



Fact Sheet

Why Child Survival is Important to Foreign Assistance



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Child survival programs give life-saving support in countries such as Sudan and are a vital component of U.S. foreign policy.

Securing America through Foreign Assistance

“What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security — diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development....We must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military; beyond just our brave soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen. We must also focus our energies on the other elements of national power that will be so crucial in the coming years.”⁸

— **Robert Gates,**
U.S. Secretary of Defense

Child Survival Advances American Leadership and Values

Through U.S. leadership, efforts to improve the survival and health of mothers and children have delivered significant public health success on a global scale. In the early 1980s, 15 million children died every year in developing countries. In 2007, UNICEF announced that the estimated number of under-5 child deaths fell below 10 million for the first time, with more than 7 million children’s lives being saved each year.¹

Recent data shows that a number of USAID-funded countries — Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Madagascar, Nepal, and Tanzania — have improved the survival of children from 20 to 30 percent in just 5 to 7 years.²

Helping children and their mothers in developing countries is both a moral imperative and a national interest. The U.S. was established on the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Values like relieving human suffering are integral to U.S. foreign policy and have been since the country’s birth.

Polling over the past 10 years shows that Americans place child survival among their highest priorities for foreign assistance, and that most believe the United States should spend about 10 percent of the federal budget on foreign assistance. In reality, less than one-half of one percent of the U.S. budget goes for development assistance.³

Child Survival Makes Investments in Programs with Long-Term Economic Benefits

Saving children’s lives is not only the right thing to do, it’s also affordable. The tools that can save these lives are not expensive. For example, antibiotics to treat pneumonia cost as little as 15 cents; a child can be immunized against six major childhood diseases for as little as \$15; and a one-year dose of vitamin A capsules costs just a few cents. While each of these measures can prevent illness or death, they work best when delivered as a basic child health package.⁴

Child survival programs save lives and promote sustainable economic development through increased productivity. This is accomplished not only by helping children to survive, but by helping them grow up healthy and well nourished so they can become good students and productive workers. One study found that for each one point decrease in infant mortality, domestic product per capita increased by 0.145 percent.⁵

Programs that save children's lives can also pay economic dividends to the U.S. over the long term. For example, between 1967 and 1977, the U.S. contributed \$84 million to the global smallpox eradication effort. In every year since 1977, the U.S. has saved an estimated \$150 million, primarily because children no longer need to be vaccinated against this disease.⁶

Child Survival Promotes National Security Goals by Investing in People

The majority of child deaths occur in 10 countries, most with large populations (such as China and India) or high rates of HIV/AIDS (as in sub-Saharan Africa). Several of these countries also suffer the effects of armed conflict and social instability (Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Sierra Leone).⁷

Child survival programs help build stability in conflict and post-conflict countries by meeting basic needs. Instability in the developing world is a major threat to world peace. By helping countries meet one of the most basic aspirations of their people — the expectation that their children will live and thrive — child survival programs promote effective government and stability. If child health is a priority, the future, theirs and ours, will be secure.

¹ UNICEF, *State of Africa's Children 2008*, 2008.

² USAID, Report to Congress. *Working Toward the Goal of Reducing Maternal and Child Mortality: USAID Programming and Response to FY08 Appropriations*, July 2008.

³ USAID, *From the American People: Why the Story that U.S. Foreign Assistance is Working Must Be Told: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid*, November 2008.

⁴ World Bank, *Priorities in Health*, 2006.

⁵ Gupta I, Mitra A. Economic growth, health and poverty: an exploratory study for India. *Development Policy Review*, 22:193-206. 2004.

⁶ USAID, Maternal and Child Health, Frequently Asked Questions, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/mch/ch/news/csfaq.html.

⁷ Save the Children, *State of the World Mothers 2007*, May 2007.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Remarks Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at Kansas State University*, 26 November 2007, <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1199>.

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