



## **Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger**

**A Study of U.S. Public Attitudes**

**(Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)**

### **Executive Summary**

In 1995 PIPA found that, while an overwhelming majority supported aid in principle, a majority wanted to cut it. However when asked to estimate how much of the budget was devoted to foreign aid, respondents vastly overestimated its size, and when asked what would be appropriate they proposed an amount far higher than the actual amount. In this new study PIPA sought to find out how perceptions and attitudes about aid have evolved in the interim.

In addition, this new study sought to explore in greater depth public attitudes on the problem of world hunger. How do Americans feel about the altruistic purpose of addressing the problem of hunger per se, as compared to using aid to pursue purposes more directly related to a traditional concept of the national interest? The countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development -- a consortium of the 29 most economically developed countries -- have set the goal of cutting world hunger in half by 2015. How do Americans feel about pursuing such a goal, and would they be willing to incur the necessary costs? How do Americans feel about sending aid to Africa, given that many analysts feel that the US has few vital interests in that region?

Other issues were also addressed. Would respondents confirm the widespread view that the American public responds emotionally to images of suffering, but is not really willing to make the long-term commitment to economic development? How do Americans feel about the growing emphasis on channeling aid money through private charitable organizations?

To address these and other questions, PIPA conducted a multipart study. It consisted of:

- a review of polling by other organizations conducted since 1995.
- focus groups conducted in Baltimore, Maryland; San Mateo, California; Richmond, Virginia; and Cleveland, Ohio.
- a nationwide poll with 901 randomly selected adult Americans conducted November 1-6 (weighted to be demographically representative). The margin of error ranged from +/- 3.5-4% depending on the portion of the sample that heard the question. For more details see the appendices.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Opposition to Aid Down**

1. Over the last few years there has been a marked decrease in the public's desire to cut foreign aid (so that it is now a minority position), while an overwhelming majority continues to support the principle of giving foreign aid. This increased support for foreign aid has occurred even though there has been no decline in the public's extreme overestimation of the amount of the

federal budget that goes to foreign aid.

### **Public Still Vastly Overestimates Amount of Aid**

2. When asked how much should be devoted to aid, the majority continues to propose an amount far higher than the actual amount, and only a small minority regards the actual current level as excessive. Addressing the problem of the poor at home continues to be a higher priority than the poor abroad, but the majority favors a greater proportion of spending on the poor abroad than the actual proportion.

### **Strong Support for Hunger Aid**

3. Overwhelming majorities are supportive of efforts to alleviate hunger and poverty --much more so than for foreign aid overall. Giving aid to gain strategic influence is far less popular. Consistent with the low concern for gaining strategic influence, a strong majority prefers to give aid through multilateral institutions rather than bilaterally.

### **Strong Support for Program to Cut Hunger in Half**

4. Overwhelming majorities support a multilateral effort to cut hunger in half by the year 2015 and say that they would be willing to pay for the costs of such a program. However, most do not think that the average American would be as willing to pay the necessary costs, and a slight majority thinks that the Europeans and Japanese would not be willing to do their part.

### **High Level of Support for Aid to Africa**

5. Consistent with the strong concern for hunger and poverty, support for aid to Africa is very high.

### **Support for Development Aid**

6. Strong majorities support the idea that the US should not only try to help alleviate hunger, but should also address the long-term goal of helping poor countries develop their economies. Support is derived from long-term self-interest as well as moral considerations. Programs that emphasize education, and helping women and girls are popular.

### **Significant Reservations About Aid Remain**

7. Concurrent with support for many aid programs, support for foreign aid per se is lukewarm due to a variety of problems Americans perceive in US aid programs, especially a lack of effectiveness and the siphoning off of aid money by corrupt officials. These perceptions may contribute to the public's incorrect belief that world hunger is increasing.

### **Support for Giving Aid Through Private Charitable Organizations**

8. Strong majorities support channeling aid money through private charitable organizations and believe that it will be much more effective.

## **Introduction**

In the early 1990s many observers of the American public expressed the view that the American public was going through a phase of wanting to disengage from the world in the wake of the Cold War -- a kind of isolationism similar to the interwar years. Out of exhaustion from the years of the Cold War, many argued, the American public was no longer willing to support a significant foreign aid program. When, in November 1994, the Republican Party took control of both houses of Congress, this was widely interpreted as confirming this view, as a major wing of the Republican Party had been taking positions consistent with this move toward disengagement.

