

Framework for Foreign Assistance Reform
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Adopted by the Committee on International Justice and Peace
May 14, 2009

The Resources of the Church

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a long history of addressing global poverty and supporting foreign assistance. In the wake of World War II the bishops of the United States called for “human solidarity,” “relief work,” and “governmental aid” in addition to “private charity” to assist other countries.¹ In more recent years, the bishops have supported focusing foreign aid on poverty reduction and increasing foreign aid funding. After the terrible events of 9/11 the bishops reminded our nation of the importance of reducing human misery in building a more secure world and the goal of increasing foreign aid toward 0.7% of national income (GDP).²

The Catholic Church in the United States brings three assets to the debate over foreign aid reform: experience, relationships, and teaching.

The Church in the United States has broad and deep **experience** reaching out to our brothers and sisters in need throughout the world. Catholic lay movements and religious communities of men and women sponsor numerous missions and educational and humanitarian organizations throughout the globe. The bishops founded Catholic Relief Services, the official relief and development agency of our Conference that is active in more than 100 countries around the world. This experience informs our perspective on foreign aid.

The Catholic Church in our nation also has profound and abiding **relationships** with the Church in many other countries. We are part of a worldwide community of faith. We listen carefully to the Church in developing countries and in many places the Church has a major institutional presence that serves the needs of the poorest members of the human family.

Finally, our Church has a rich body of **teaching** that offers principles that can help guide the structure and reform of foreign assistance. These principles include:

1. The Life and Dignity of the Human Person: Based on our belief that each person is created in the image of God, the measure of every social institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. Foreign aid reform should be measured in terms of its effectiveness in promoting human life and dignity.

2. The Common Good, Participation and Subsidiarity: The common good consists of “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”³ Governments have a special responsibility to

¹ *Man and Peace!*, Administrative Board of the National Catholic War Council in the Name of the Bishops of the United States, November 17, 1946.

² *Living With Faith and Hope After September 11*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 14, 2001.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1906.

foster the common good of all. This requires effective community and country based coordination that respects local cultures. Human dignity demands that people participate in the decisions that shape their lives; therefore, transparency and accountability are important. Corruption undermines the ability of governments to serve their people. The principle of subsidiarity establishes a healthy relationship between government and civil society, requiring governments to support families, associations and communities without usurping their roles. Foreign aid should promote good governance for the common good, transparency, accountability, and subsidiarity.

3. **Option for the Poor:** The Church makes a fundamental “option for the poor” in the belief that the measure of the justice of a society is how those who are poor or vulnerable are faring. It is their lives and dignity that are most at risk. Meeting the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society strengthens the whole human community and insures that all are protected. Poverty destroys human potential and impoverishes the global community; it breeds despair and violence to the detriment of human security. Foreign aid should give priority to the poorest countries and the poorest populations.

4. **Peace:** In Catholic teaching peace is more than the absence of war; it is built on the foundation of justice. Human development and true security are long term projects that foster the common good. The use of armed force is at times justified and necessary to promote human security, a prerequisite for human development, but lasting peace is not built by force of arms or a balance of forces. Conflict in developing countries reverses development through the destruction of homes, infrastructure, schools, health facilities and people’s lives. Countries coming out of conflict or in danger of falling into it require intensive assistance. Foreign aid should support peacekeeping operations, and civilian agencies taking the lead in long term development efforts.

The State of Foreign Assistance and its Reform

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 reorganized U.S. foreign assistance programs, separated military and non-military aid, and established the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Over the years, the Act has been amended numerous times to add programs, earmarks and initiatives with overlapping objectives and no unifying strategy and little coordination

Over the last two years, calls for comprehensive foreign aid reform have gained momentum among government officials, policy analysts, international development agencies, faith-based groups, international donors and recipient countries.

General Recommendations for Foreign Aid Reform

Based upon the Church’s experience, relationships and teaching, USCCB, informed by the on-the ground work of CRS, offers these general recommendations on foreign aid reform:

1. Make **human development** the fundamental goal of foreign aid. Focus on **reducing poverty** through balanced interventions (agriculture, health, education and micro-credit) and empowering the **participation** of poor people in development (civil society empowerment, democracy and governance) through **country-specific strategic plans** that respect local

conditions and cultures and involve and strengthen local governments and civil society.

2. Develop a coherent and coordinated national **global development strategy** that provides for both immediate humanitarian assistance and long-term development.

3. Promote a **comprehensive approach** that coordinates humanitarian aid, development assistance, trade and agriculture policy, climate change initiatives and other mechanisms to promote poverty reduction and human development. (Incorporate the “comprehensive strategy to further the United States foreign policy objective of promoting the reduction of global poverty” of The Global Poverty Act of 2007 in foreign aid reform.)

4. Gradually **increase foreign aid** to reach the international commitment to allocate 0.7% of national income to global development. Link related priorities (e.g. climate change) in ways that increase resources to poor countries and do not diminish them.

5. Mandate between one-half and two-thirds of foreign aid funding be allocated to the **poorest countries** and communities of the world.

6. Enhance **human security** through development. Provide assistance to **failed or failing states** and those coming out of conflict by building government capacity and legitimacy, including respect for human rights. Strengthen local civil society in close collaboration with U.S. civil society development organizations to support communities where their government has failed them.

7. Give **development** a status and structure that places it alongside diplomacy and defense as the “**third leg**” of U.S. foreign policy. Insure that long-term development goals are not subordinated to short-term security and political concerns.

8. Consolidate, rebuild and expand the **capacity of civilian agencies** involved in long-term development work.

9. Affirm that U.S. humanitarian relief and development assistance should be under the **control, authority, and direction of civilian agencies** (and implementing partners) who have the skills and expertise to plan and implement the most effective and appropriate responses.

10. Design programs with the active and effective input of local government and **civil society** organizations including faith-based groups and local community members, especially women, the poor and indigenous peoples who stand to benefit from them. Preserve the important role of **faith-based organizations** through conscience clauses that prohibit discrimination in funding and other provisions that help them to make their unique contribution to serving the poor.

11. Make foreign aid **accountable** to the poor persons served and to Congress and the American people. Promote anti-corruption efforts, transparency and participation.

12. More closely coordinate with other **international donors** and support **multilateral agencies** to reduce program duplication and the burdens on recipient nations.