, working in 44 of the continent's 54 countries. In Zambia, for example, a malaria vaccine is scheduled for rollout this fall. Special mechanisms ensure vaccine delivery to internally displaced and refugee populations. But the scholar warned that, although Congress has appropriated FY 2025 funding for the U.S. contribution, the Office of Management and Budget has not yet obligated it. A delay or failure to do so would result in an immediate 13% (roughly $1.3B) cut to GAVI's budget,75 million fewer vaccinations, 1.3 million deaths, and would weaken U.S. influence on GAVI's board, where it holds a permanent seat.

Members asked about philanthropic contributions, vaccine manufacturing, and hesitancy. The scholar noted that the Gates Foundation recently committed $1.6 billion to GAVI, and that the organization does not fund therapeutics, leaving that space to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. She described new investments in regional vaccine manufacturing, including a $1.2 billion facility financing program in Africa, designed to subsidize production and address inequitable vaccine access experienced during COVID-19. The scholar also acknowledged that vaccine skepticism in the U.S. has damaged global trust as misinformation and politicization around vaccines in the U.S. are closely watched abroad. While hesitancy varies by vaccine (demand for measles and malaria vaccines remains high), addressing misinformation is becoming an increasingly important part of GAVI's strategy.

Looking ahead, the scholar warned that the next pandemic is not a question of if, but when. The global system for early detection and coordinated response was historically one in which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control played a major role, but now it is much weakened. Moreover, with the U.S. no longer engaging with the World Health Organization, the only body with a mandate to organize global responses, gaps in preparedness have widened. The scholar urged Congress to hold hearings with all relevant stakeholders to examine U.S. readiness and to reaffirm leadership in multilateral health security.

Severe Weather Patterns: Implications for African Food Security

Scholars framed the need for renewed U.S. engagement in Africa's food systems as a threefold imperative: moral, national security, and economic. Food, they emphasized, is the foundation for life and public health. Without adequate diets, even the most advanced medical interventions are less effective. Malnutrition is the single largest cause of death worldwide. It weakens immune systems, increasing susceptibility to acute and chronic disease. Since World War II, roughly 65% of novel infectious diseases in humans have originated in food systems, often where agriculture and animal husbandry intersect. If Africa's rapidly growing population cannot be fed, they warned, the consequences will not remain contained to the continent. Food insecurity drives political instability, fuels conflict, and generates outward migration, all pressures that directly affect U.S. interests.

By mid-century, the majority of new global food demand will come from sub-Saharan Africa, which is expected to account for about 70% of worldwide growth. Rising incomes will further amplify demand, particularly for higher-quality and more diverse foods. American farmers may play a role through exports of specialized products, but meeting Africa's food needs will be an African-led endeavor. U.S. engagement should focus on investing in production capacity, providing technical assistance, and fostering market access. One scholar drew parallels to the response to the U.S. Dust Bowl of the 1930s, when science, hybrid seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and soil and water conservation strategies transformed semi-arid agriculture in the American Midwest. These conditions are similar to those found in many African regions today, and climate change has already undercut about 30% of potential productivity gains from such innovations. Thus, making accelerated innovation more widely available will be key to feeding Africa in the future, and the U.S. agricultural research and development sector could be poised to partner with Africans in this arena.

The disparity in diet quality is stark. Around half the world's population today, four billion people worldwide, now enjoy a healthy diet, but that is equal to the entire global population 50 years ago. The other half of the planet's eight billion people cannot afford or access healthy foods. Scholars argued that this gap underscores the urgency of investing in agricultural R&D, which yields returns of $21-42 for every $1 spent, compared to a $1.25 multiplier for most U.S. government spending. They cautioned that the U.S. is pulling back from global engagement at precisely the moment when future markets for U.S. agribusiness lie abroad. Margins inside the hyper-competitive U.S. food market are thin, and African markets represent both a humanitarian obligation and a lucrative opportunity for American innovation, particularly in climate-resilient farming, drought monitoring, and big data applications that can track and mitigate weather impacts in real time.

Another scholar, now a U.S. citizen, described growing up in a small Cameroonian village where the sale of pigs and chickens determined whether his family could afford school fees. Losing his mother to disease at age 45 shaped his understanding of the link between health and agriculture. His career in agricultural science has been rooted in the belief that resilient food systems are inseparable from human development. He stressed that the U.S. withdrawal from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) means losing not just a research partner but also a global sentinel for emerging agricultural and zoonotic threats. These networks have helped U.S. agencies anticipate disruptions, such as the impacts of the Ukraine war on food security, and have fostered businesses that now generate revenue for American firms.

Members explored practical pathways for re-engagement. For example, could the U.S. land-grant university model, with its combination of research, extension, and local application, be adapted for Africa? Scholars noted that while the 20th-century land-grant approach was highly effective in the U.S., Africa may benefit from a more localized "backyard university" model, similar to one now being developed in China, which aligns research with local industry needs. Others highlighted the potential of integrating agriculture into school curricula, allowing students to grow their own food and learn about water management. The discussion ranged from low-cost irrigation solutions powered by solar pumps or playground equipment like see-saws, to genetic improvements that can make crops and livestock more drought-resistant.

Technology and dietary change also featured prominently. Members asked about the scalability of lab-grown proteins and vertical farming. Scholars responded that prices will fall, just as with cell phones, making these options viable complements to traditional agriculture. Reducing the land, water, and transport demands of meat production could free those resources for other uses. They stressed the need to view Africa as three distinct markets: an affluent tier with global-standard consumption patterns, a growing middle class, and a large population still living in absolute poverty, each requiring different approaches.

On the question of whether Africa can feed its projected 2.5 billion people by 2050, scholars were cautiously optimistic, although they noted that Africa as a continent will not be food self-sufficient. Historically, global food production has outpaced population growth, but success will require sustained investment in research, infrastructure, and adaptation to shifting weather patterns, pests, and pathogens. Economic stability and higher incomes tend to lower birth rates, but instability and child mortality drive families to have more children. In the meantime, some African states will inevitably be net exporters of food while others remain net importers, reflecting comparative advantages in the global food system. Prosperity, scholars argued, will depend less on keeping people in farming and more on creating jobs across the broader food value chain, from processing and logistics to retail and services.

Scholars also issued a stark warning: disengagement now risks forfeiting both influence and market share in a sector that underpins African stability and directly affects U.S.

security and prosperity. Strategic re-engagement in agricultural research, innovation partnerships, and targeted investment would not only be morally right, but could be a pragmatic, high-return investment in America's long-term interests.

Global Health Challenges Across Africa

Scholars emphasized that over the last two decades, U.S.-led initiatives such as PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight Malaria, HIV, and TB have delivered one of the most significant public health achievements in modern history. In nearly every African country, the two largest health providers are PEPFAR and the Global Fund, often working in close coordination. Their partnership is pragmatic rather than tied to rigid methodologies. For example, if the most effective way to reduce HIV infections among adolescent girls is to keep them in school, they will fund school-based interventions. This flexibility has contributed to major results: HIV and TB deaths are down by 72%, and HIV, TB, and malaria combined have seen the same reduction. The Global Fund estimates that 62 million lives have been saved through these efforts, with average life expectancy in countries like Zambia rising by 15 years, two-thirds of that gain being due directly to reductions in these three diseases.

The Global Fund's operational model was described as lean and time-limited, designed to enable countries to take over their own health programs while meeting $9.3 billion in co-funding requirements. This approach builds national financial management capacity and fosters ownership of health outcomes. However, the recent freeze in U.S. development funding created a severe disruption. As the closest partner to PEPFAR, the Global Fund found itself scrambling to fill critical gaps, re-prioritizing spending to offset a sudden shortfall. Although $1.3 billion in U.S. funds for the Global Fund was eventually released in June, uncertainty remains about future appropriations. The mutual-commitment model means that if the U.S. falters, partner governments are also less likely to follow through on their pledges.

Looking ahead, scholars argued that the end of HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is within reach if momentum is maintained. Tuberculosis remains a tougher challenge, though more people are now receiving treatment than ever before. Malaria, they cautioned, is the most concerning of the three due to the combined pressures of climate change, conflict, and emerging drug resistance, though Zambia's progress is a notable exception. New tools, including the first effective malaria vaccine now in trials, could dramatically improve outcomes if deployed at scale.

Another scholar noted that COVID-19 left a form of institutional "PTSD" in the global health community, but also reinforced the importance of interconnectedness and trust. PEPFAR and the Global Fund have demonstrated what global solidarity looks like, yet recent months have severely strained these partnerships. The suspension of USAID and CDC information-sharing, along with NIH grant delays, threatens to undo decades of progress. Vulnerable groups, such as adolescent girls, women-led households, and displaced populations, will be disproportionately affected unless investments are restored and targeted strategies implemented.

In discussion, members pressed for ways to frame U.S. investments in African health systems in transactional, security-oriented terms that resonate with U.S. domestic audiences. Scholars pointed to the Sahel as an example: regions overwhelmed by diseases like malaria cannot achieve stable governance or sustainable development, making them more vulnerable to extremist influence, which is a direct security concern for the U.S. Health investments can likewise be economic opportunities: the Global Fund purchases $4 billion in U.S. medical supplies, and healthier societies are better markets for American trade and investment.

Members also raised concerns about bureaucratic inefficiency in U.S. foreign aid, with one noting that 22 federal agencies currently handle some aspect of foreign assistance. Scholars agreed that the "global health architecture" needs fundamental reform, with more rigorous assessment of what is working and what is not among both field-level implementing partners and donor governments. However, they stressed that, unlike in the private sector, where failed ventures can close, diseases do not pause while bureaucracies restructure. Tough love and selectivity are needed, but without halting ongoing programs.

Scholars said eliminating HIV/AIDS as a significant public health threat by 2030 is a realistic goal, even if the virus remains present in some populations. The "last mile" challenge will require pinpointing the drivers of residual infections and adapting strategies accordingly. For malaria and TB, the road is longer, but tools are improving. The overarching message was clear: U.S. leadership is not just symbolic, it directly unlocks matching commitments from other donors, sustains fragile health systems, and keeps alive the realistic possibility of ending some of the world's deadliest diseases within the next decade.

Access to Critical Minerals: Supporting U.S. Interests and Promoting Economic Growth on the Continent

A business leader with both U.S. and Zambian ties offered a historical and personal perspective on Africa's mining sector and its role in the U.S.-Zambia relationship. She recalled how, in the late 19th century, American scouts and engineers worked alongside Cecil Rhodes to develop Zambia's copper-rich north, building rail and industrial infrastructure. Following independence, much of the professional class departed, but mining remains central to Zambia's economy and to U.S. strategic interests. Today, critical minerals such as copper, cobalt, lithium, nickel, and rare earth elements are vital for AI chips, infrastructure modernization, and transportation systems.

The speaker's company, U.S.-owned and California-based KoBold Metals, uses sensors and AI to accelerate mineral discovery, addressing the industry-wide decline in high-quality finds. They have digitized the national geological archive at their own expense and made it public to encourage transparency. While large industrial miners focus on extraction, smaller "junior" companies take on exploration, often without the capacity to maintain a stable presence. KoBold's model emphasizes reliability, environmental and social impact assessments, and a strict no-bribery policy, which they say attracts partners who value transparency.

Members asked about challenges in competing with Chinese state-subsidized mining, where the industry expert explained that Beijing often acquires distressed assets rather than developing new ones. She also noted that Zambia's substantial smelting and refining capacity, which is greater than that of the U.S., offers opportunities to reduce reliance on China's 45% share of global refining. Exploration also has spillover benefits for local economies, including job creation in food, housing, transport, and tourism. Questions also included how the U.S. can support non-corrupt operators in navigating local bureaucracy, and whether mining skills training can prepare Zambians for increasingly automated operations. The speaker highlighted the need for cross-sector partnerships, noting their efforts to connect Zambian universities with U.S. institutions for co-teaching programs. She cautioned that while many Zambian students still aspire to study in the U.S., growing numbers are going to China, Russia, and Malaysia and returning with different perspectives and relationships that are unlikely to align with long-term U.S. interests.

Where Do We Go from Here?

This discussion was framed around the stark choice facing U.S.-Africa relations: seize this moment of demographic and economic change to build durable, mutually beneficial partnerships, or retreat into reactive, short-term assistance that fails to match the scale of the opportunity and the challenge. Scholars emphasized that the most compelling case for sustained engagement lies not just in humanitarian imperatives, but in the economic and security stakes for the United States over the next several decades. By 2050, one in four people on Earth will be African, and one in three workers will be African, meaning the continent will be either a dynamic growth engine for the global economy or, if instability and unemployment prevail, a source of escalating crises. Drawing on personal experiences, one scholar recounted the despair in southern Africa during the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, when hopelessness "was sucking the life out of the subcontinent." The advent of PEPFAR and the rapid distribution of antiretroviral therapy not only saved millions of lives but also reshaped perceptions of the United States. In Botswana's Chobe District, where three-quarters of pregnant women were once HIV-positive, life expectancy and optimism rebounded sharply. Across PEPFAR countries, public approval ratings of the U.S. rose on average by 20%. Doctors in Namibia and Ethiopia described the program as proof that "the American people care about us," even in places where U.S. policy had once been viewed with deep suspicion. A central theme was sustainability. The architects of GAVI, PEPFAR, and the Global Fund never intended these programs to be permanent. Some African countries have the capacity to "graduate" from external financing within two to three years; others will require longer; a few may remain dependent for the foreseeable future. Progress is rarely linear—economic or political crises can reverse gains. Scholars argued that sustainable exit strategies require better data on where donor dollars are actually going (only two countries have ever successfully audited their external health programs), and that the model should also include supporting economic growth so that countries can fund their own health systems.

