

Despite money woes, report urges U.S. to boost world antipoverty efforts: Need especially urgent now

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The global financial crisis makes it even more urgent that the United States not only take care of its own economy but also redouble efforts to aid the world's poorest, according to a new report and several development experts.

The 2009 edition of the Christian antipoverty group Bread for the World's annual hunger report was released at a November 24 news conference in Washington. It calls for the government to streamline international development efforts through renewed focus and reforms—despite, and because of, the international economic downturn.

“At a time like this, we ought to use our foreign assistance effectively, and we ought to distribute more of our aid to struggling families around the world who are trying to overcome hunger and poverty,” said Bread for the World president David Beckmann. “This crisis has been a huge setback in the world's progress against hunger, poverty and disease.”

Beckmann estimates that 75 million more people are malnourished than two years ago.

The report calls for several reforms in the way U.S. development and aid work is conducted, including:

- Making development and poverty reduction “specific goals in U.S. foreign policy, distinguished from political, military and security goals, with distinct and secure funding.”
- Coordinating development assistance with recipient nations “to meet their long-term development goals and focus on outcomes with measurable goals and objectives.”

- Maintaining civilian leadership in U.S. development-assistance efforts, with the U.S. military's role "limited to its operational strengths in logistics and stabilization."
- Creating one "effective, streamlined agency" to channel all U.S. development assistance, now spread across 12 cabinet departments and dozens of federal agencies and offices.

"We need to have a consolidated agency that is separate from AID," said Peter McPherson, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, referring to the U.S. Agency for International Development. McPherson was the agency's administrator during the Reagan administration.

"President-elect Obama seems to be receptive to these ideas, and a number of people on the Hill seem to be receptive as well," McPherson added. "But our community, broadly speaking, has to be engaged or otherwise this will slip off the table."

Beckmann said polls show that the majority of voters want to increase the aid the U.S. provides to the world's poor. "Their main motive is humanitarian," he said.

Another consideration is national security, Beckmann said, because post-9/11 Americans know that misery in far-off places can breed terrorism at home. -*Robert Marus, Associated Baptist Press*