In January of 1995 the Program on International Policy Attitudes conducted a major study of public attitudes on foreign aid, consisting of a review of existing polling, focus groups and an extensive nationwide poll. The results were somewhat surprising. Like other polls at the time, the PIPA poll found that a strong majority felt the US was spending too much on foreign aid and wanted to cut it. However, when PIPA asked respondents to estimate how much of the federal budget was devoted to foreign aid, the median estimate was 15% -- 15 times the actual amount, which was just under 1%. More dramatically, when asked what an appropriate percentage would be, the median response was 5% -- 5 times the actual amount. And when asked to imagine that they heard the real amount was only 1%, only 18% of respondents said they thought that would be too much--as compared to the 75% who had initially said that the US was spending too much on foreign aid. When the Washington Post asked the same questions later in the year, the median estimate was even a bit higher (20%), as was the proposed amount (10%). Some wondered whether these high estimates were due to respondents inflating their estimates by including the costs of defending other countries, but subsequent research showed that this was not the case.

These findings produced a substantial amount of attention and entered into the debate about foreign aid spending. They were widely cited in the press, on Capitol Hill, and by top members of the administration, including the President. Interaction, a consortium of all the major aid organizations, launched an initiative called the "Just 1%" campaign that sought to drive home the point that foreign aid spending was actually far less than most Americans assumed. Administration figures sported buttons from this campaign and made a point of stressing how little of the budget is devoted to foreign aid and international spending in general, including in the 1997 State of the Union message.

In part to find out if there has been any change in public perceptions and attitudes about foreign aid as a result of this public education effort, PIPA recently conducted a follow-up study of public perceptions and attitudes on foreign aid. Key questions from the 1995 study were replicated with a new sample.

The new study had other purposes as well. The 1995 study showed that the public was divided about whether to use foreign aid to gain influence over other countries, as was typical during the Cold War. The current study seeks to learn what purposes Americans would like to see foreign

aid fulfill, now that the Cold War has been over for more than a decade.

In particular, we have sought to find out how the public feels about efforts to address the problem of world hunger. At the conclusion of the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, global leaders pledged to cut hunger in the world in half by 2015. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development -- a consortium of the 29 most economically developed countries -- has set the goal of cutting hunger in the world in half by 2015. It is monitoring progress toward halving world hunger by 2015 and it has encouraged its members to prepare concrete plans to meet this goal. How do Americans feel about pursuing such a goal, and would they be willing to incur the necessary costs? In a more general way, how do Americans feel about the altruistic purpose of addressing the problem of hunger per se, as compared to using aid to pursue purposes more directly related to a traditional concept of the national interest? As a case in point, how do Americans feel about sending aid to Africa, given that many analysts feel that the US has few vital interests in that region?

A widespread view on Capitol Hill -- and among many in the aid and policy communities in general -- is that the American public does respond emotionally to images of suffering, but is not really willing to make the long-term commitment to economic development. We have sought to test this assumption about public attitudes.

In the 1995 study, the public's extreme overestimation of the amount of US aid was not the only factor that undermined support for aid. Overwhelming majorities showed strong concern that US aid was going to countries that had poor human rights records and that aid money was ending up in the pocket of corrupt government officials overseas. In the current study we have sought to explore whether these concerns have grown or diminished in the intervening years, and to go into more depth to determine how extensive the public believes these problems are, and finally, if there is any approach that the public believes would mitigate these problems.

To address these questions PIPA conducted a multipart study. It consisted of:

- a review of polling by other organizations conducted since 1995
- focus groups conducted in Baltimore, Maryland; San Mateo, California; Richmond, Virginia; and Cleveland, Ohio.
- a nationwide poll with 901 randomly selected adult Americans conducted November 1-6 (weighted to be demographically representative). The margin of error ranged from +/- 3.5-4% depending on the portion of the sample that heard the question. For more details see the appendices.

