

# *The Critical Need for a New U.S. Effort to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa*

*A Briefing Paper by The Partnership to Cut Hunger in Africa  
February 12, 2001-Version for Translation and Review in African Consultations*

**PREFACE FOR AFRICAN CONSULTATIONS & LANGUAGE TRANSLATION:** This document is being made available in English, French and Portuguese to be used to help inform African consultations as discussed below. When used in these settings, it is important to understand that this is primarily an American briefing paper written to serve as the basis for domestic consultations planned in the U.S, with representatives of different U.S. organizations. These meetings will serve as fora to help develop a vision, strategy and action plan to renew efforts of the United States to help African partners significantly reduce hunger between now and the year 2015. As a consequence of the document being originally written for a U.S. audience, the document focuses primarily on American concerns regarding African hunger.

Nonetheless, we want to stress a central idea that underlies the process we are undertaking, namely the need to convince American public opinion that the creation of a permanent partnership between Africans and Americans to cut hunger in Africa is an essential part of any effort to re-engage the United States in developing a new consensus about the need for a long-term assistance strategy to reduce hunger in Africa. This suggests that an active participation of African decision-makers at all levels (researchers, development workers, farmers, traders, funding agencies, NGOs, and government and political leaders) is needed, working hand-in-hand, with their American counterparts, to develop this vision, strategy, and action plan

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Cutting hunger and poverty in Africa is in the U.S. national interest. Helping the poor feed themselves and building African economies will reduce war, create opportunities for U.S. business, strengthen democracy, and reduce threats to the environment.

Although hunger is a massive challenge, many African nations are already making progress, but more help is needed. A new U.S approach to help develop Africa's food and agricultural system is critical to build economic growth, reduce poverty, and feed the poor. The new strategy should include the following parts to assist African nations:

- Develop programs and policies that strengthen farmers, businesses, and markets to compete in the global economy;
- Increase rural education and training, and build public institutions;
- Expand agricultural research and outreach to exploit existing and new technologies, such as biotechnology and information technologies, to stimulate new ties with business and avoid damage to the environment;
- Improve rural governance;
- Link emergency food relief with long-term development; and
- Coordinate food and agricultural programs with actions to combat HIV/AIDS.

USAID needs this strategy to re-emphasize long-term development. Over the last 15 years USAID's approach has shifted to a much shorter-term, relief-oriented focus. An aggressive U.S.-African partnership for agricultural development should also link with efforts to improve child and maternal health and survival, education (particularly for girls), environmental protection, coping with HIV/AIDS, availability of micro-credit, emergency assistance, and political stability of new democracies. The challenge is to garner sufficient resources to stimulate and sustain long-term growth, while strategically coordinating with vital shorter-term U.S. relief efforts and with the efforts of other donors and countries.

The **Partnership to Cut Hunger in Africa** [www.africanhunger.org](http://www.africanhunger.org) is pleased to present this preliminary outline of a new U.S. strategy for Africa. This bipartisan coalition of U.S. and African organizations is co-chaired by Michigan State University President M. Peter McPherson, Mali President Alpha Oumar Konaré, Senator Robert Dole, and Lee Hamilton. President Konaré has proposed national consultations and a summit of the Heads of State of Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Mozambique during 2001 to commit to poverty and hunger reduction in Africa. The Partnership's strategic framework will be delivered to U.S. government leaders by the spring of 2001.

**THE CHALLENGE:** A third of Sub-Saharan Africa's population—almost 200 million people—goes to bed hungry. Thirty-one million African children under the age of five are malnourished. Poverty, war, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and environmental degradation compound the hunger problem. The costs are staggering in terms of human suffering, lowered economic productivity, and lost intellectual resources. Africa faces catastrophe if we fail to respond aggressively to these problems now. There would be significant spillover for the whole world, requiring costly responses from the U.S. and other nations.

**THE PAYOFF FROM A NEW U.S. STRATEGY:** Lack of food security threatens national security. Widespread hunger and poverty stimulates conflict across Africa. The U.S. and other industrialized countries pay heavily for these conflicts through international peacekeeping and aid to refugees. The annual costs of UN peacekeeping in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone will total \$646 million in 2000/01, equivalent to nearly 60% of all U.S. foreign development assistance (including food aid) requested for Africa in the FY 2001 U.S. budget. Strategic investments to cut hunger and develop food systems can reduce U.S. exposure to the costs of future conflict in Africa.