Indeed, economic opportunity was repeatedly linked to strategic competition. African leaders, one scholar recalled, have long acknowledged the drawbacks of relying on Chinese state capitalism but often see "no choice" in the absence of competitive U.S. private investment. Russia and the Gulf states are also injecting capital, often in ways that result in political destabilization. Yet when supported, U.S. private firms can outcompete Chinese counterparts, bringing higher quality, more transparent business practices. Financial institutions like JPMorgan are expanding in Africa, but U.S. development finance remains relatively small. A priority should be to expand U.S.-Africa private-sector engagement through market access, regulatory reforms, and tools such as pooled loan guarantees to lower borrowing costs.

The conversation also challenged long-standing narratives in U.S. foreign assistance that frame Africans as "hopeless and helpless." Two-thirds of African countries are now lower-middle income or better, and many have vibrant private sectors and rising middle classes. Scholars urged a shift from Washington-centric, one-size-fits-all program design toward approaches tailored to the radically different contexts of Africa's 54 countries. They pointed to the loss of 5,300 locally hired foreign service nationals, many of whom ran programs on the ground and could be future national leaders, as a self-inflicted setback that has opened the door for the expansion of Chinese influence on the continent.

Members pressed for practical legislative priorities in the current constrained budget environment. Scholars suggested letting the private sector co-design enabling reforms, drawing on MCC's performance-based model, and working with in-country development experts to define clear graduation pathways from humanitarian to self-financed programs. Several warned against focusing solely on humanitarian aid, which is politically easiest to pass but does not address long-term resilience. Instead, they advocated "building threads of resilience" into emergency relief so that it strengthens systems over time.

In response to concerns about U.S. business hesitancy toward African markets, scholars stressed that the barrier is often not a lack of interest on both sides, but the ripple effects of negative cases when local businesses or their international partners encounter politicized judiciaries, abrupt license cancellations, and other obstacles. Aligning U.S. government rhetoric with on-the-ground realities and ensuring that reform commitments are credible will be essential to attracting U.S. and global private capital. African countries themselves should identify their top priorities in infrastructure, nutrition, education or any other area, scholars argued, which would enable U.S. programs to be tailored accordingly. They urged members to think in terms of continuous adaptation, not one-off "reforms," and to see foreign assistance as a dynamic tool of statecraft that must evolve with economic, technological, and geopolitical shifts. As the conference came to a close, scholars and members agreed that the United States still has a decisive competitive advantage in Africa, rooted in the respect and trust built through programs like PEPFAR, but maintaining that advantage will require combining disciplined, targeted assistance with robust private-sector engagement and a willingness to match words with actions on the ground.

POLICY ACTION MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS[2]

Strategic Vision

- **Articulate a clear, consistent and future-focused U.S. policy vision on Africa**
  - By 2050, Africa will be home to one in four people and one in three workers worldwide, making it imperative to define U.S. interests in terms of economic, security, diplomatic, and development goals, not just reactive humanitarian impulses.
  - Counter China's "techno-optimist" messaging with a positive U.S. vision centered on partnership, innovation, and shared prosperity.
  - Promote America's English-language advantage, shared democratic values, and people-to-people connections.

- **Rebuild the U.S. foreign assistance toolkit in line with this vision**
  - Rebuild human capital lost through USAID and other agency downsizing, including rehiring foreign service nationals, who are critical to implementing programs and are future leaders in their own countries.
  - Reduce the "alphabet soup" of entities involved in U.S. foreign assistance policy, to streamline decision-making, increase accountability, and prevent duplication.

Trade and Economic Growth

- **Leverage the private sector as the primary driver of sustainable growth**
  - Engage U.S. companies directly in designing enabling reforms (regulatory, legal, and infrastructure) that would unlock investment.
  - Highlight U.S. private sector competitiveness versus Chinese state-capitalist models.
  - Showcase success stories of U.S. firms in Africa to counter negative perceptions on both sides.

- **Improve access to capital for African economies**
  - Offer loan guarantees to reduce borrowing costs for African governments and firms.

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[2]*Note: These are potential policy principles and proposals that emerged through conversations among Members of Congress and Scholars, and do not reflect any position endorsed by the Aspen Institute or the Aspen Congressional Program. This document is intended as a nonpartisan record of potential avenues for legislative action and as a companion to the Conference Rapporteur's report.*

  - Encourage African regional credit pooling to improve sovereign credit ratings.
  - Direct U.S. influence at multilateral development banks to help lower interest rates for African borrowers.

- **Promote value-added production in Africa**
  - Support African countries in moving up the value chain—processing minerals, agricultural goods, and manufactured products locally.
  - Encourage U.S.–Africa joint ventures in manufacturing, agribusiness, and renewable energy.
  - Align the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to promote regional integration.

- **Expand U.S. commercial presence and connectivity**
  - Support U.S. airlines in establishing routes to South and West Africa to facilitate business travel and tourism.
  - Increase U.S. trade missions to African capitals and encourage reciprocal African business delegations, including easing visa conditions for African businesspeople coming to the U.S..

Security, Diplomacy, and Geopolitical Competition

- **Adopt a "respect plus influence" approach to great power competition in the region**
  - Avoid language that calls on African nations to publicly "choose sides" in U.S.-China competition; instead push local governments to adopt transparency commitments that would prevent China from buying influence and better protect U.S. stakeholders' interests.
  - Focus on mutually beneficial deals that improve governance, reduce corruption, and build long-term resilience.
  - Expand embassy capacity and regional engagement to match or surpass China's diplomatic network.

- **Leverage existing diplomatic and financial tools to maximum effect**
  - Support African peacekeeping contributions with targeted foreign military financing (FMF) packages, as in Zambia's provision of troops to missions where the U.S. does not deploy.
  - Align training assistance programs with local needs as well as with areas where China seeks to use training and education for influence operations, such as journalism and public administration.
  - Invest in public diplomacy to highlight U.S. contributions such as PEPFAR, infrastructure projects, and education exchanges.

Development Investments

- **Reinvest in agriculture and food systems**

    - Recognize that food security is not only foundational to all human flourishing, but is the most important tool for promoting security and stability since hungry people are prone to conflict.
    - Revive and modernize Feed the Future, with an emphasis on African-based R&D and labs.
    - Invest in water infrastructure, low cost irrigation technology, and climate-resilient crops.
    - Promote insurance and risk-sharing mechanisms for farmers, as well as for U.S. ag businesses to export to Africa.

- **Strengthen health systems with a focus on sustainability**
    - Maintain U.S. leadership in the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI, and PEPFAR, encouraging and taking advantage of matching dollars from other donors.
    - Focus on transitioning middle-income African countries to self-financed HIV, TB, and malaria programs.
    - Integrate disease prevention with economic and education programs, especially targeting adolescent girls.

- **Shift from a reactive, assistance-focused model to a long-term resilience and self-help strategy**
    - Lifesaving short-term humanitarian aid should as much as possible embed elements that build up longer-term resilience.
    - Work with host governments to define clear timelines and criteria for moving from direct assistance to co-funding to self-funding.
    - Encourage countries to recognize their own near-term potential to graduate from direct assistance.
    - Condition aid on opening markets to U.S. business and protecting investors.

Innovation, Technology, and Infrastructure

- **Digital infrastructure as a development driver**
    - Launch a "Digital Marshall Plan" for Africa—expanding broadband, digital payments, e-governance, and cyber capacity.
    - Encourage U.S. tech partnerships that compete with China's 5G and digital service offerings.

- **Support frugal innovation, especially in energy**
    - Back African innovators developing low-cost, scalable solutions in health, agriculture, and energy.
    - Link U.S. universities and research institutions to African counterparts through joint projects.

    - Support electrification, especially cost-effective renewable energy deployment where feasible and pair with natural gas and other reliable baseload sources where needed.

The Unique Role of Congress

- Draft a joint letter on Africa signaling bipartisan commitment to U.S.–Africa engagement.
- Launch a bipartisan, bicameral "Africa Caucus" with co-chairs from both parties.
- Establish an ad hoc select committee on U.S.–Africa relations to coordinate legislative priorities across committees.
- Engage directly with African leadership: High-level congressional delegations should visit African capitals regularly, not just during crises.
- Invite African leaders to visit the United States and brief Congress on their priorities and challenges.

SCHOLARS' ESSAYS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12

Amb. Michael Gonzales	*Promoting a Competitive Business Enabling Environment to Foster Investment-led Development and Growth in LDCs*

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13

Amb. Mark Dybul	*Statement before the House Appropriations NSRP Subcommittee*
Amb. Mark Green	*Africa In Motion: A Survey Of the Forces And Questions Shaping Africa's Future* *Excerpts from "Stubborn Things" and "Moments Along the Way" Blogs*
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THURSDAY, AUGUST 14

Chris Barrett	*The Case for Revitalized, Reoriented United States Investment in African Food and Nutrition Security*
Appolinaire Djikeng	*Severe Weather Patterns: Implications for African Food Security*
Peter Sands	*Ending Malaria Makes Everyone Healthier, Safer And More Prosperous* *The First Generation Without AIDS Is Within Reach — If We Refuse to Settle for Less* *How AI Is Accelerating the Fight Against an Ancient Killer*

Promoting a Competitive Business Enabling Environment to Foster Investment-led Development and Growth in LDCs[3]

Amb. Michael Gonzales

U.S. Ambassador to Zambia

As many Least Developed Countries reach their 6th decade of independence, perhaps the cruelest irony is that so many of them remain among the "Least Developed Countries." Real GDPs, especially real GDPs per capita, have not kept pace with other countries. And, perhaps most regrettably, economic growth and development have not reached levels reflective of either countries' potential or the expectations of their citizens.

Having lived and worked among the least developed countries in the world, from Bangladesh to Ethiopia to Malawi to Nepal, I have seen throughout my career that it is not governments or donors who create growth. Responsive governments can provide the conducive environment, and donors can provide much needed support. But, ultimately it is private sector investment that drives growth. It is investment that creates jobs, drives productivity, and pays taxes to fund public services.

We have seen over recent decades that significant foreign assistance might provide phenomenal impacts on people's lives. But sadly, the assistance-led development model has broadly failed to spur the sustained, systemic reforms needed to drive real per capita growth and development. Regrettably, the fiscal and policy space that aid provides has not been used to enact such reforms. So, despite significant potential, accountable and transparent businesses are not investing in proportion to that potential. As a result, the development of LDC economies remains unrealized despite the interest and availability of literally trillions of dollars in available capital.

In my experience, much of the difference between countries that attract that investment and those that do not is a matter of government orientation. From Ethiopian coffee to Chilean mining, those countries and sectors that create conducive environments to foster innovation and business within a transparent and stable policy environment – using government to enable business while monitoring and enforcing compliance – are the countries able to unleash their potential. In contrast, those countries that insist on controlling – be it through opaque, complex, and redundant licenses and approvals; vulnerabilities from human intervention; or ever shifting rules and regulations – consistently fail to secure the investments of even those companies who are interested.

[3] Remarks originally written for the LDC Future Forum on April 2, 2025.

Apart from the truly phenomenal business opportunity, too often, the companies that do invest in the controlling environment do so by buying their ways around regulations or officials, extracting and exploiting to the detriment of the host country.

In this competitive global economy, capital is like water, it follows the path of least resistance. Companies do not just wait for the opportunity to invest in your country. They will invest somewhere. But, if your country makes it difficult, they will go elsewhere. I often hear governments complain that investors are not serious. "Just look at the massive potential that exists," they lament. The reality is that while the potential is significant, the costs of realizing that potential continues to outstrip it. Put another way, potential revenues are great, but the costs of realizing a profit remain higher still.

Accountable companies are not necessarily looking for a special deal. They seek transparent, consistent, and predictable policies and processes that provide a level and stable playing field to minimize risk. In a world where time is money, one-stop shops and automated processes help reduce opportunity costs. A new market entrant's first stop is typically to talk to others already in the market. If what they hear is about corruption, byzantine processes, and long delays, they may not even stick around to meet with your governments or actually explore opportunities. So, the first key to attracting new trade and investment is to facilitate business practices for those companies already in your market.

Against this backdrop, Western embassies and governments often share your objective of increasing mutually beneficial commercial ties. Because companies talk to their embassies when exploring new markets, we often have clear insights into what attracts a company. We also hear what keeps them away. And, we have close contact with companies across the economy. Partnering with embassies in your countries to understand the perspectives of the private sector can help your governments develop and prioritize an action plan for reforms to turn that potential into real investment, meaningful jobs, and increased tax revenues.

The United States is often happy to advise on prospective business process reforms or regulations, so too are other partner countries or multilateral partners like the World Bank. A true partner is not one that insists on non-disclosure agreements or wants special benefits for themselves. More often than not, those opaque arrangements come at the expense of recipient economies. Genuine partners are those who support you in creating level playing fields where transparent processes ensure investor confidence and foster competition to bring both the companies and your people value for money.

Statement before the House Appropriations NSRP Subcommittee[4]

Amb. Mark Dybul

Professor at the Medical Center of Georgetown University, former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and former U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator leading PEPFAR

Good morning Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Frankel and distinguished members of the Committee. It is a great privilege to come before this group, which I have had the opportunity to testify on PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria since the days of Jim Kolbe in and Nita Lowey in 2006.

It has been the honor of a lifetime to have been one of the architects of the original PEPFAR plan, and to have been deeply engaged with the program for two-thirds of my professional life. Please accept heartfelt thanks to all the Members and Staff who have provided steadfast support in a bipartisan way for more than two decades.