## Findings

### 1. General Attitudes Toward Foreign Aid

**Over the last few years there has been a marked decrease in the public's desire to cut foreign aid (so that it is now a minority position), while an overwhelming majority continues to support the principle of giving foreign aid. This increased support for foreign aid has**

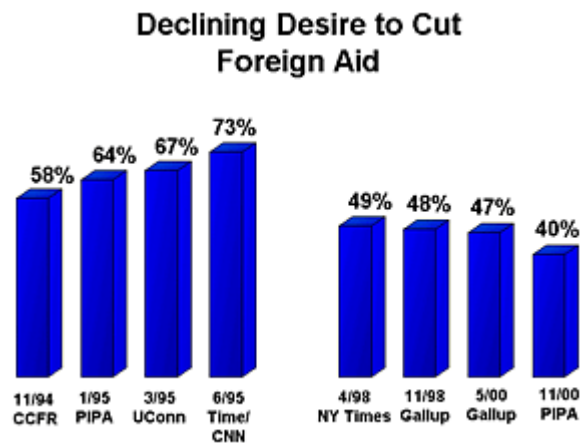
**occurred even though there has been no decline in the public's extreme overestimation of the amount of the federal budget that goes to foreign aid.**

### **Decline in Desire to Cut**

Findings from the current study, as well as from other polls, show a shift in public opinion away from the feeling that the US should cut foreign aid. In the 1995 PIPA poll, 64% favored cutting foreign aid. In the current poll this percentage has dropped to just 40%.

Other polls have found similar trends. In an April 1998 New York Times poll, 49% favored having foreign aid "decreased," while 45% wanted it increased (7%) or "kept about the same" (38%). In a November 1998 Gallup poll for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) 48% wanted to see "economic aid to other nations" cut back, while 49% wanted to see it expanded (13%) or "kept about the same" (36%). In a May 2000 Gallup poll, 47% said "the amount of money the United States is now devoting to foreign aid" should be "reduced" while 49% said it should be "increased" (9%) or "kept about the present level" (40%).

All of these results are strikingly different from those taken in 1995. In a June 1995 survey for Time and CNN, an overwhelming majority (73%) wanted to "decrease...government spending...with respect to aid to foreign nations." Just 23% favored increasing or maintaining current levels at that time. Similarly, a March 1995 survey by the Institute for Social Inquiry at the University of Connecticut found that 67% wanted to "decrease...government spending to aid foreign nations." Only 30% wanted to increase or keep constant the level of aid being given. In the 1994 CCFR study, 58% wanted to cut back foreign aid, while only 37% wanted to expand (9%) or keep the amount the same (28%).



There have also been significant changes in the percentage saying the US spends too much on foreign aid. In the 1995 PIPA poll, 75% said they felt "the amount the US spends on foreign aid" is "too much.". In a July 2000 PIPA poll this dropped to 55%, but rebounded a bit in the current poll to 61%. In the current poll 33% said spending was "too little" (7%) or "about right" (26%).

Other polls have also found this trend. Using a question similar to the one asked in the current survey, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago in May 1996

found 68% thought the US was spending too much on foreign aid while 22% felt current spending levels were "about right" and only 4% said they were "too little." In June 1998 this dropped to 60% saying the US was spending "too much" on foreign aid. Twenty-seven percent believed what the US was spending was "about right", and just 7% felt the US spent "too little."

### **Support for Aid in Principle**

The American public continues to show strong support for giving foreign aid in principle. Nearly eight in ten (79%) agreed that "the United States should be willing to share at least a small portion of its wealth with those in the world who are in great need"-essentially the same as the 80% that agreed in 1995. Fifty-four percent rejected the notion that "helping people in foreign countries is not the proper role for the US government" and that "this should be strictly a private matter taken care of by individuals giving donations through private organizations"-down slightly from the 58% that disagreed in 1995. In the focus groups, there was general consensus that the US government, in addition to individuals, has a role to play in helping less developed nations. As one man said to wide agreement, "I think you need both. I think we should all be our brother's keeper, including our government." Similarly, in March 1999, a poll sponsored by National Public Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University found that 60% believed "foreign aid" to be a very important (14%) or somewhat important (46%) "federal government program".

Other polls have found some positive movement in general questions about foreign aid. Several organizations have simply asked respondents whether they favor or oppose giving foreign aid. The responses to this question can be hard to interpret, because it is not clear whether the respondent is expressing his or her attitude about foreign aid per se or about the current level of foreign aid. Nonetheless, the answers to such questions have changed over this period. Belden, Russonello and Stewart in 1994 found (among registered voters) just 46% favored the idea of "the US giving economic assistance to help other countries," and 43% opposed it. In 1998, Belden, Russonello and Stewart found a much higher 59% in favor and 37% opposed; in February 2000 they found 55% in favor and 42% opposed. Curiously, between 1994 and 1998, on a similar question, CCFR did not find such a movement, though they did find a 10% decrease in the percentage that wanted to cut foreign aid.