At the 1998 World Food Summit, the U.S. pledged to help Africa cut hunger in half by 2015. Successful programs to increase the productivity of agriculture and the entire food system will not only help the U.S. meet that pledge, but also will foster broad-based economic growth in agriculture and other sectors, lower food prices for both the rural and urban consumer, and increase real incomes. This, in turn, will contribute directly to relieving human suffering by generating the resources locally to support expanded programs to improve health, nutrition, education, and democratic governance. And it can create new trade and investment opportunities for U.S. firms and improve the safety and quality of food and other products exported from Africa to the U.S. consumer.

**THERE IS HOPE FOR AFRICA:** Images of starving African children, conflict, AIDS orphans, and dictatorial regimes paint a picture of a hopeless continent. However, numerous Sub-Saharan African countries are making serious progress. Over the past 15 years, many African countries have reformed their economies and governments. These reforms stimulated economic growth and gave citizens more voice in governing.

Twenty-three Sub-Saharan African countries (more than 60% of the region's population) grew their per capita incomes from 1995 to 1999. Over half of the countries south of the Sahara (two-thirds of the population) are free of major conflict and, according to Freedom House, are either politically "free" or "partly free." Countries as diverse as Mali, South Africa, Ghana, and Mozambique have embraced multiparty democracy. Uganda and Ethiopia, once seen as beyond hope, reformed their economies and stimulated growth. Nigeria, Zambia, Mali, and others have taken responsibility for regional peacekeeping.

Several factors contributed to this progress. The end of the Cold War reduced external support for dictators and increased internal pressures for accountability. Painful economic reforms have begun to bear fruit, after years of austerity. Access to new communication and information technology has tied Africans more closely to the world's science and business, spurring growth, and a burgeoning array of local to global markets has opened new opportunities for African farmers.

**WHY THE U.S. NEEDS A NEW STRATEGY:** USAID in Africa has evolved primarily from a long-term development assistance agency to an organization focused much more heavily on shorter-term emergency relief. Efforts such as child survival and health, micro-enterprises, and improving the climate for U.S. trade and investment *are important*, but progress in Africa cannot be sustained without broad-based economic growth. Yet, since 1986, USAID funding for the backbone of these African economies—agriculture and food—has fallen by two-thirds. If Africa is devoid of

economic growth, future crises will only multiply.

This decline in funding for food and agriculture must be corrected for three reasons.

First, improvements in macroeconomic policies adopted at the urging of reformers do not automatically improve economic growth in rural areas—where 65-75% of the population resides. Africa does not yet possess enough of the requisite technologies, public institutions, infrastructure and educated workforce that experiences around the world demonstrate are needed.

Second, strengthening the prime movers of economic growth—improving technologies, human capital and institutions—is inherently a long-term process. By focusing on short-term objectives, perhaps in response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, USAID has moved away from areas it had traditionally supported – areas such as long-term training and support of agricultural research. These prior long-term efforts helped lay the groundwork for the modest successes many African countries have experienced in recent years.

Third, U.S. foreign assistance to Africa is now severely imbalanced toward immediate crises. Constrained foreign assistance funding prompted supporters of vital specific activities, such as child survival, HIV/AIDS, micro-credit, and environmental protection, to seek protected funding. Thus support for long term economic growth through agriculture and food system development has declined. Without the resources derived from growing economies, African countries will not be able to manage present crises, and there will be dramatic need in the future for increased foreign aid.

**FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW STRATEGY:** U.S. efforts need to help stimulate African economies, reduce poverty, and help the poor feed themselves. **The U.S. must assist African nations to improve the performance of agriculture and the broader food system.** *No country has been*

*able to reduce poverty substantially and spur economic transformation without first sharply increasing productivity in its agricultural and food system.* This focus will help avert future crises and generate the resources within Africa to address ongoing humanitarian concerns, such as improving health, nutrition, and education.