I hope we can all agree that this Committee and the American people's investment in PEPFAR have made our country safer, stronger and more prosperous. In that regard, please accept deep appreciation for maintaining appropriations for the most effective US development programs, including PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria despite substantial reductions in the Subcommittee's overall envelope.

Averting Disaster

It seems important to recall the state of the epidemic at the turn of the Century. In the most impacted countries, more than 30 percent of the adult population was infected with HIV. In certain districts in Botswana, 75% of pregnant women carried the virus. There were entire villages run by orphans or grandparents because there were no adults left alive.

Unlike many diseases that target the young and the old, HIV infects those who are not only in their reproductive – but also their productive – years. There was a persistent misunderstanding that the poorest were most vulnerable. The greatest risk was among those who had begun to climb the economic ladder - factory and mine workers, doctors and nurses, corporate executives and government officials. There were projections for substantial decreases in economic growth. Indeed, Ford was among the first Corporations to provide life-saving treatment to its workers in Africa so they could keep their assembly lines moving.

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[4] Remarks originally written for the House Appropriations National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs (NSRP) Subcommittee on April 8, 2025.

Soldiers were at very high risk. Africa struggled to field peace keeping forces. There were reports from the US national security sector raising the alarm about the risks of HIV. It had the potential to tumble fragile states and leave a huge cadre of desperate young people susceptible to terrorist recruitment. So we ensured that the first ever UN Security Council meeting on an infectious disease was on HIV.

Fortunately, and largely because of US led global intervention, the dire predictions of global instability and economic harm did not occur.

Our great country acted decisively and effectively to avert disaster and, in doing so, offered the world a shining example of who and what we are when we are at our best.

Helping America to be Safer, Stronger and More Prosperous

PEPFAR has been called – and I believe in fact is - "the most successful global health program in history." That powerful statement is no small part due to the astounding success of the program:

- More than 26 million lives saved – that bears repeating – more than 26 million lives saved.
- More than 7.5 million babies saved from HIV infection around the time of birth.
- More than 8 million children saved from becoming orphans.

But its impact is much wider and deeper – from villages to State Houses, from Africa to Asia to Latin America – in improved diplomatic relations – which translates directly to our national security, stronger health systems, in particular remarkably robust data systems for a results-focused, transparent accountability that can serve as a foundation for enhanced health security and pandemic preparedness and response, and potential for a healthy, growing market for US goods and services – legacies that have helped America to be safer, stronger and more prosperous in the future.

In other words, PEPFAR has been a transformational model that helped drive reforms throughout US and international development programs.

With your indulgence, I would like to tell a story that remains vivid in my memory. In 2006, while I was the US Global AIDS Coordinator, I was fortunate to visit Axum, Ethiopia, believed to be the birthplace of Christianity in Africa. At dawn, with the mist over the town blocking the electrical wires, it looked as it might have centuries ago. Local farmers winding through the streets with donkey-drawn wagons, the spires of the churches peeking through the haze, bells ringing to call all to prayers and the market. We were met at the local clinic by the director and his team. In a town that small, the clinic director was also a town elder and leader in the community. He kept referring to PEPFAR. I was cranky from too little sleep so asked him what PEPFAR means. His answer knocked me over. He said, "PEPFAR means the American people care about us."

That wonderful phrase captured the sentiments I have heard from nearly every corner of Africa. And that soft power – as many leading generals, admirals and commanders on the ground have clearly said is essential for our national security - can be quantified. Senators Frist and Daschle, who were the Senate's Majority and Minority leaders when PEPFAR was first authorized, led an assessment by the Bipartisan Policy Center of the impact of the program on perceptions of the United States in Sub-Saharan Africa. In PEPFAR supported countries, 68 percent of respondents had a positive view of our country, compared to only 46 percent in non-PEPFAR supported countries. In fact, many PEPFAR-supported countries have a higher percent positive view of the United States than people in the United States.

The sentiment expressed in Axum has grown with every life saved and as individuals, families, communities and nations moved from total despair to hope for the future. Hope is not just a matter of faith or a good feeling. It awakens a lost desire to find a job, go to school, feed a family, care for your community. It is, in fact, the basis for economic growth and the development of markets for US goods and services. That is not just a theory. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that PEPFAR-supported countries had a 2.1 percentage point increase in the GDP growth rate per capita from 2004 to 2018.

Indeed, prior to the COVID pandemic, Africa, as a region, had the second fastest growing regional economy in the world. It also has a rapidly growing population. By the 2030s Africa will be larger than either India or China. While the latter has an aging population, 70% of Africa is under the age of 30.

Africa is a key and growing market for US goods and services.

While PEPFAR is an HIV program it has remarkable ripple effects on the broader health system. Treatment and prevention of HIV is a life-long enterprise requiring well trained health care providers including community health care workers, pharmacists and pharmacies, lab technicians and laboratories, logistics, supply chains and communications systems and much more. These systems are public but also private, including faith-based organizations.

At the beginning, because of stigma and discrimination, many HIV services were provided in separate locations. However, the vast majority of HIV-related activities now occur in general health care settings. So the doctors, nurses, lab techs, pharmacists, community health workers – and all the support systems – serve non-HIV roles as well.

In that regard, a recent analysis by the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) found that countries supported by PEPFAR have seen a 235% greater increase in the number of trained nurses and midwives than countries not supported by the program. For that reason, it is not surprising that studies have shown that PEPFAR is associated with a significant improvement in 6 out of 7 key indicators of maternal and child health including rates of mortality for women and children and childhood immunization.

The dramatic life-saving results are linked to prevention as well as treatment. Effective prevention is key to reducing the number of new infections which is essential for sustainability. For example, using treatment to prevent infections has shown great promise. Similar to taking anti-malaria drugs when traveling, pills – and recently a single injection that can last three to six months – provided to those most at risk of infection including women and men of reproductive age could help bring new infections down to very low-levels. Combined with an expected increase in deaths as those who started treatment more than 20 years ago begin to die of natural causes, it is possible to substantially reduce the number of persons requiring treatment in 7 to 10 years. With expected advances in other technologies, including vaccines, it is now possible to conceive of nearly eliminating HIV in our lifetime.

Among the most important investments in systems were transparent data for monitoring and evaluation to help drive rapid and continual pivots to maximize results and taxpayer investments. Those systems also provide a backbone of transparency and accountability for Congressional oversight, but also for country management and ownership.

The power of those improved health systems was clearly demonstrated during the height of the COVID pandemic. PEPFAR-supported HIV testing was used to detect SARS-Cov-2. Clinics, hospitals and community workers, and commodities procured were all used to help combat the deadly disease. Looking to the future and the threat of another pandemic, the best way to ensure early detection and to respond rapidly is to maintain and strengthen the capacity to respond to an ongoing pandemic, such as HIV, with an intentional design for surge capacity when needed promoting our health security and national security.

Key Role of the Global Fund

As a former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, I'm proud the partnership has saved over 65 million lives from AIDS, TB and malaria. I would like to thank the Committee for its support of that important organization. With the 33 percent cap on contributions from the United States, it is a potent means to help ensure the American taxpayer is not alone in this fight. The Global Fund also plays a key, and complementary, role in building health systems and pandemic preparedness and response. In fact, the success of PEPFAR and the President's Malaria Initiative are intertwined with the Global Fund and serve as a model for how US investments in bilateral and international programs can be synergistic. And our engagement in a results-driven international organization contributes to our diplomatic relations.

Transitioning from Funding to Stronger Economic, Diplomatic and National Security Partnerships

I hope we can all agree that few US Government programs have been as impactful as PEPFAR. It has rightly been called the best policy decision by any President in the past half century. And few international programs have been as impactful as the Global Fund.

However, neither PEPFAR nor the Global Fund can or should be forever.

The health care capacity that has been built provides a foundation for a structured transition to fully country led and owned programs. In addition, countries have also increased their financial commitments to health and HIV programs. Domestic sources accounted for 59% of all HIV-related spending in 2023. However, the increases are very uneven and much work remains to be done.

While substantial work has been done to prepare for transitions, now is the time to execute a comprehensive plan with clear, annual and transparent benchmarks on progress, including reductions – beginning now in funding.

Countries are in different stages on their journey to self-reliance. It could be useful to group them based on the amount of external funding they receive, socio-economic factors and others and, in working with countries within each group, to set accountable, clear targets for progress within each category and progress towards a final transition.

In my view, there are a handful of countries – in particular in Asia and Latin America - who could rapidly have full transitions. There are at least a dozen countries, some with large PEPFAR and Global Fund allocations, that could successfully transition within a few years, including regular reductions in funds during that time. Others will take longer – some much longer, but they can and should begin now.

It is essential that PEPFAR and the Global Fund function as a single team, working with Heads of State, Ministries of Finance, Health, Economic Planning and others as well as sub-national structures, e.g., Governors and States as appropriate. Grants, loans and private sector investments must be available in a coherent way with a different mix of mechanisms based on where each country is on their journey to self-reliance. For too long, the various Departments and Agencies responsible for grants, loans and effective engagement of the private sector have acted – and received appropriations – in disparate and unaligned ways. Sustainability and effective transitions will require bold, new approaches to an "all of government" approach here in Washington, in partner countries and by International Organizations and Development Finance Institutions.

It is also essential that faith- and community-based organizations, who often provide substantial health services, be fully engaged from the beginning. Those organizations are likely to bear the brunt of rapid resource reductions. Many partner governments have no clear systems to transfer funds to faith- and community-based organizations. But with time and effort, those mechanisms can be created.

The strong data systems that have been developed are key to effective and rapid transitions. It is essential that they remain active to help ensure that countries maximize impact and to have visibility into current externally financed programs – in particular for faith- and community-based organizations – to ensure the vital services they provide do not fall through the cracks. Over time, the countries can fully absorb the systems to enhance transparency and accountability within the health sector as a model for other sectors – as has already been done in several places. Finally, those data systems are indispensable for continued oversight by the Administration and Congress.

The private sector must be at the table from the outset. Often, the private sector is a second, third or fourth thought – or not even considered at all. We also approach them from a public sector lens rather than working with them based on their needs and limits. There can be no sustainability without revenue generation from health programs – moving from "health to wealth". There are opportunities for American investors and companies to reap rewards and for Asian, African and Latin American investors and companies to grow their economies to create markets for our goods and services. There are important US Government financing instruments as well as African, Asian and Latin American Development Finance Institutions – some have already begun to engage in health – which could play key roles identifying projects, co-financing including providing first-loss investment.

While it is important that every country transitions from external financing for their HIV and health services, it is equally important that they transition to become stronger economic and diplomatic partners of the United States for the long-term.

I have remained very active in Sub-Saharan Africa, and I can assure you that there are ready and willing partners to enact clear, accountable and successful transition plans from State Houses to Ministries of Finance and Health to villages, faith and community-based organizations, private sector investors who see "health to wealth" opportunities and African Development Financing Institutions, including the African Export-Import Bank and African Development Bank. Indeed, those key actors have already been engaged in increased health financing towards sustainability.

The alternative to successful transitions is frightening to contemplate. Moving too rapidly to dismantle one of the most successful programs in history threatens millions of lives, reverses decades of stronger diplomatic gains affecting national security, and substantially limits opportunities for stronger economic partnerships and markets for US goods and services.

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As this Committee knows, the United States is now in a worldwide struggle to remain a beacon on the hill and to ensure that we are safe, strong and prosperous. While we must lead, we must have allies including, and perhaps particularly, in Africa where democracy is threatened and where we have lost ground as the number one trading partner – and where the opportunity for the future is so vast. Clearly, PEPFAR alone is not sufficient.

But after nearly a quarter Century of working with and supporting Africans at all levels, the wisdom of the words from Axum 15 years ago rings truer than ever.

People know what we stand for when we stand with them. With your continued support and a clear plan for successful transitions from external financing and to stronger economic and diplomatic partners, untold millions of lives will continue to be lifted up and saved, strengthened health systems for the ongoing HIV pandemic will continue to improve the health of mothers, children, communities and nations. Those systems will better prepare us for, and help respond to, the next pandemic threat. And our values and our economy will flourish. That will be another remarkable legacy for this Committee and the American people.

The choice before us is clear: do we have a well-planned, structured, successful transition over time that begins today – one that helps make America safer, stronger and more prosperous – or do we squander one of America's greatest achievements, retreating too quickly and chaotically, risking the lives of millions and leaving a void for others to fill. That choice is ours to make.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to your questions.

Africa In Motion: A Survey Of the Forces And Questions Shaping Africa's Future

Amb. Mark Green

President Emeritus of the Wilson Center, former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania and former Member of Congress

"Africa has her mysteries, and even a wise man cannot understand them. But a wise man respects them." Miriam Makeba a/k/a "Mama Africa"

INTRODUCTION

It's impossible to capture all that is going on in Africa in just a few short pages. For one thing, Africa is unimaginably diverse. For another, it is always in motion. What we *can* do is try to recognize the forces and influences that are flowing across Africa and impacting every part of the continent. These forces present both challenges and opportunities for African leaders, and the decisions these leaders make will shape the continent for decades to come.

I believe U.S. policymakers should seize the opportunity to walk with African leaders as they make their choices. Why? Because while I've always believed that Africa matters, I'm absolutely certain of it for the years ahead.

What follows are glimpses of what's shaping Africa's future, as well as a few of the questions leaders will need to address. In addition, for the more ambitious, I've attached some excerpts and links to recent essays that provide some additional context for our discussion.

GLIMPSES OF WHAT'S SHAPING AFRICA

Africa is young. Very young.