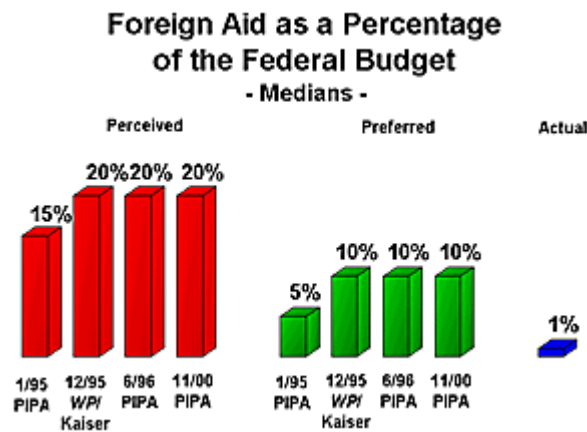
### **Public Continues to Overestimate Amount of Aid**

Even though a majority of the public no longer wants to cut foreign aid, Americans continue to vastly overestimate how much of the federal budget goes to aid. And the public still proposes as appropriate an amount that is much larger than the actual US expenditure. PIPA asked respondents to estimate how much of the federal budget goes to foreign aid, and told them they could answer in terms of fractions of percentage points if they wished, to make them feel comfortable giving a low answer. Nonetheless, the median estimate was 20% of the budget-more than 20 times the actual amount (a bit less than 1%). The mean estimate was even higher, at 24%. Only 5% of respondents estimated an amount of 1% or less. This extreme misperception appeared in all demographic groups. Even among those with post graduate education the median estimate was 8%.

This is actually an increase over the median estimate made in the January 1995 PIPA poll (15%),

but the same as the 20% estimate found in the Washington Post poll of November 1995 and the PIPA poll of June 1996.

Some have wondered whether the high estimate of foreign aid spending is due to Americans incorrectly including in their estimates the high costs of defending other countries militarily. To determine if this was the case, in June 1996 PIPA presented the following question: US foreign aid includes things like humanitarian assistance, aid to Israel and Egypt, and economic development aid. It does not include the cost of defending other countries militarily, which is paid for through the defense budget. Just based on what you know, please tell me your hunch about what percentage of the federal budget goes to foreign aid. Despite this clarification, the median estimate was 20% and the mean 23%.



Since 1995 other organizations have asked various questions that also show that Americans wildly overestimate spending on foreign aid. In October 1997, for example, a Pew survey asked, "As far as you know, is more of the federal budget now spent on Medicare or is more spent on foreign aid?" A whopping 63% believed more was spent on foreign aid, and only 27% thought more was spent on Medicare. In fact, about ten times more federal money went to Medicare than went to foreign aid in 1997. Similarly, in March 1997, a survey sponsored by the Washington Post, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University offered a list of five programs and asked which two of them were "the largest areas of spending by the federal government." Foreign aid ranked first with 64%, followed by defense (56%), Social Security (50%), food stamps (26%), and Medicare (23%). Of course, defense and Social Security make up more than a third of the entire federal budget.

Indeed, the amount of foreign aid spending is so greatly overestimated that in recent years a strong majority believed it was hurting America's economic performance. For example, in a Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard study fielded in August 1996, two-thirds (66%) said the fact that "foreign aid spending is too high" was a "major reason the economy is not doing better than it is." Another 23% said it was a "minor reason", and just 10% thought it was "not a reason."

In the current poll respondents also overestimated the percentage given by the US of "all of the aid given by wealthy countries to poor countries." The median estimate was 33%. In 1999, the US was responsible for about 16% of all development assistance given by the major industrialized

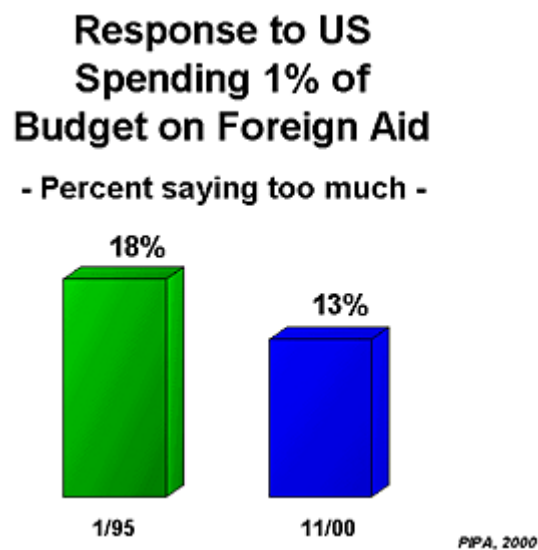
countries, and as a share of GDP gave the lowest amount of all.

