

Opening Remarks of Chairman Donald M. Payne
A Hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health
“U.S. Assistance to Africa: A Call for Foreign Aid Reform”
2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building
11:30 a.m.
Thursday, April 23, 2009

Let me welcome all of you to the first hearing in the 111th Congress of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. The purpose of today's hearing on “U.S. Assistance to Africa: A Call for Foreign Aid Reform” is to determine where and how Africa fits into the larger ongoing debate on foreign aid reform.

We are particularly interested in the effectiveness of US assistance to the continent – a discussion that is inevitable, particularly as we tighten our belts in response to the global economic downturn.

We have certainly seen significant increases in aid funding to Africa in recent years and this is something I applaud. Of course, much of the increase can be attributed to PEPFAR and the MCC – two programs which are being hailed by African governments as great successes.

There are other successes which the USAID witness highlights in his testimony and, again, I am proud of what our nation is doing. However, I also feel we must carefully assess what our assistance is actually contributing in terms of long-term, sustainable development and not simply rest on our laurels. We also know that it is not enough to simply increase funding levels, while that is certainly important.

I submit that we have gotten away from some of the core development work and, in a way, we should get back to the basics – agricultural development and food security, assistance towards health of the nation and strengthening of health systems, and education, but, particularly higher education, poverty reduction, and economic growth.

I commend President Obama's G-20 announcement that he will double support for agricultural and rural development to over \$1 billion aimed at helping poor nations achieve food security.

In terms of our assistance more broadly, I welcome the administration's moves towards increased multilateralism and greater coordination with other donors.

I feel we must take a more integrated, long-term, and regional approach to our foreign assistance, and feel these can be balanced with short-term objectives based on national security and strategic interests.

Finally, we must hold ourselves accountable to the funding we provide intended for development in Africa and elsewhere. We must be able to ensure our taxpayers that the money is used wisely and we can do that by ensuring the intended recipients of aid actually receive it.

Secretary Clinton spoke passionately about this issue before this committee yesterday, highlighting that less than 50 cents on the dollar reaches the people while the bulk of funding goes to contractors and associated costs. This does not mean we eliminate the use of contractors. It means we must take stock of what we have done and figure out the smartest and most effective way forward.

We will hear from expert witnesses on their recommendations for prioritizing our assistance to Africa going forward.

Our witnesses are: USAID Acting Assistant Secretary for Africa Earl Gast, Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development Dr. Steve Radelet, Director for Africa at the International Food Policy Research Institute Dr. Ousmane Badiane Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University Professor Dr. Meredith Turshen, and Catholic Relief Services' Senior Director for Advocacy Bill O'Keefe.

We thank you all for your participation and greatly look forward to your testimony.

At this time I would like to recognize our distinguished Ranking Member Chris Smith for his opening remarks.