- 60% of Sub-Saharan Africans are under 25; 70% are under 30.
- The world's 10 youngest countries are all in Africa. The median age in Niger is 15, in Angola,16, and in Zambia, the 11th youngest country, it's just over 18. In the US, it's about 39.
- 60% of Africa's unemployed are between 15 and 24. (Source: Federation of Kenya Employers)
- According to the World Economic Forum, by 2035, more young Africans will be entering the workforce each year than in the rest of the world *combined*.

Africa is diverse. Very diverse.

- Africa is home to more than 2,000 different languages, the most of any continent. Nigeria itself has over 500 languages and 300 ethnic groups.
- How African governments have dealt with linguistic and ethnic diversity has often had far reaching consequences.
    - Tanzania has approximately 120 distinct ethnic groups. When Julius Nyerere became the country's first president, he created a single official language (Kiswahili) and required every young Tanzanian to undertake national service—and to do so outside of his/her home area.
    - In apartheid-era South Africa, the white minority government used ethnicity and language to divide and disenfranchise Black citizens. Apartheid actually means "separate." South Africa still has 12 official languages.

2/3 of African nations are middle income. Nearly all have a vibrant, entrepreneurial citizenry.

- World Bank data classifies 31 of 54 African nations as Lower Middle Income or higher.
- African entrepreneurs have often harnessed "frugal innovation" to get around infrastructure limitations. M-PESA, launched in 2007 by Kenyan mobile provider Safaricom, brought mobile banking to people without traditional bank accounts—long before it became a part of Western banking services. To get around a weak rural road system, Rwandan health officials partnered with an American start-up to harness drones to deliver fresh blood to any part of the country in less than an hour.
- According to the African Development Bank's 2022 African Youth Survey, 3/4 of all young Africans say they plan to start a business in the next five years.

Africa's biodiversity matters…for Africans and everyone else.

- Africa has every type of landscape and a wide, wide range of ecosystems, habitats, and species. It has approximately 1/4 of the world's bird and mammal species, 1/6 of the world's remaining forests, and 8 of the world's 36 recognized biodiversity hotspots (areas with exceptional concentrations of endemic species).
- The Congo basin area is sometimes referred to as earth's "second green lung" (Amazonia being the first) because it absorbs more in carbon emissions than the continent itself emits.
- Nearly 3/4 of Africans make their living through agriculture—many at a subsistence level.
- In 2021-24, conflict between farmers and herders in Chad killed over 1,200 people and injured more than 2,200. (The International Crisis Group.) The competition over dwindling land resources in many parts of Africa is fueling violent clashes that extremists and criminal gangs are exploiting —and weak governments are struggling to keep under control.

The new “Scramble for Africa”: Precious minerals, hot commodities

- Botswana has the world’s 2nd largest diamond reserves. Angola the 3rd, DRC the 4th, and South Africa the 5th.
- Regarding minerals critical to emerging technologies, DRC produces more than 70% of the world’s cobalt; Guinea has the world's 2nd largest bauxite reserves; South Africa produces 40% of the world's chromium; Madagascar and Mozambique have the 2nd and 3rd largest graphite reserves; Zimbabwe has the 8th largest lithium reserves; South Africa is the largest producer of manganese with Gabon 2nd and Ghana 4th; and Namibia is the world’s largest exporter of uranium.
- Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana together account for over 40% of the world’s cocoa production; Ethiopia and Uganda are 2 of the world’s top 10 coffee producers.

Africans on the move; Africans in need

- Across borders: South Sudan is the world’s 5th largest source of refugees; Uganda is the 5th largest host of refugees.
- Inside countries: Sudan has the world’s highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs). 5 of the 10 largest hosts of IDPs are in Africa (DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan).
- 10 of the world’s 13 most vulnerable countries in humanitarian terms are in Africa. (International Rescue Committee)
- Burdened by weak health systems: In 2023, according to a BBC analysis, malaria was linked to more than a half million deaths, the vast majority of those were African children under five. PEPFAR has prevented more than 25 million deaths, but without it, HIV/AIDS is poised to return in vulnerable communities. The world’s 5 unhealthiest countries are all in Africa. (Legatum Institution Fdn)
- The number of outbreaks caused by zoonotic pathogens increased 63% from 2012-22 compared to the preceding 10 years. (World Health Organization)

PRESSING QUESTIONS FOR AFRICAN LEADERS

- What steps can they take to create the 15+ million jobs per year the IMF says they’ll need in order to keep pace with the number of new entrants into the workforce?

- How can they alleviate the poor access to health care and nutrition that is hampering worker productivity?

- The continent is rich in raw materials, but they’re largely processed and refined elsewhere, reducing Africa’s share of revenues and reducing chances for skilled job opportunities. What can African leaders do to change that?

- Population growth, changing weather patterns, and the demand for work are combining to place new stresses on already overburdened land resources. How can

Africans simultaneously benefit from the natural bounty of biodiversity, while enhancing meaningful economic opportunities for rural communities?

- Africa continues to lag behind the rest of the world in the foreign direct investment needed for infrastructure development. Many countries are strapped with crushing external debt, and China is very often the largest creditor. What is the smartest path forward that meets immediate economic demands while not mortgaging the future?

- Given the record numbers of IDPs and refugees, what can be done to connect those who are displaced with humane opportunities for education, health care, and self-reliance?

HOW CAN THE U.S. BE HELPFUL? SOME POSSIBILITIES…

The proven: Millennium Challenge Corporation, PEPFAR, Feed the Future, USDFC, innovative financing tools (e.g., development impact bonds)

The Latest: Lobito Corridor Project, alternative livelihood investments, new collaborations between conservative community and development leaders

Excerpts of Stubborn Things/Moments Along the Way Blogs[5]

Amb. Mark Green

President Emeritus of the Wilson Center, former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania and former Member of Congress

By 2050, Nigeria will likely have the world's third largest population (surpassing the US) and one of its ten largest economies.[6]

One of every five Africans is Nigerian, and Nigeria boasts Africa's largest economy. It has the world's second largest film industry ("Nollywood"), is a major producer of oil and gas, has significant reserves of lithium and other critical minerals, and has rapidly expanding IT and financial services sectors. A Nigerian start up recently beat out an Israeli consortium for a drone-based security services contract. … Despite its size and significance, there hasn't been a U.S. presidential visit to Nigeria in 10 years.

Even before President Trump took office this year, China had a larger diplomatic presence in Africa than the US.[7]

China is Africa's largest trading partner, and has been for more than a dozen years. And the momentum in the China-Africa relationship seems to be building....But it's also important to understand the broader story of how we got to this point. Beijing has been paying attention to Africa for years and making serious investments in its relationships on the continent. Its diplomatic presence now surpasses that of any other country —including the US. According to the Lowy Institute's 2024 Global Diplomacy Index, China has now established sixty diplomatic posts in Africa. That's 4 more than the US and over 20 more than Russia. … Every official sent out by Beijing in support of a diplomatic post represents Chinese eyes and ears in the field. Each is a Chinese voice on the continent and a new channel for China to spot economic opportunities, press its interests, and pitch for its businesses.

[5] Stubborn Things can be found on Amb. Green's Substack; older posts are at WilsonCenter.org.
[6] https://substack.com/@ambmarkgreen1/note/c-125642325?r=2a16ct&utm_medium=ios&utm_source=notes-share-action
[7] https://substack.com/@ambmarkgreen1/note/p-167806122?r=2a16ct&utm_medium=ios&utm_source=notes-share-action

As of 2020, Africa's natural resources[8] were pledged to back nearly $66 billion in loans made for the most part from China's state-controlled Development and Exim Banks.

Africa has enormous economic potential. It is the youngest continent in the world, and nearly half of the world's working-age population will be African in 30 years. With that youth comes not only a vast source of ready labor, but also a potential treasure trove of new ideas and innovations. The continent is also home to a large portion of the world's most valuable natural resources: 40% of global gold, nearly 90% of chromium and platinum and, overall, about a third of the world's known critical minerals supply. The value of these natural resources will only grow as the global search for new sources of energy and components for ever-faster microchips intensifies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates demand for nickel will likely double by 2050, triple for cobalt, and increase ten times for lithium. Given these demand projections, the IMF estimates that African countries could reap 10% of cumulative global revenues from copper, nickel, cobalt, and lithium—which together are estimated to reach $16 *trillion* dollars—over 25 years.

40% of the world's cocoa beans are produced in Côte d'Ivoire. In February, China opened that country's largest cocoa factory.[9]

Nearly everyone loves chocolate. Increasingly, that includes those living in China, the world's second most populous nation....Meanwhile, China has been proactively keeping up with increased domestic demand for chocolate products. In 2019, China signed a deal with Côte d'Ivoire to open two cocoa processing facilities in San Pedro and Abidjan, the country's economic capital. Each plant can produce 50,000 metric tons of chocolate end-products each year and can store up to 300,000 tons. The Abidjan plant, built by the Chinese company China Light Industry Nanning Design Engineering, is now the largest cocoa bean processing facility in the entire country....Interestingly, when China loaned Côte d'Ivoire $200 million to build these two factories, it negotiated for part of the loan to be repaid in cocoa beans. Accordingly, 40% of the output from both plants will be dedicated to China.

Malaria kills roughly 600,000 people each year, and is now present in four US states. Yet it's largely preventable, and an affordable new vaccine is ramping up in production.[10]

As anyone who has lived or worked in Africa can tell you, malaria has long been a terrible challenge for the continent, imposing considerable human and economic costs.

[8] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/africas-natural-resources-africans
[9] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/china-and-chocolate-factory
[10] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/malaria-largely-preventable-and-yet

The disease kills more than 600,000 people annually, and Africa accounts for 95% of all malaria cases—and 96% of its deaths. Among Africans, pregnant women and young children, who have lower natural immunity, are hit hardest. About 80% of malaria-related deaths are from children under the age of five....When the US government's President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) came on to the scene in 2005, it dramatically expanded the world's access to proven interventions (e.g., insecticide treated bed nets, indoor residual spraying, rapid diagnostic tests, and more), and boosted training for vital health care workers. Together with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, (known as the Global Fund), and other partners, PMI has helped save an estimated 7.6 million lives, and prevented more than 1.5 billion malaria cases.

Ninety-five percent of the animals in Gorongosa National Park were destroyed in Mozambique's civil war. Investments in the people and the communities surrounding the park are bringing the wildlife back[11]—102,000 animals at last count.

Mozambique's Gorongosa National Park has been called "Africa's most successful rewilding effort." Ironically, it's the investments made in the people and communities that are key to that success being sustained....large swaths of the Gorongosa ecosystem were engulfed in the Mozambican civil war that erupted in 1977—a war which caused nearly a million deaths, and the forced displacement of millions more. Fighters often took refuge in the park, killing vast quantities of animals for food, or for money; selling items like elephant tusks helped finance their operations. The war's end only brought partial relief to Gorongosa as economic fallout and ongoing political instability left the area vulnerable to poachers. By 2001, the wildebeest population had dropped from 5,500 to 1, hippos declined from 3,500 to 44, and both elephant herds and lion prides were reduced by 90%....Gorongosa's fortunes finally took a turn for the better when, in 2004, the park captured the attention (and the heart) of American entrepreneur and philanthropist Greg Carr. "The Gorongosa Project" is now the largest employer in central Mozambique. In addition to traditional conservation operations, a growing number of Mozambicans have jobs with innovative SDZ projects that both pay good salaries and incentivize ecosystem preservation.

A study by the Infrastructure Consortium of Africa shows that poor infrastructure—roads, railways, harbors, etc.—adds 30-40% to the costs of goods traded among African countries.[12]

[11] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/rewilding-investing-people
[12] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/why-africa-talks-so-much-about-infrastructure

Part of what holds Africa back in its journey to self-reliance is that many countries there lack the reliable infrastructure that private investment often needs. An analysis by Deloitte shows that the lack of physical infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa is still keeping many investors at bay. Large commodity finds—such as oil, gas, iron ore, platinum, coal, and copper—are driving the need for infrastructure. Yet, at the same time, investment in infrastructure needed to extract and transport these commodities to the global market is also driving Africa's economic growth….African leaders are striving to accelerate infrastructure improvements and are looking to both China and the West for assistance. As we read about nearly every day, China is answering their call. Are we?

On average, 500 nurses leave Ghana for the West every month.[13]

According to the World Health Organization's WHO health workforce support and safeguards list 2023, some 55 countries have significant health staffing shortages—by the numbers, that means fewer than the median of 49 health workers per 10,000 people—and 40 of them are in Africa. In other words, roughly 80% of Africa is experiencing medical staff shortages and high rates of healthcare professionals leaving to work in other countries. … Unfortunately, high rates of healthcare professionals leaving the continent is neither a new phenomenon, nor limited to Ghana. Egypt's former health minister recently lamented that 65% of Egyptian doctors are working abroad, and a report from the UK's House of Commons found that more than 3,000 Ghanaian health professionals had left that country for the United Kingdom from 2018 to 2021. At least 9,000 doctors left Nigeria to work in the UK, United States, and Canada from 2016 to 2018. And, when looking at 2015 data, the WHO found that Liberia had a mere 51 doctors for a population of 4.5 million, and Sierra Leone only had 136 doctors for 6 million people, making the doctor-to-population rate 0.1 and 0.2 per 1,000 people respectively.

A larger share of the world's terrorism-related deaths come from Africa's Sahel region than South Asia and MENA combined.[14]

Each year, the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) produces Global Terrorism Index, or GTI, for 163 separate countries. The most recent GTI finds that, by the numbers, terrorism deaths dropped slightly during 2022. However, much of that "decline" is a result of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan: since the Taliban is now the government, it isn't included in GTI's terrorist calculations.