## 2. Preferred Levels of Aid

**When asked how much should be devoted to aid, the majority continues to propose an amount far higher than the actual amount, and only a small minority regards the actual current level as excessive. Addressing the problem of the poor at home continues to be a higher priority than the poor abroad, but the majority favors a greater proportion of spending on the poor abroad than the actual proportion.**

In the current poll, when asked what would be an appropriate percentage of the federal budget to go to foreign aid the median response was 10%--10 times the actual level. The mean was 14% and only 12% of the sample proposed an amount of 1% or less. This proposed level is up from the median of 5% and mean of 8% in 1995. The Washington Post poll of November 1995 and the June 1996 PIPA poll both found a median preferred level of 10%.

When asked to "imagine that you found out that the US spends 1% of the federal budget on foreign aid," just 13% said they thought this would be too much, compared to the 61% who initially said that they thought the US spends too much on foreign aid. In January 1995 18% thought 1% would be too much.



In the current study, 37% said that 1% would be too little for the US to spend on foreign aid. However, given that only 12% of the sample proposed an amount of 1% or less, one might expect a larger percentage to say that the 1% was too little. Apparently respondents were rather quick to move away from the position that aid levels were too high, but were more reluctant to move all the way over to the position that aid levels were too low. One possible explanation is that saying that aid levels are too low implies a need to increase them, which means that some other area of the budget may need to be cut or taxes may need to be increased. When respondents proposed a



level above 1% in most cases they did not think they were actually proposing an increase.

Another factor may be that some respondents are not willing to fully entertain the possibility that their assumptions are incorrect. In a recent study by the Center on Policy Attitudes, it appears that when respondents were told the amount of the budget that goes to foreign aid, they did not believe this was the full amount. When presented a breakdown of the federal discretionary budget, including foreign aid, most did not increase spending on foreign aid. When the same respondents were re-contacted several days later and asked to estimate the percentage of the budget devoted to aid and how much it should be, most did not take into account the information they received just several days earlier, and made estimates and proposed spending levels that were approximately the same as for those who had not been given such information. For the overwhelming majority, the aid levels they proposed were far higher than the levels they had been told or that they had previously proposed.

As compared to other countries, the level of aid proposed was also somewhat higher than the actual level. In the current poll, when asked how much the US share should be "of all the aid given by wealthy countries to poor countries," the median response was 20% -- substantially more than actual amount of 16%.

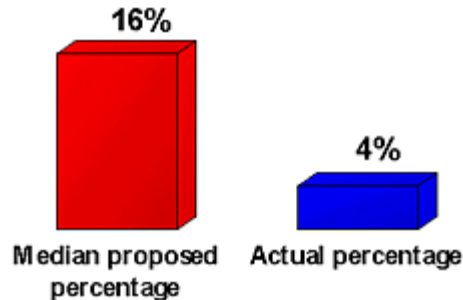
### **Higher Priority to Domestic Concerns**

When poll questions ask respondents to set priorities, foreign aid is seen as less important than domestic concerns. In the current poll, an overwhelming 84% agreed with the assertion that "taking care of problems at home is more important than giving aid to foreign countries." In PIPA's 1995 poll, 86% agreed with that statement.

But this does not mean that Americans think no aid should go overseas. When Americans are not simply asked to establish priorities but to distribute government funds, they do distribute some funds to foreign aid. Respondents were asked in the current study what percentage of their "tax dollars that go to help poor people at home and abroad...should go to help poor people in other countries." The mean response was 16% (down a bit from 22% in response to this question in a 1996 PIPA poll). Strikingly, this turns out to be a far higher percentage than is currently given. In 1999, a bit less than 4% of the total spent on the poor went to the poor abroad. Sixty percent of respondents proposed a percentage that was higher than 4%. A woman in the focus groups said:

I really wouldn't mind donating to the outside if we were taking care of home first. If this area was taken care of, at least by 80% [of the money], then I wouldn't mind if donations were going elsewhere.