Broad-based economic growth from improvements in agriculture and food can contribute significantly to other important priorities. *Use of cost-effective techniques to promote child survival*, such as vaccinations and oral rehydration therapy, can only be sustained over the long-term if the economy is growing enough to help finance these services and if families have the income to get access to them. *Better education (especially for girls) and nutrition programs* similarly require local economic growth to be sustainable. *Environmental protection* will be enhanced because increased agricultural productivity reduces pressures to expand farming into fragile environments and increases carbon sequestration in more luxuriant biomass. *Chemical fertilizers substituted for highly labor-intensive organic inputs* can allow households whose main breadwinners have been killed or incapacitated by AIDS to continue to produce some of their own food. *Political stability* will be enhanced by expanded employment opportunities for the burgeoning labor force and more stable prices for basic staples.

**ELEMENTS OF THE NEW STRATEGY:** (These elements will be developed further over the coming weeks based on feedback from key leaders and organizations in Africa and the U.S.)

U.S. assistance to cut hunger in Africa should focus on particular U.S. expertise. There is no quick fix. Economic growth in Africa requires a sustained 15-20 year effort. Medium-term progress can be made and can be measurable by helping African nations to:

*Develop programs and policies that strengthen farmers, businesses, and markets to compete in the global economy.* African countries need to continue to open their

economies to the private sector and make policy processes more transparent. They need assistance in *strengthening local capacity* to analyze and formulate programs and policies that will enhance public-private partnerships and foster broad-based growth. Particularly important will be increasing agricultural production and making African products more internationally competitive. Rapid urbanization and growing regional and international trade will offer both new opportunities for farmers as well as put existing marketing arrangements under stress. Transportation infrastructure upgrades are needed, but these may be best done through multi-lateral assistance.

***Strengthen rural education, training, and public institutions.*** Education is especially critical for rural economic progress and a better quality of life. Women, particularly, need improved literacy, better education for careers, and basic skills to improve the health and nutrition of their families. African economies are constrained by declines in scientists, educators and extension specialists, and the lack of institutions to train them. One major casualty of the short-term focus of USAID is the decline in long-term training and institutional strengthening, particularly for agriculture. Training and institution building were the major contributions the U.S. made to the economic development of Asia and Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s. The progress of many African countries in the 1990s was due in part to the contributions of scientists and policy analysts trained earlier in the U.S. New information technologies offer expanded opportunities for lower-cost training and building institutions, for example, through partnerships linking U.S. and African universities in agriculture, biotechnology, and policy analysis.

***Expand agricultural research and outreach to exploit science-based agriculture and information technologies, stimulate new ties with business, and avoid damage to the environment.*** Food and agricultural research in Africa remain weak, in spite of recent substantial reforms. Research and extension must be responsive to the needs of farmers and to market demands. Biotechnology

offers special opportunities for increasing yields, refining crops for local conditions, and decreasing environmental damage. Once improved agricultural technology is developed, it needs to reach farmers, traders, and processors. Greater use of private-public partnerships, competitive grants, and links with the U.S. agricultural research community are all means of better developing and disseminating vital new knowledge. New information technologies offer special opportunities to extend these collaborations.

***Improve rural governance.*** Many African countries are decentralizing services, creating local units of government, and growing vibrant civil society. In rural areas where most Africans live, these changes allow greater local initiative through farmer organizations, local school and health boards, and county and township governments. The U.S., through knowledge of federalism and strong extension services, is well suited to helping Africans improve these local organizations.

***Link emergency food relief with long-term development.*** Humanitarian emergencies will remain. The United States Government has made substantial progress in recent years in framing its relief operations within a longer-term development outlook. This emphasis needs to continue.

***Coordinate food and agricultural programs with actions to combat HIV/AIDS.*** The growing tragedy poses a huge challenge. FAO projects up to a *quarter* of agricultural workers may be lost by 2020 in the nine countries (all in Eastern and Southern Africa) hardest hit by HIV/AIDS. Agricultural technologies need to be developed with attention to the special needs of these severely constrained rural economies. Agriculture and food can contribute substantially to the battle against AIDS, which is spreading rapidly in rural areas. For example, extension offices can counsel on health and nutrition, and agricultural distribution systems can distribute condoms.