But the index's most eye-opening finding? The Sahel now accounts for 43 percent of the world's terrorism deaths—more than South Asia and the MENA region combined. That percentage is on the rise. According to GTI, two Sahel countries—Mali and Burkina

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[13] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/africas-healthworker-brain-drain
[14] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/sahel-now-accounts-43-global-terrorism-deaths

Faso—are among the world's five countries most impacted by terrorism deaths. With 1,135 terrorism deaths in 2022, Burkina Faso now accounts for more terrorism deaths annually than any other country.

By the end of 2024, only 10% of the US Representatives who voted to create PEPFAR will still be in office—and none of the legislation's original co-authors will remain.[15]

In 2008, Tanzania President Jakaya Kikwete implored, "Let me just make an appeal: Let PEPFAR continue...Can you imagine if this program is discontinued or disrupted? There would be so many people who lose hope, and certainly there will be death. You create more orphans ... for PEPFAR not to continue, it's a recipe for disaster for us." Standing next to him at a joint public appearance, US President George W. Bush said, "It appalled me very early on in my administration to realize that an entire generation of people could be lost to HIV/AIDS, and that those of us who were comfortable weren't doing much about it."

[15] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/pepfar-looking-back-looking-ahead

The Gavi Leap: Radical Transformation For a New Global Health Architecture

Sania Nishtar

CEO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

It has long been acknowledged that the global health system needs reform. Although this system has improved public health, saved lives, and advanced health equity,[1,2] it remains fragmented, uncoordinated, at times inefficient, and in some settings even a barrier to progress.[3] Now, in the harsh light of geopolitical realities in 2025 and an unprecedented squeeze on funding from traditional donor countries,[4] discussions about how to reform global health have taken on an existential quality.

As the Chief Executive Officer of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, I believe that transformative change is required to protect the gains of the past and to secure further progress in the future. The global health system needs to embrace a new reality in which international institutions have a clear understanding of their mandates and their lifespans and work seamlessly together to serve the interests of the countries that request their support. This will require difficult conversations and some tough choices about the form, function, and, in some cases, the continuity of some institutions going forward as we seek to deliver the maximum public health benefits for the funding available.

Gavi, a public–private partnership, can point to a quantifiable impact on health and development over the past 25 years. We have helped to vaccinate more than 1·1 billion children in low-income and middle-income countries and prevented more than 18 million deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.[1] But this record does not make us an exception to the challenges or the criticisms facing the global health architecture.[3]

When I joined Gavi just over a year ago, I began a radical transformation of the organisation to embrace new ways of working that would prepare us to deliver the goals of our next 5-year strategic period (2026–30), known as Gavi 6.0.[5] At the centre of the Gavi Leap, as we call this process of transformation, are four principles that I believe have broader relevance for our global health peers and partners as we seek to remake the global health landscape, and restore confidence and optimism in the ability of global health institutions to reshape the world for the better.

Country-centricity is the first organising principle of the Gavi Leap. Currently, already under-resourced countries cope with cumbersome parallel processes and reporting indicators of different global health agencies with agendas that are not aligned. In alignment with the 2023 Lusaka Agreement on the Future of Global Health Initiatives process,[6] Gavi has taken concrete steps to reform our processes to ensure they are responsive to country needs, not burdensome. From 2026 onwards, countries will have much more agency over how Gavi support for vaccine programmes and the health systems that deliver them is deployed. Gavi is in the process of simplifying and streamlining engagement with countries through a root and branch reform of our grant-making process.

From eight grant opportunities, or windows, for Gavi-eligible countries to apply for support that each followed a different timetable, Gavi is moving to one grant window for the Gavi 6.0 strategic cycle. This means that countries will only need to apply for funding once during the Gavi 6.0 period, and all of that funding will be aligned with the priorities set out in Gavi's 6.0 strategy,[5] which was itself developed in close consultation with countries to ensure it reflected national priorities. A new monitoring strategy will link metrics with accountability for all partners in our vaccine alliance—starting with the Secretariat—for better delivery and coherence.

These changes, along with a further evolution of the way we operate at the country level during the Gavi 6.0 period, also offer an unprecedented partnership opportunity for global health initiatives, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to align grant cycles and metrics, programme jointly, and establish a mandated model of health systems collaboration. We are already working together to realise this potential. In addition, Gavi is supporting the aspiration of countries in Africa to expand their own vaccine manufacturing capacity.[7] Putting countries at the centre of global health, rather than prioritising the agendas of institutions in the Global North, is an overdue rebalancing of agency that can improve efficiency and accelerate impact.

The second principle of the Gavi Leap is self-reliance. Global health institutions can only be truly country-centric if they are designed to empower and enable countries to assume full responsibility for health programmes. Gavi's model of financial support has always been predicated on the principle that countries pay more towards the cost of immunisation as their national income rises, until they reach a threshold at which they transition to full self-financing. This model works, as is evidenced by 19 countries graduating from Gavi support. Almost all countries that are eligible for Gavi support meet the full co-financing costs of their immunisation programmes.[1] Crucially, this model also has strong support from national governments, as evidenced by the Abidjan Declaration, in which nine African countries agreed to concrete steps towards vaccine self-reliance.[8] That is why Gavi is supporting countries to unlock more resources for immunisation, including through support for budget planning and public finance management, and by facilitating partnerships with multilateral development banks to support transitions to vaccine self-reliance.[9] Gavi believes cultivating support for self-reliance should be a guiding principle of all global health organisations.

Focused mandates for global health institutions is the third principle. Fragmentation and duplication of efforts are inevitable and often inadvertent consequences of mission creep as global health organisations evolve in response to crises, donor priorities, and competition.[3] Over the next 5 years, Gavi will work with renewed focus on our core strengths of market shaping and innovative finance to save lives and strengthen global health security by improving access to vaccines. Gavi has succeeded as a vaccine alliance because we leverage the comparative advantage of each of our public and private partners, from the technical expertise and the procurement power of UN agencies to the agility of manufacturers and the community knowledge of civil society. A similar focus on defined and discrete mandates for organisations working towards shared, country-driven goals within global health would enable the system to achieve more for less.

The fourth principle is finite lifespans for operational global health entities. A flaw in the current global health architecture is that few institutions have sunset clauses with an end date for the organisation written into their articles of incorporation. This includes Gavi, and although it is our goal to put ourselves out of business, there is no timetable for doing so. Having clear parameters for the termination of operational duties provides focus and urgency, and a clear incentive to help countries achieve self-reliance. This will be an important theme in Gavi's work on the future of immunisation.

The world around us forces us to confront the profound challenges facing global health with speed, concrete actions, and ambition. The four principles of the Gavi Leap could serve as a blueprint for a wider global health leap to improve the health and the lives of those most in need during this period of unprecedented change. We stand ready to work with all stakeholders to make that happen. And to that end, we will propose a process that, we hope, can bring us together to forge a new consensus on the future of our global health architecture.

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The Case for Revitalized, Reoriented United States Investment in African Food and Nutrition Security

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This year, the United States government (USG) began a historically unprecedented disengagement from Africa. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)[1] and Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)[2] have effectively closed. Only a temporary court order has (as of the time of this writing) kept the (very small) United States African Development Foundation (ADF)[3] open. Billions in USG contributions have been rescinded from multilateral agencies actively working in Africa, such as the African Development Bank, Gavi The Vaccine Alliance, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAids), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and UN Peacekeeping operations, among others. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR),[4] which has saved tens of millions of African lives, barely escaped rescission and faces a sharply reduced budget. Other governments have followed the USG lead in disinvesting, compounding the damage. A strong case can certainly be made for major reforms to and portfolio reallocation within US foreign assistance. I make several such arguments below. But the present strategy reflects unwise retreat, not sage reform.

USG investments in African nutritional and food security had long enjoyed bipartisan support because they represented an exceptionally cost-effective means for the US to project 'soft power' and to promote US-based businesses around the world, and an impactful way to advance distinctively American values concerning democracy, human rights, and market-based economies. This essay's central argument is that not only was this disengagement ill-advised, but for moral, national security, and economic reasons the USG should invest far more heavily in Africa, especially in the region's food and nutrition security, albeit with some reorientation relative to past practices.

The Moral Case

The moral case for investment is straightforward: the humanitarian imperative to save lives and relieve avoidable human suffering on the basis of need, without discrimination. For decades the US has supplied most of the world's humanitarian aid, reflecting longstanding bipartisan support for the humanitarian imperative.

Africa represents less than 20% of the world's population yet is home to roughly 40% of the world's hungry people. Low agricultural productivity and limited import capacity, combined with pockets of recurring conflict and the increasingly frequent extreme weather events, conspire to make Africans unusually unlikely to afford a nutritious diet.

That causes high rates of child stunting and diet-related diseases, especially those related to mineral and vitamin (i.e., micronutrient) deficiencies. Children who suffer undernutrition early in life –especially before their 2nd birthday, in the first 1000 days post-conception – run a high risk of irreversible loss of adult physical and neurocognitive function, as well as increased morbidity and mortality. In Africa, 70 out of every 1,000 children die before their fifth birthday, ten times the rate in the US. This is avoidable human suffering.

Most severe acute malnutrition occurs in places and times of crisis. That's where humanitarian response is most essential. The world's only officially declared famines of the 21st century have plagued Africa (Somalia in 2011, South Sudan in 2017), as have the large majority of near-famine declarations (in Ethiopia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan). Rapid, cost-effective humanitarian response is essential in such contexts.

USAID was the global pacesetter in famine early warning, rapid deployment of (US-made) ready-to-use therapeutic foods, and humanitarian food assistance. Congressional restrictions on international food assistance long created inefficiencies that USAID has effectively minimized over the past generation.

A comprehensive recent assessment estimates that USAID funding from 2001-21 saved 91.8 million lives, including 30.4 million children younger than five years, partly from health interventions that achieved, for example, a 50-65% reduction in mortality from HIV/AIDS, malaria and neglected tropical diseases, and partly from feeding programs. Those gains are now being lost, with gross waste and grave consequences. Just this month the State Department destroyed ~500 tons of emergency food rations, wasting ~$1 million of taxpayer funds. More tragically, without reversal of these funding reductions, an estimated 14.1 million people, including 4.5 million children under the age of five, are projected to die avoidable deaths by 2030.

The most cost-effective, sustainable way to promote nutritional security is to avoid food emergencies by boosting the incomes of the poor. 45% of Africa's population falls beneath the global extreme poverty line (US$3.00/day per person in 2021 purchasing power parity terms), and at least two-thirds of them live in rural areas and work in agriculture. A large research literature shows that boosting agricultural productivity – through improved inputs (fertilizers, machinery, seed), soil and water management, and physical and institutional infrastructure (roads, commodity exchanges) – has far bigger poverty reduction bang per dollar invested than any other development interventions.

The National Security Case

As a recent Wall Street Journal headline highlighted, "Africa has entered a new era of war." While less widely covered by media than the conflicts in Gaza or Ukraine, Africa is now experiencing more conflicts than at any time post-World War II. More conflict causes more poverty and more acutely malnourished people, stretching even more thinly the world's already-underfunded humanitarian aid programs.

It is equally true and concerning, however, that causality also flows the other way: more food emergencies result in more conflict. Since the 2008 global food price crisis, recurring episodes of sociopolitical unrest and violent conflict have been fueled partly by food insecurity. Rising food insecurity highlights a government's failure to safeguard its constituents' ability to feed their family, sowing unrest and fertile ground for insurgents to recruit combatants. Rising food prices make land and water more valuable resources over which groups become more willing and likely to fight. A hungrier world with more expensive food is a more dangerous world.

As the USG withdraws from supporting Africans in their time of need – and retreats from educating Africa's future leaders – it weakens US influence in global fora like the UN, which undercuts our national security. Moreover, US withdrawal facilitates regimes hostile to US national interests gaining footholds and influence throughout Africa. African conflict is internationalizing as Russia, China, and Iran engage more, with serious potential consequences for the US military and our national security. We can reduce these pressures by investing in reducing the prevalence and severity of malnutrition and improving the livelihoods of rural Africans.

Pandemics and antimicrobial resistance represent another national security concern. The 2014 Ebola scare and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic underscore how quickly local problems overseas can spread, with calamitous consequences as we combat microbial adversaries. Agrifood systems are the source of most zoonoses emergent in humans since World War II. Plausibly COVID-19, and certainly Ebola, bird flu, swine flu, plague, and other zoonoses arise largely due to agricultural expansion into wildlands. We can and must preempt pandemics that arise from agrifood systems by identifying and stopping them at their point of origin. Africa is the locus of most agricultural land expansion today and thus the most likely incubator of the next horrific pandemic. We also face a looming antimicrobial resistance crisis due in part to the rapidly rising use of (poorly managed) antibacterial agents in livestock and aquaculture production to meet the growing demand for animal-source foods. That demand growth is greatest and regulation weakest in Africa. Averting such threats requires investing in improvements to African agrifood systems to stem conversion of forests and wetlands that are the reservoirs of pathogens modern medicine cannot yet combat effectively.

The Economic Case

The economic case for investing in African nutritional and food security is simple: the return on investment is exceptionally high, far higher than virtually anything else in the USG budget. Recent, careful World Bank analysis estimates that every dollar invested in combating malnutrition yields an average return of $23 through improved health, education, and adult productivity. Hundreds of studies of such investments consistently return similarly high estimates of the return on investment in international agricultural research, at least $10 returned per dollar spent. Those returns are even higher – more than $30 return per dollar invested! – in African food and agricultural R&D because of massive underinvestment. By contrast the average economic multiplier on USG spending is just $1.50 per dollar. Investment in African nutrition and food security returns 15-20 times the gains of the average USG expenditure.