## Of All US Spending on Poor, What Portion Should Go to Poor Abroad?

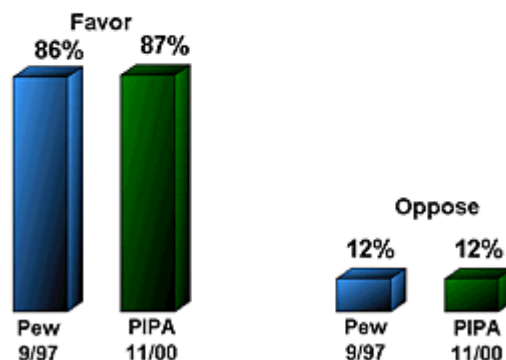


### 3. Humanitarian Aid and Strategic Aid

**Overwhelming majorities are supportive of efforts to alleviate hunger and poverty--much more so than for foreign aid overall. Giving aid to gain strategic influence is far less popular. Consistent with the low concern for gaining strategic influence, a strong majority prefers to give aid through multilateral institutions rather than bilaterally.**

A very large majority supports US efforts to alleviate hunger in other countries. In the current survey, an overwhelming 87% favored the US "giving food and medical assistance to people in needy countries." When the same question was asked by Pew in September 1997, 86% favored the idea. This level of support is much higher than for foreign aid per se. As mentioned above, when respondents have been asked whether they favor or oppose foreign aid, those in favor are less than 60%.

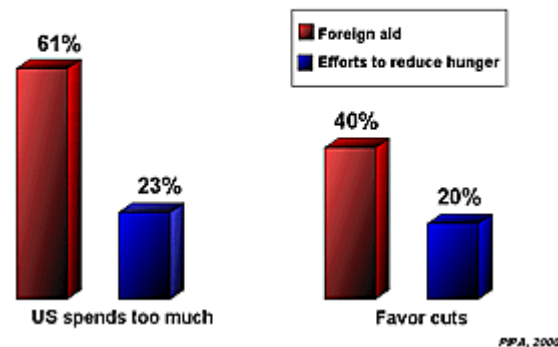
### Overwhelming Support for Humanitarian Aid "Food and medical assistance to people in needy countries"



Attitudes about the current level of spending on hunger-related programs are also very different

than for foreign aid. Less than one in four (23%) said they felt the US spends too much "on efforts to reduce hunger in poor countries," while more than three in five (61%) said the US spends too much on "foreign aid." Only 20% wanted to cut the amount spent to fight hunger, as compared to 40% who wanted to cut foreign aid overall.

### Opposition to Spending on Hunger Much Lower Than for Foreign Aid Per Se



In the current poll respondents were offered a list of reasons for giving aid and asked to rate them on a scale of zero to ten, with 0 being a very bad reason, 10 being a very good reason and 5 being neutral. Of all the reasons offered, assistance to "alleviate hunger and disease in poor countries" was rated highest, at 7.71. Seventy-seven percent gave a response of 6 or higher, and just 9% gave such efforts a rating of 4 or less.

When asked how they feel about foreign aid overall, on a scale of zero to ten with 0 being very bad, 10 being very good and 5 neutral, the mean response was 4.9. Just 31% gave a response above 5, while the same percentage gave a response below 5.

When asked how they felt about "the US government working to reduce hunger in poor countries" on a zero to ten scale, the mean response was slightly higher than that for foreign aid in general -- 5.2 compared to 4.9. (Presumably this 5.2 number was lower than other ratings for hunger-related efforts because respondents were evaluating the effectiveness of US government efforts as well as the value of the objective.)

Support for efforts to alleviate hunger abroad was also voiced in the focus groups. For example, as one man noted, "I think we did a good job...in trying to overcome the famine that was going on in Ethiopia. I think the US played a big role in that and was a big help in putting a stop to that. And I think it was good."

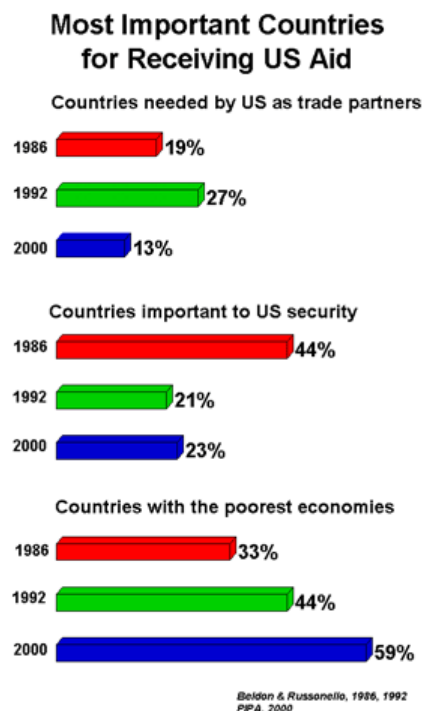
Other polls have also found strong support for putting a high priority on addressing the problems of world hunger and poverty. In the November 1998 CCFR poll, given a list of foreign policy goals, a very robust 62% said that "combating world hunger" should be a "very important" goal for the US, while an additional 32% thought it should be a "somewhat important" goal, and just 4% said it should not be an important goal. This was a higher ranking than for the goals of "maintaining superior military power worldwide" (59% very important), controlling and reducing illegal immigration (55% very important) and improving the global environment (53% very

important). The 62% saying that combating world hunger is very important is also up 6% from the 1994 CCFR poll, when 56% cited it as very important. Also, in a December 1999 CBS News poll, asked, "What do you think will be the most important problem facing the world in the twenty-first century?" the most frequent response was "war," cited by 18%, followed by "poverty" and "hunger," cited by 12%. Other issues such as the economy, the environment, and terrorism received substantially fewer citations.

### Preference for Hunger/Poverty Relief Over Strategic Concerns

In a variety of questions, respondents showed much higher support for giving aid in support of hunger relief than for giving aid in support of strategic goals. Respondents were given three types of countries that might receive US aid and were asked to say which they would select as "most important." "Countries with the poorest economies" was chosen by a solid majority of 59%; another 23% chose "countries important to US security"; and just 13% picked "countries needed by the US as trade partners."

With the end of the Cold War, there is also a discernible trend toward increasing emphasis on helping poor countries and declining emphasis on giving aid to countries related to US security concerns. As the graph below shows, the percentage choosing countries important to US security was a modest plurality (44%) in 1986, but that figure fell to 21% in 1992 and held relatively steady in the current poll. Those choosing countries needed as trade partners rose from 19% to 27% between 1986 and 1992, but declined to just 13% this year, perhaps reflecting the ups and downs of the economy. Meanwhile, the percentage choosing countries with the poorest economies has risen steadily, from 33% in 1986 to 44% in 1992, and to 59% in late 2000.



In another question, a strong majority of respondents also rejected the argument that US aid

giving should be driven by security concerns (see box below).

## Aid and Security Interests

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your point of view:

We should only send aid to parts of the world where the US has security interests.



When hunger is a major problem in some part of the world we should send aid whether or not the US has a security interest in that region.



PIPA, 11/00

As mentioned, in the current poll respondents rated the reasons often given for providing foreign aid. In addition, they were asked to assess different forms of aid, also on a zero-to-ten scale. Both the reasons for aid and the forms of aid that were related to hunger and poverty received high marks, while reasons and forms of aid related to strategic goals received the lowest marks. As shown in Table 1, responses could be broken down into three tiers. In the first tier, with the highest level of support, are altruistic reasons and forms of aid that focus on reducing hunger and poverty. The most popular reason for giving aid was to "alleviate hunger", which received a mean score of 7.71, with 77% giving a response of six or higher. Aid "to help poor countries develop their economies" was next, with a mean score of 6.42; 59% gave it a score above 5.

With regard to the forms of foreign aid, altruistic types of programs also make up the entire first tier. "Child survival programs" received a mean score of 7.66, with 76% giving it a positive score (i.e., above 5). This was followed by "education and training for people in poor countries" (mean 7.04, positive score 67%); the Peace Corps (mean 7.07, positive score 64%); and "programs that focus on helping women and girls" (mean 6.81, positive score 61%).

This is in stark contrast to the items ranked in the third tier, which relate to strategic influence. These were viewed positively by only about a quarter of respondents and received mean ratings of less than five out of ten. The only reason for giving aid that falls in this tier is the one that has the most general hegemonic flavor. "To increase US influence over other countries" was given a mean rating above 4.40, with just 23% giving a positive rating. Similarly, the two forms of aid that ended up in the bottom tier reflect forms of aid related to strategic influence. "Aid to Israel and Egypt" was given a mean rating of 4.45 and was viewed favorably by just 27%, while "military aid...to countries that are friendly to the US" was rated positively by only 25%, with a

mean rating of 4.26.

It should be noted, however, that in a Pew survey taken in September 1997, a strong majority (73%) favored "military aid to countries that are important allies of the US." Thus it may be that a strong majority does want to maintain some military aid and feels that it is necessary, even if most are not really enthusiastic about it.