Good nutrition translates into good health, which results in better educated, more productive workers. The earlier in life one starts being reliably well-nourished, the bigger the gains. The median age in Africa is just 19 years. It is the only major world region poised for significant population growth by 2100, to a projected 3.5 billion. As the U.S. population ages, and soon begins to shrink, Africa will become a crucial source of working age adults, especially in high-demand sectors like health care and information technology, in which U.S. businesses and non-profits already struggle to find qualified workers. Investments in African children today help ensure a high-quality U.S. workforce of the future. If you want your children to have non-robot nursing and health care aide options when they become senior citizens, invest in Africa's children today.

Investments in Africa today also build consumer demand for US-made products tomorrow. Although Africa today accounts for less than ten percent of a roughly US$8 trillion global food market, that will change dramatically in the coming decades. Africa is the only world region where the market for food products – indeed for consumer goods, more broadly – will grow substantially. Africa will lead the world in population growth, and possibly also in income growth rate, and because Africa is the poorest continent, the share of that income growth that converts into food demand is also the world's highest. As a result, 60-75 percent of global food demand growth to 2100 will occur in Africa, at least tripling the region's global market share and making it an increasingly important market for U.S. farmers and food-related businesses. As African agricultural productivity grows, incomes rise and demand for U.S. products does as well. This trend is already evident. Inflation-adjusted annual revenue growth in Africa's food retail and food service sectors far outpaced that of any other world region over the past decade, more than five times the U.S. growth rate.

What To Do?

Feeding an extra 2+ billion Africans this century will be a massive challenge because African farmers suffer the world's lowest agricultural productivity and the vast majority of the supply needed to meet that new demand must be produced in Africa, not imported from abroad. Roughly 60% of the world's remaining arable land is in Africa and >70% of food consumption occurs in the same country that grew the underlying commodity(ies), even more in poorer, land-locked countries. So reaping the moral, national security, and economic rewards requires investing in boosting sustainable, science-based agricultural productivity growth in Africa.

The highest single priority is to sustainably boost healthy food productivity growth. That requires investing more and differently. U.S. public agricultural research, development and extension (R&D&E) investment has fallen by one-third in 20 years and remains trapped in turn-of-the-millenium designs. The same is true of CGIAR, the international network of agricultural research centers that birthed the Green Revolution that rescued humanity from the last food-related poly-crisis, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, earning a plant breeder, Norman Borlaug, the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize. The returns to CGIAR research historically have been extremely high. But CGIAR funding and science have stagnated. There is a direct link from reduced and outdated R&D&E to poly-crisis.

Much of R&D&E investment expansion must occur in Africa because technological advances developed for U.S. agrifood systems do not translate well to radically different agroecosystems. Crop varieties developed for the U.S. lose ~80% of gains when used in Africa. African agricultural research and extension systems presently lack the scale and expertise to adapt, translate, and extend new agrifood systems discoveries. African farmers are not our competitors so much as they can be our customers and partners.

Seven principles should guide policy design and implementation:

1) **Emphasize basic and applied science for impactful innovation.** The highest returns come from tackling the most basic, universal challenges: photosynthetic processes, animal and plant disease resistance, soil health, improved water management, etc. Most US foreign assistance historically has been local, bilateral programming, with uneven returns. We must rebalance the USG aid portfolio to invest far more in 'global public goods', innovations that transcend boundaries, unlocking the considerable, untapped potential of Africa's and the world's food systems – and in complementary biomedical, energy, and computational science and engineering (e.g., renewable energy, shelf-stable vaccines). Such innovation also requires investment in the brightest young minds. Today China hosts more than twice as many African university students as the US, building business, cultural, and political ties. A large share of those future African leaders study agricultural and food issues in China, although the US Land Grant University system remains the world's finest, for now. Not only will those future business and political leaders' primary allegiance favor China rather than the US, but those students are currently helping China leapfrog the US in agrifood (and many other) industries.

2) **Move beyond staple crops.** The USG should maintain R&D&E on calorie-rich staple grains, roots, and tubers, which get the lion's share of agricultural R&D&E funding now. But the USG should sharply expand R&D&E on micronutrient-rich, high-value foods to address diet-related health problems and farm profitability. There is tremendous promise in so-called 'specialty crops' – fruits, nuts, and vegetables – and many neglected – or 'orphan' – crops in Africa. Also, novel foods based on synthetic biology or chemosynthetic processes reduce reliance on conventional agriculture. Genetic advances to biofortify staple crops with essential micronutrients can address nutrient-deficient diets. Meanwhile, improved animal nutrition and genetics to reduce methane emissions and antibiotic resistance, and circular systems that cost-effectively convert waste products into fertilizers and livestock feed can accommodate rising animal-source food consumption within planetary boundaries, boosting nutrition and productivity both.

3) **Reduce water, land, antibiotics, and agrochemicals use.** Nature and human health cannot endure expanded use of these inputs and feedback (e.g., from climate change or soil nutrient loss) wipes out productivity gains. Novel production processes for familiar foods – e.g., cultivated proteins, vertical farming – as well as novel foods, including many 'alternative proteins', are especially helpful here, complementing advances based on crop and livestock genetics accelerated by new genomic techniques such as those involving gene editing.

4) **Look beyond the farm.** Three-quarters of the value of global consumer food expenditures accrues to firms beyond the farmgate, such as processors, manufacturers, retailers, and restaurants, who also employ far more workers than farms do. These are the most concentrated parts of agrifood value chains. Enforce competition policy, set clear, science-based standards for food manufacturing, retail, and wholesale – for example, more nutrient fortification and less unhealthy ultra-processing – and use public food procurement policies to induce a race to the top, not the bottom, among food producers, processors, and wholesalers. Improved practices in the U.S. spill over into other markets, including Africa's.

5) **Leverage private sector financing.** The public sector cannot and should not foot the R&D&E bill. An extra $5 billion for public agricultural R&D&E is a heavy lift for the USG and especially for African governments. But it is pocket change for corporate America. We can better leverage taxpayers' and philanthropists' current investments by using policy tools that attract significant private agrifood systems R&D&E and disaster finance.

6) **Respond promptly, generously, and cost-effectively to crises as they emerge.** Humanitarian response has become considerably more cost-effective over the past generation, boosting the payoffs to modern emergency food assistance. Yet the U.S. – and especially other rich countries –respond inadequately, especially in Africa. Three of the four nations with the largest populations at risk (≥20 million each) are African: DR Congo, Ethiopia, and Sudan. In 2023, humanitarian assistance to those three countries covered only 34-43% of assessed needs. This is a penny-wise, pound-foolish policy. The costs of addressing food emergencies only rise the longer one waits. As children's malnutrition intensifies, the cost per child increases dramatically, with irreversible cognitive and physical developmental impacts if response is too little or too late. Desperate families risk dangerous migrations to high-income countries, including the U.S., and serving displaced persons, much less refugees, is far more expensive than supporting them in their homes. Radical groups prey on the fears and needs of food-insecure people to sow sociopolitical instability.

7) **Prioritize children and pregnant and lactating women.** Good nutrition during a baby's first thousand days, from conception through the child's second birthday, lays the foundation for adult cognitive, emotional, and physical potential. They are the highest return subpopulation to target. Of course, that requires prioritizing pregnant and lactating women as well. These interventions are relatively cheap. Providing pregnant women with free prenatal vitamins, vitamin A supplementation drops for young children, breastfeeding promotion, and mandatory food fortification (e.g., iodized salt, fortifying flour and vegetable oils with folic acid, iron, and zinc) sharply reduce maternal and child malnutrition, yielding great returns.

What specific steps can the Congress take, based on those seven guiding principles?

A. Set explicit productivity growth targets: Legislatively target 1.5-2.5% annual growth in agrifood system total factor productivity (that is, the value of output divided by the value of all inputs), domestically and globally. Globally, we have dipped to about 1.1% annually, and essentially no growth in the U.S. and in Africa. Moreover, set targets in terms of essential nutrients (e.g., iron, calcium, vitamin A), not just in monetary value terms. We can and should grow the supply of essential nutrients by 3-4% per year. Hold federal agencies and international partners – e.g., the World Bank, Constructive Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) – accountable for meeting those targets. Empower agency leadership and their technical experts to develop and implement strategies to deliver those results, based on the best available scientific evidence, without political micro-management. Do this via both guidance in Farm Bill Title VII (Research) and various foreign affairs appropriations (e.g., Feed the Future, Global Food Security Act (GFSA), CGIAR, World Bank) as well as through directives to U.S. Government representatives in multilateral organizations.

B. Give agencies the resources to meet those targets. Agricultural R&D&E is one of the very highest return public investments in the federal budget, with an average benefit/cost above 20! Yet U.S. public agricultural R&D&E has fallen by one-third over the past two decades. China has overtaken the U.S.; soon Brazil and India will too. We need to reverse course. Double federal agrifood systems R&D&E budgets through USDA research enterprises, at a cost of approximately $5 billion/year. Simultaneously, to generate innovations customized to African food systems, triple US support for CGIAR (via the World Bank), a cost of just $400 million/year, and appropriate the $1 billion needed to resuscitate the recently-dismantled Feed the Future Innovation Labs that put the best US science from Land Grant Universities to work on the targets advanced above. Direct the US Executive Directors of the World Bank and the regional development banks to prioritize those same targets in their institutions' grant and loan portfolios.

C. Prioritize African-led agricultural R&D&E for Africa. Africa outsources much of its agrifood systems R&D&E because it lacks adequate institutional capacity to reap the economies of scale and scope that drive much of the return on such investments. The high returns already enjoyed on U.S. and CGIAR R&D&E would rise further if complemented by African R&D&E institutions with the scale, scope, and scientists to do the adaptive research and extension needed to promote commercial distribution of improved genetic and other inputs and practices. U.S. matching funding, directly and through the multilateral development banks, can induce greater, concerted investment by African governments in multi-national regional programs organized around agroecological zones common to many countries, possibly under the direction of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa. Resolving the technology mismatch problem that plagues African agricultural R&D&E requires adequate funding for vibrant, problem-oriented science led by and serving Africans.

D. Leverage the private sector better. Public and philanthropic R&D&E investments can be multiplied many times over by policies that incentivize private firms appropriately. Advanced market commitments – like those used to accelerate investment in and discovery and delivery of COVID-19 and pneumococcal vaccines – can be used in the agrifood space. For example, direct VA hospitals to commit to purchasing antibiotic-free alternative proteins with attractive nutrient profiles at the prevailing price of conventional protein sources. That ensures a profitable market for a high-quality product, eliciting private investment and accelerated R&D&E. Use benevolent patent extensions to induce cash-rich firms with expiring patents to support CGIAR or Africa-based laboratories presently starved for funding. Use modern financial tools – such as catastrophic drought insurance – that have proved highly impactful and more cost-effective than many cash transfer programs.

E. Restore, then expand support for rural infrastructure in rural and small-town America (like the Rural Energy America Program - REAP) and in Africa development projects. Roads and communications infrastructure are the backbone of healthy market economies. Renewable energy is equally essential. Help farmers harness sunlight, methane from manure lagoons, wind, and geothermal energy to boost post-harvest processing, reduce food loss and waste, and stimulate job creation and economic growth to reduce hunger. Enable small cities and towns to convert vacant factory, military, and warehouse space to controlled environment agriculture and novel feeds/foods production, which can restore high quality jobs to rural areas while reducing the use of land, water, antibiotics, and toxic chemicals as well as crop loss to pathogens and pests. MCC was good at this before it was shuttered.

F. Expand support for global safety nets. For generations, the United States has been the world's most generous humanitarian donor. That must continue post-USAID and our diplomats must push others to offer their fair share of support, too. That support needs to heed the evidence of the past twenty years, using the most flexible, cost-effective, contextually appropriate policy instruments in emergency and non-emergency food assistance, and resist interest group pressures to try to capture humanitarian programs for commercial gain. Safety nets to protect lives and livelihoods during emergencies are an essential complement to technological advances. They save lives and livelihoods, while depriving hostile actors from using food insecurity grievances as a recruiting tool.

Producing affordable, healthy food in Africa using environmentally sustainable practices while effectively and generously addressing disasters where they arise will be the world's biggest social, environmental, technical, and humanitarian challenge in the final two-thirds of the 21st century. Directing public investment, diplomatic efforts, and private sector activity towards meeting this challenge promises enormous national security, moral, and economic gains in the coming decades.

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[2] MCC was founded in 2004 by President George W. Bush to support compacts with a small, competitively selected group of low- and lower-middle-income countries (LLMICs). MCC supported country-led strategies to promote sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction, following a model advanced by critics of conventional foreign aid practices, like those employed by USAID. It was the only USG agency that supported public sector infrastructure in the region, offering a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013. At the beginning of 2025, MCC had multi-year agreements in force in 12 African nations – Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zambia – totaling just over $3.5 billion.

[3] ADF, launched in 1980, provides grants of up to $250,000 and capacity-building assistance to African enterprises and entrepreneurs, leveraging host country government and private sector investments. It's most recent (FY2025) Congressional appropriation was just $45 million.

[4] Like MCC, PEPFAR was founded in 2003 under President George W. Bush. It's roughly $5 billion annual budget has always concentrated overwhelmingly on sub-Saharan Africa.

Severe Weather Patterns: Implications for African Food Security

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Escalating Severe Weather Patterns in Africa

Africa stands at the frontline of several crises. Extreme weather events are intensifying, undermining food security, displacing communities, and threatening development gains. The continent is grappling with the warmest decade on record,[1] record-high sea surface temperatures, and a cascade of shocks that are accelerating hunger, migration, and insecurity.

Africa is the most vulnerable continent to extreme weather events, despite contributing only about 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The year 2024 was among the warmest on record, with the average surface temperature across Africa approximately 0.86°C above the 1991–2020 baseline. Sea surface temperatures around Africa also reached record highs, particularly in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. These conditions triggered marine heatwaves that spanned nearly 30 million km² of ocean between January and April, the largest extent recorded since monitoring began in 1993. These heatwaves disrupted marine ecosystems, intensified tropical storms, and worsened coastal vulnerabilities through sea-level rise and erosion.[2]

Inland, droughts and floods have devastated livelihoods: in 2024, cereal yields plummeted by up to 50% in some African countries, while other parts of the continent endured deadly floods that displaced hundreds of thousands, affecting over 4 million people.[3]

These are not isolated incidents. Rather, they reflect a broader pattern of escalating volatility that is affecting every sector of African life, from agriculture and energy to health and education.

Without urgent adaptation and resilience-building, Africa's development trajectory remains perilously exposed.

Impact of severe weather patterns on food security

Despite recent gains in agricultural productivity and a rapidly growing population, Africa is projected to remain a net food importer, the challenge is how to produce more food to meet both trade and local consumption needs.

Over 95% of Africa's agriculture is rain-fed—making it particularly vulnerable to rainfall variability and prolonged droughts. Increasingly frequent extreme weather events are disrupting planting and harvesting cycles, degrading soil health and water availability, contributing to disease outbreaks in both crops and livestock, reducing yields, and increasing post-harvest losses – not only reducing food availability, but also undermining the resilience of food systems. From North to South, droughts in the Sahel and Horn of Africa have decimated crops and livestock, while floods in Southern Africa have destroyed infrastructure and displaced farming communities.

The effects are profound: reduced productivity leads to lower incomes, less food, and increased reliance on humanitarian aid. In regions where agriculture is the primary source of income, the loss of a single harvest can tip families into chronic poverty.

Beyond the direct impacts on food production, climate-induced weather extremes are also contributing to social and political instability. A report on Southern Africa highlights how environmental stressors – especially drought – are intensifying competition over water and arable land.[4] This has led to rising tensions between communities, increased migration, and, in some cases, violent conflict. The report warns that, without proactive adaptation strategies, we could observe a major increase in instability across the continent. Countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi have declared states of emergency, with over 68 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.[5]

As of late 2023, 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced globally, with 80% suffering from acute food insecurity.[6] A considerable proportion are in Africa, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCASs)7. These disruptions ripple through economies, causing job losses, food price spikes, and reduced access to essential services, which in turn fuel social tensions and weaken public trust in institutions.

Food insecurity in Africa: Facts & Figures

As a result of these vulnerabilities, Africa remains the most food-insecure continent globally. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, over 280 million Africans – more than one-fifth of the continent's population – are undernourished. The UN projects that by 2030, 582 million people will face chronic undernourishment globally, with over half residing in Africa.[8] Despite holding 60% of the world's remaining arable land,[9] the continent's food systems remain fragile, inefficient, and unproductive.

Food insecurity is deeply intertwined with rural livelihoods. In many African countries, agriculture employs over 50% of the labor force,[10] yet productivity remains low due to limited access to improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation, and extension services. Smallholder farmers, who produce around one-third of the world's food,[11] are particularly exposed. Their reliance on rain-fed agriculture makes them acutely vulnerable to climate variability, while limited access to finance and markets constrains their ability to adapt. The changing environment and new weather patterns act as compounding factors that further intensify these vulnerabilities.

Concurrently, displacement is on the rise. As weather patterns become more erratic, rural populations are increasingly forced to migrate in search of stable food supply and livelihoods. This trend is not unique to Africa, but the continent's limited adaptive capacity makes it particularly vulnerable. In FCASs, such as Ethiopia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Somalia, the convergence of heat stress, droughts and floods, political instability, and displacement creates a perfect storm for chronic food insecurity.

The importance of agricultural R&I in Africa

Agriculture is both a contributor to and a potential solution, and more critically so in Africa. Food production generates 25–37% of global greenhouse gas emissions,[12] drives 80% of deforestation,[13] and consumes 70% of freshwater.[14] However, when equipped with the right science, smallholder farmers can transform agriculture into a powerful lever that can sequester carbon and make soil healthy again. Agricultural R&D is among the highest-return investments in development. A recent benefit-cost analysis found that expanding R&D in the Global South could increase agricultural output by 10%, reduce hunger by 35%, lower food prices by 16%, and raise per capita income by 4%, with a benefit-cost ratio of 33. This means that every $1 invested in agricultural R&D yields $33 in economic benefits, making it one of the most cost-effective tools for supporting global stability and prosperity.[15]

Despite this, very little finance reaches small-scale agriculture,[16] and most funding is reactive, arriving only after crises are underway. Chronic hunger and malnutrition remain politically invisible, even though food systems impose $12 trillion in hidden costs annually. To transform them, we need $400 billion per year, just 0.5% of global GDP.[17]

CGIAR's high-impact innovations

CGIAR and its partners are at the forefront of this transformation, delivering science-based, African-led solutions that are already reshaping food systems across the continent.

- **Forecasting:** Information services, like seasonal forecasts, early warning systems, the creation of digitally enabled extension systems that link farmers/livestock keepers with real-time, climate informed advisory, are proving to be a game-changer in managing climate risk. CGIAR innovations reached more than 9 million people from 2021 to 2024.Satellite-based early warning systems for droughts and floods, and platforms like the Zambia Drought Management

System (ZADMS) and AWARE (Early Warning, Early Action, Early Finance), are providing governments, businesses, and farmers with critical data, helping them plan for floods and droughts, improve their productivity, and protect their harvests.

- **Indexed based livestock insurance in the horn of Africa:** Pastoralists in East Africa have always faced episodic drought, however the frequency has increased in the recent decades. Satellite-indexed livestock insurance helps manage risk by triggering payouts when forage falls below critical thresholds. Over 100,000 policies have been sold in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan, covering 1.1 million people. Bundling insurance with savings, animal health, and advisory services is enhancing resilience, reducing poverty traps, and encouraging private sector engagement to build sustainable, market-based solutions for livestock communities.[18]

- **Solar irrigation:** Small-scale irrigation makes farms more resilient to drought and increases productivity, with high quality irrigated crops also increasingly more appealing to consumers. CGIAR research informed a USD$500 million solar irrigation technology facility under development in Nigeria and improved a USD$300 million solar-irrigation technology facility in Uganda. Approximately 50,000 pumps are in use. Over 360,000 farmers have accessed climate-smart financing for solar-powered irrigation and input packages, drought-tolerant seeds, integrated aquaculture/agriculture innovations, and livestock integration - fueling rural entrepreneurship and reducing rain-fed dependency.

- **Staple crops**: Plant breeding is driving large-scale adoption of innovations that protect smallholder cereal farmers from intensifying weather extremes and pest outbreaks. For example, drought-tolerant, heat-resilient, and Fall Armyworm-resistant maize varieties are now available for the diverse agro-ecologies of Africa, covering over 7.2 million hectares across 13 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, directly benefiting an estimated 44.5 million people. Their adoption has led to a 15% average yield increase, 30% reduction in crop failure, and up to US$240 per hectare in added income—equivalent to nine months of staple food for a typical rural household.

  A new rice variety, NERICA, which is drought tolerant and heat-resistant, combines traits from African and Asian rice varieties. Yields rise from ~1 tonne per hectare to over 2.5 tonnes per hectare under rainfed conditions. Some genotypes perform well in infertile soils with low water input.

- **Roots and Tuber Crops (RTCs):** Intercropping and crop rotation with RTCs enhances soil fertility, reduces pests and diseases, and boosts productivity. Integrating RTCs with legumes or cereals, for example the orange-fleshed sweet potato, supports soil health, nutrition, biodiversity, and severe weather adaptation.

- **Fish farming:** CGIAR is working in Zambia to combine fish farming with crop and small livestock production, which is helping diversify livelihoods, improve resource access to women and conserve natural resources thanks to recycling of nutrients and water. These innovative systems are building resilience against weather variabilities, while increasing fish production by 71%.

- **Vaccinating livestock against infectious diseases:** Vaccines are essential in the fight against diseases like Foot and Mouth and Peste des Petites Ruminants (PPR). For PPR, a thermo-tolerate vaccine has enabled vaccination to be scaled up to remote areas. A 2016 cost-benefit analysis for the proposed global PPR eradication program determined a cost-benefit ratio of 33.8. In Senegal, farm households with PPR vaccination earned an average gross margin of $69.43 (annually) more than those without vaccination.

Overall, between 2022 and 2024, CGIAR informed $2.5 billion in third-party investments in Africa. Its innovations were adopted by 3.7 million farmers and over 5,000 organizations. More than over 500 crop varieties have been co-developed with more than 600 partners.[18]

But to scale these solutions and deliver the system-wide transformation that is needed, we must move beyond reliance on public funding. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) and blended finance are essential for this. PPPs combine public policy with private sector innovation, helping integrate smallholder farmers into value chains and improve market access.

When effectively designed, they can unlock investments in infrastructure, digital platforms, seed systems, and insurance schemes that directly benefit smallholder farmers. Blended finance instruments, such as concessional loans, risk guarantees, and outcome-based incentives, can de-risk investments in underserved or fragile markets, encouraging private actors to engage where they might otherwise hesitate.

Importantly, these financial models also support the integration of smallholders into formal value chains, expanding their access to inputs, credit, and markets while promoting inclusive growth. To succeed, PPPs must be guided by strong governance frameworks, transparent accountability mechanisms, and a clear focus on long-term development outcomes rather than short-term profits.

Research and innovation that definitively addresses root causes and unlocks sustainability at scale takes time. Unlike short-term interventions, agricultural R&D efforts often require years – sometimes decades – to deliver measurable outcomes. Developing, testing, adapting, and scaling innovations that are both scientifically robust and socially accepted require iterative and sustained engagement with farmers, policymakers, and institutions. This is particularly true in fragile and vulnerable contexts, where capacity constraints and systemic barriers demand persistent, context-specific solutions.

Long-term commitment is not only essential for scientific progress but also for building trust with local communities and ensuring that innovations are embedded within national development strategies. Investing with a patient, generational mindset is the only way to transform food production in a way that is both resilient and equitable.

Strategic opportunities for the United States

The United States has long been a founding partner and strategic ally of CGIAR. Continued U.S. engagement has historically proven to be a forward-looking investment in American prosperity, security, and leadership, too. The innovations that CGIAR delivers in Africa and the Global South have provided tangible and measurable benefits across U.S. agriculture, agribusiness, and public health.

CGIAR-developed seeds account for 60% of wheat grown in the United States. These improved varieties, engineered for yield, disease resistance, and drought tolerance, have enabled American farmers to produce an additional 1 million tons of wheat per year, increasing profitability by over $15 billion since 1971. Similarly, CGIAR's work on rice has added as much as $43 million to U.S. farm annual incomes. The drought- tolerant maize varieties developed through CGIAR programs have been commercialized by U.S. agribusiness firms and marketed across Africa, strengthening both food security abroad and economic returns at home.

Moreover, CGIAR's global pest and disease surveillance networks, implemented in partnership with developing countries, help prevent outbreaks from reaching U.S. farms. This has reduced the risk of devastating losses and shields American consumers from the resulting price shocks. For example, CGIAR's work to contain wheat stem rust abroad has helped the U.S. avoid up to $3 billion in potential damages.

Beyond its benefits to American agriculture and food systems, CGIAR strengthens U.S. global competitiveness and trade. By helping to remove regulatory barriers on biotechnology in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Vietnam, CGIAR has opened new markets for U.S. agricultural exports. For example, Vietnam imported 11 million tons of corn and cotton in 2023–2024, much of it from the U.S. Additionally, CGIAR works with U.S. manufacturers to promote American-made farm equipment in African and Asian markets, supporting American industry while advancing sustainable agriculture.

CGIAR also protects U.S. supply chains in global commodities. Approximately 2.2 million Americans work in the coffee sector, which relies heavily on imports from Africa and Latin America. By supporting coffee, cocoa, and tea farmers with sustainable practices and disease management, CGIAR helps ensure supply chain stability for these key industries.

The stakes are not only economic. In an era of mounting global risk, CGIAR science is increasingly essential to U.S. national security. Its research has been deployed across over 544 million acres of agricultural land worldwide, generating $47 billion in annual economic benefits. Improved agricultural productivity in the Global South reduces humanitarian needs, supports regional stability, and addresses the root causes of migration. In Central America, for instance, CGIAR-informed rural development programs have helped reduce the pressures that drive migration to the U.S.

CGIAR's predictive analytics, including famine early warning systems, food price modeling, and zoonotic disease tracking, regularly inform U.S. foreign policy decisions and humanitarian response strategies. These tools help U.S. agencies anticipate and mitigate the consequences of climate shocks, pandemics, and conflict- related food insecurity – situations that, if left unaddressed, can escalate into geopolitical crises.

In short, CGIAR is a strategic partner in the global effort to stabilize food systems, prevent crises before they escalate, and foster inclusive growth, both domestically and internationally.

To deepen and extend the value of these contributions, the following policy actions merit consideration:

- **Sustain and increase investment in agricultural R&D.** Strengthen long-term funding for better and more resilient agriculture, digital innovation, and bio surveillance. Investments in R&D are among the highest-return interventions in development and food security policy.
- **Integrate food security into wider security strategies.** Recognize agriculture as a central pillar in peacebuilding, pandemic preparedness, and resilience to a changing environment and demographic pressures. U.S. security frameworks should explicitly include food security.
- **Leverage public-private partnerships.** Expand the use of blended finance and market-based tools to mobilize private capital for food production.

The convergence of food insecurity and fragile governance presents Africa with one of the most pressing development challenges of our time. Yet, it also offers a unique opportunity to reimagine agricultural production as engines of resilience and sustainability. CGIAR's track record demonstrates that science-based, locally adapted solutions can drive meaningful change, if matched with patient investment and strategic partnerships.

For the United States, continued support for CGIAR is a strategic investment in global stability and economic prosperity. Strengthening this collaboration is essential to building a future where African farmers can thrive despite unpredictable weather patterns, and where global food security becomes a shared pillar of prosperity.

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Ending Malaria Makes Everyone Healthier, Safer And More Prosperous[16]

Peter Sands

Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Alarm bells rang across global health networks a few months ago as a mysterious disease emerged in a remote corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The outbreak seemed to defy easy explanation — it was circulating in the remote parts of the country and primarily struck children under the age of 5 with surprising severity. It hit its patients with a cocktail of symptoms, including fever, headache, cough and sometimes difficulty breathing. The disease was also spreading swiftly, infecting hundreds and claiming dozens of lives within a few weeks. Amid the growing panic, global health officials hastily labeled it "Disease X" — a catch-all term for an unknown pathogen that could unleash similar consequences to those wrought by COVID-19.

When a coalition of health partners, led by the government of DRC, rushed to the location, collected samples and investigated the outbreak, they discovered that Disease X was not some new pathogen. It was, in fact, a strain of severe malaria presenting itself as a respiratory illness. Complicated by malnutrition, which had weakened people's immunity, an age-old disease had become more lethal.

This story serves as a stark reminder of two urgent realities. First, malaria remains a deadly disease, claiming the life of a child nearly every minute. Ending it would save the lives of millions of children and pregnant women. Second, tackling malaria is not just about saving lives today — it's also about strengthening global health security and making the world safer for everyone. The disease remains a potent threat to all of us, wherever we live. It's a killer we should see not just through the usual humanitarian lens, but also through the lenses of health security and economic opportunity.

As we saw in DRC, even diseases we thought we understood can present new challenges. Malaria is a disease we know how to prevent and treat, and one that should not be allowed to continue unabated. To secure ourselves from future pandemics, we must urgently end the diseases killing people today, building a future where a Disease X emerging from complications of an existing infectious disease does not happen.

The health system infrastructure and capabilities put in place to defeat malaria, such as medical supply chains, laboratories, community health workers and disease surveillance, are what is needed to identify and respond to new outbreaks.

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[16] This article was originally published in Forbes on April 23, 2025: https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersands/2025/04/23/ending-malaria-makes-everyone-healthier-safer-and-more-prosperous/.

Take disease surveillance — in a typical rural clinic in malaria-endemic areas, most people presenting with fever are suffering from malaria. There are more than 250 million cases every year, of which 94% are in Africa. Accurately diagnosing malaria is one way to rule out or identify other disease outbreaks, so the better we are at diagnosing malaria, the better our overall disease surveillance and health security will be.

More generally, in the most afflicted areas, malaria often overwhelms health systems, with a significant portion — and in some cases, the majority — of health facility activities devoted to this one disease. In such contexts, it is extremely difficult to tackle other pressing health needs, let alone identify and respond to new threats. At the height of the pandemic, COVID-19 squeezed out other health priorities, leaving a legacy of problems that still affect many health systems, even in the richest countries. In the highest burden countries, malaria has this impact all the time. Investing in the fight against malaria is a powerful way to free up the capacity of health systems, meet other urgent health care needs and tackle dangers arising from new pathogens.

Additionally, investing in malaria control not only saves lives, it also boosts productivity and creates economic opportunities. There is compelling evidence that reducing the malaria burden in malaria-endemic countries could unlock substantial economic growth. One recent study estimated that getting back on the path to ending malaria between 2023 and 2030 could boost the GDP of malaria-endemic countries by US$142.7 billion. Moreover, the benefits would extend further, increasing global trade by US$80.7 billion during the same period, including US$3.9 billion in additional exports for G7 countries.

Ending malaria is not just the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing to do. If saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of young children and pregnant women through investments in malaria isn't persuasive enough to global donors, they should recognize that ending malaria is crucial to ensuring their own safety and prosperity.

Now is the time to ramp up efforts to end malaria. Progress against malaria has stalled in recent years due to a combination of factors, including violent conflict, extreme weather events, stagnant funding and the emergence of drug and insecticide resistance. Any decline in political commitment or funding risks sharp reversals. But if we can scale new innovations, improve efficiencies, and — perhaps most critically — sustain the pace of investment, we can still defeat this disease once and for all.

This is not the time to take our foot off the accelerator. Doing so would risk losing the gains we have fought so hard to achieve. Instead, we must reaffirm our commitment to beat malaria. Investing in the fight against malaria is one of the most cost effective and powerful ways to save lives, improve the health of some of the poorest communities in the world, and deliver a safer and more prosperous future for us all.

The First Generation Without AIDS Is Within Reach — If We Refuse to Settle for Less[17]

Peter Sands

Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

This isn't about managing the AIDS pandemic. It's about ending it — and letting a new generation grow and thrive free of its threat.

We stand at the edge of an extraordinary possibility: to end the AIDS pandemic, eliminating HIV as a public health threat. Over the last few decades, more than 40 million people have died of AIDS and there are another 39 million people living with HIV. But now we could see the first generation of children growing up free of the threat of being infected with HIV. This would be a historic achievement.

The science makes this goal achievable. The data makes the case undeniable. What's uncertain is whether we have the courage to grasp this opportunity.

Today, we are still losing the equivalent of a couple of packed jumbo jets of people to AIDS-related illnesses every day — 630,000 deaths in 2023 alone. In the same year, 1.3 million people were newly infected with HIV. These are not just statistics. These are children, parents, friends and neighbors.

While we have made huge progress against HIV, with deaths down by 73% since 2002 in the countries in which the Global Fund invests, there is a real risk of complacency and incrementalism. We've perhaps grown too comfortable treating HIV and AIDS as chronic conditions to be contained, rather than a crisis to be finished. But epidemics don't end when we stop paying attention. They end when we confront hard realities, back what works and refuse to settle for anything less than success.

The most glaring failure is in prevention. Despite huge progress in treatment access — now reaching nearly 30 million people — HIV prevention has flatlined. This is not good enough, particularly for the adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa who account for three-quarters of new infections in their age group. No epidemic has ever been ended without stopping transmission.

That's what makes the arrival of long-acting PrEP so significant. Lenacapavir, a twice-yearly injectable for HIV prevention, has the potential to change the game — not just for individuals, but for public health. For young women who face stigma taking

[17] This article was originally published in Forbes on July 9, 2025: https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersands/2025/07/09/the-first-generation-without-aids-is-within-reach-if-we-refuse-to-settle/.

daily pills, or for key populations living under the threat of criminalization, lenacapavir offers discretion, durability and dignity.

On 9 July 2025, the Global Fund announced an agreement with Gilead, the manufacturer of Lenacapavir, to ensure affordable access to this ground breaking innovation in low- and middle-income countries. Together with partners, we aim to make Lenacapavir available to 2 million people in the next three years. The Global Fund is already working with countries, communities and partners to prepare for rapid, equitable rollout — supporting regulatory readiness, delivery infrastructure and community engagement.

Yet biomedical innovations like Lenacapavir only make a difference if they reach the people who can benefit the most. Since [70% of new HIV infections occur among key populations] and their sexual partners, that means tackling the barriers to access these communities often face. Without action on stigma, discrimination and criminalization, we will not realize the full potential of Lenacapavir.

Empowering communities to take the lead on HIV prevention is vital: where communities lead, outcomes improve; where they're sidelined, infections grow. That's why the Global Fund channels much of our investment in HIV prevention — about a third of our total spend on HIV — through civil society networks that can reach the people most at risk.

Cutting the number of new infections is also critical to ensuring the longer-term sustainability of the fight against HIV. Countries must accelerate their journey toward nationally owned and nationally financed HIV responses, no longer dependent on external support. Yet this transition is a pathway, not a switch. Too abrupt a transition would derail progress, leave people behind and cost millions of lives. The lower the rate of new infections, the faster and more feasible the path to countries' self-reliance. Taking on responsibility for a long duration but declining health issue is a much more manageable challenge than taking on a still rapidly growing problem.

That's why we see Lenacapavir as an integral part of our sustainability and transition strategy. It's also why the Global Fund supports countries in building systems that will outlast us — including integrated service delivery, robust supply chains, health workforce capacity and digital data systems.

Reducing funding for prevention would defer the end of the AIDS pandemic and cost many more lives. It would also delay the transition away from external funding. Ending AIDS is one of the most achievable and cost-effective goals in global health. For every [$1 invested in HIV prevention, $7 are saved] in treatment and care costs later. We either pay to end the epidemic now, or we pay the human and economic price for decades to come.

This isn't just a technical challenge — it's a test of values. Do we believe that a girl born in rural Malawi deserves the same chance to live HIV-free as a girl born in Manchester or Minneapolis? Do we believe that access to lifesaving services should not depend on who you are, whom you love or where you live?

The first generation without AIDS is not a dream. It is a choice. But it's a choice that requires urgency, clarity and courage — not next year, but now. History won't remember how well we managed AIDS, but will record whether we ended it.

How AI Is Accelerating the Fight Against an Ancient Killer[18]

Peter Sands

Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Tuberculosis (TB) remains the world's deadliest infectious disease – an ancient killer that still claims over a million lives each year, mostly among the world's poorest and hardest-to-reach. Yet we are on the brink of a new era of progress in the fight against the disease. This transformation is driven by a range of innovations, including artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is rapidly improving our ability to detect TB in people and places that conventional health systems often fail to reach. With AI-powered software that analyzes digital chest X-rays, health workers can quickly identify people with TB. Mounted on mobile vans, these tools are bringing lifesaving care directly to underserved communities – prisoners, refugees, poor rural communities and the socially marginalized – helping us reach people with the disease who have long been missed by health systems.

This is a breakthrough in how we deliver equitable access to TB diagnosis, treatment and care. In Pakistan – one of the countries with the highest TB burden – mobile clinics equipped with AI-assisted digital X-rays screen people on the spot, flagging potential cases for follow-up. This leads to earlier diagnosis, faster treatment, fewer people with TB missed and ultimately, more lives saved. Even better, these platforms aren't limited to detecting TB. They can also identify other lung diseases – pneumonia and whooping cough – as well as other noncommunicable diseases such as cardiomegaly.

This is just one example of how AI is driving greater capacity, increasing efficiency and providing novel ways of reaching people where they are. For funders, this translates into a higher return on investment – one tool serving multiple functions, strengthening frontline care and improving efficiency across the health system.

Scaling AI effectively will require focused investment to support countries in defining their priorities and shaping their own agenda. As we have seen with pharmaceuticals, the most impactful tools are those developed in collaboration with the people they are supposed to serve. Countries and communities must be supported to lead. Just as our partnerships on biomedical products have advanced health equity, AI must do the same -- delivering impact that is not only effective, but also inclusive and equitable.

At the Global Fund, we have invested over US$193 million between 2021 and 2025 to roll out AI-enabled TB screening in more than 20 countries. But this is just the start. We see AI not only as a tool to beat TB, but as a platform that can power a much more

[18] This article was originally published in Forbes on July 10, 2025: https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersands/2025/07/10/how-ai-is-accelerating-the-fight-against-an-ancient-killer/.

efficient use of resources, support integrated service delivery spanning infectious diseases and noncommunicable conditions, and also strengthen pandemic preparedness and response.

Our use of AI in the fight against TB – and the progress our partnership is making in reaching underserved communities – is a compelling proof of concept. The world is making significant gains in finding more people with TB. In 2023, 8.2 million people were identified as ill with the disease, up from 7.5 million in 2022 and 7.1 million in 2019. This is a dramatic improvement over the COVID-era lows of 5.8 million (2020) and 6.4 million (2021). The number of people with TB who go undiagnosed is also shrinking rapidly: just 2.7 million in 2023, down from about 4 million in both 2020 and 2021, and below the 2019 pre-pandemic level of 3.2 million.

This progress is imperative. Without treatment, tuberculosis is often fatal, and a person with active, untreated TB can infect up to 15 others in a single year. Every individual we identify and treat brings us one step closer to ending this age-old disease and strengthening global health security.

We know that AI can be a powerful tool for good in the fight against deadly infectious diseases. The question is whether our will to deploy it at scale will match its proven effectiveness and its transformative potential. For philanthropists and private sector partners, this is a moment where they can choose to make a huge difference. In resource-constrained settings, philanthropic funding and partnership will be essential to support countries to lead, define, develop and scale AI solutions that work. With this, we can deliver high-impact, scalable solutions that strengthen primary care, enable earlier treatment, and ensure we reach those most in need and those left furthest behind, as we are seeing in TB.

That's a powerful promise – but it's one we'll only fulfill if we get it right. AI must be developed and deployed responsibly, with transparency, respect for local context and equity as its guiding principles. It must work for the people who are often excluded from the benefits of innovations.

For donors seeking to invest in high-impact innovation, this is an opportunity to support solutions that are not only effective but truly transformational, saving lives and helping to build a healthier, more equitable future for all.

SITE VISITS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13

Site Visit	*Community Health Programs Focused on HIV, Malaria and Malnutrition*

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14

Site Visit	*Improving Food Production and Livelihoods and Building Resilient Farming Systems*

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15

Site Visit	*Community Health Programs Focused on HIV, Malaria and Malnutrition*

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16

Site Visit	*Focus on Wildlife Conservation in Africa at Chobe National Park, Botswana*