The second or middle tier of reasons and forms contains a more varied mix of items that were given positive responses by roughly 40% to 50% of respondents. Among the reasons ranked in this tier are "to discourage countries from trying to develop nuclear weapons" (51%), "to get countries to give US access to regions where we have strategic interests" (48%), and "to help newly democratic countries develop their democratic institutions" (42%). While these are certainly important national interest rationales, they are somewhat different from the influence-related considerations in tier three. Two of these reasons (discouraging nuclear weapons and strengthening democracies) can be seen as promoting global goods, not simply US interests; the other (strategic access) represents concrete, limited goals that further US interests -- something less imposing than the general increase of US influence over other countries, which was rated far lower.

These findings point to a very significant possibility: that when Americans express attitudes about foreign aid, the kind of aid they are commenting on may be more closely related to US strategic interests than to hunger, poverty or development. As mentioned, foreign aid was given a mean rating of 4.9 -- only slightly above the scores given for reasons and forms of aid related to strategic influence. However, reasons and forms of aid related to the alleviation of hunger and poverty score considerably higher. Such thinking also appeared in some focus group comments. One man remarked, "I would like to see the US government, instead of sending all the money over in foreign aid to countries [where] a lot of the money gets wasted and involved in corruption, I think that some of that money should be used to feed the hungry in the world." Apparently this person--as well as other participants in the groups -- had the idea that hunger aid was one thing, but that 'foreign aid' was something different.

*Table 1*

VIEWS ON FOREIGN AID Ratings on 0-10 scale					
<i>Tier One</i>					
Reasons for Giving Aid	% over 5	Mean	Forms of Aid	% over 5	Mean
To alleviate hunger and disease in poor countries	77%	7.71	Child Survival Programs, including prenatal care, immunizations and nutrition	76%	7.66
To help poor countries develop their economies	59%	6.42	Education and training for people in poor countries	67%	7.04

			The Peace Corps	64%	7.07
			Programs that focus on helping women and girls	61%	6.81
<b><i>Tier Two</i></b>					
To discourage countries from trying to develop nuclear weapons	51%	5.98	Aid to farmers in Colombia to convert from drugs to normal crops	47%	5.64
To get countries to give US access to regions where we have strategic interests	48%	5.79	Making very small loans to people in poor villages to start small businesses	46%	5.59
To help newly democratic countries develop their democratic institutions	42%	5.52	Military aid to Colombia to help fight drug traffickers	42%	5.32
			Promoting democracy by helping organize and monitor elections	41%	5.52
<b><i>Tier Three</i></b>					
To increase US influence over other countries	23%	4.40	Aid to Israel and Egypt, including military and economic aid	27%	4.45
			Military aid, which provides weapons and materiel to countries friendly to the US	25%	4.26

A 1998 Rand Corporation study of global population issues contained a similar evaluation of US foreign aid. Respondents were asked to use a scale of one to ten to assign priority to a variety of "goals" for US international economic assistance (a rating of 1 meant the goal was "lowest priority" and 10 meant "highest priority"). Although all of the 15 items tested received generally high scores -- between 6.3 and 7.8 -- items that focused on altruistic, humanitarian concerns ranked highest, as in the current survey. Two of the top three items focused on children: "improving children's health," which earned a mean score of 7.8; and "increasing survival rates of babies and young children," which scored 7.4. Relieving human suffering brought about by civil war and natural disaster" ranked fourth with a mean of 7.4. Goals relating to women also did well: "helping women in poor countries avoid unintended pregnancies" and "improving women's health" both earned a mean score of 6.9. The goal of "improving economic conditions in developing countries" received a relatively low rating of 6.3, though only slightly lower than the 6.42 in the PIPA study for "help[ing] poor countries develop their economies."

Other goals also received high scores, including "promoting human rights" (7.0), "promoting democracy" (6.9), "preventing civil wars and regional conflicts" (6.4) and "promoting trade between the US and other countries" (7.0). In the Rand study a goal presumably related to strategic influence also did well-"supporting governments friendly to the US" (6.8)-which seems

to be more acceptable than "increasing influence over other countries" (discussed above).

The 1995 PIPA study also found much higher support for programs aimed at poor countries and lower support for aid with a strategic component. Overwhelming majorities favored maintaining or increasing spending on child survival (91%), the Peace Corps (90%), humanitarian relief (87%), environmental aid to poor countries (79%), development assistance (75%) and family planning for poor countries (74%). The percentage wanting to maintain or increase spending on loans to Turkey and Greece was 61%, on military aid only 47%, and on aid to Egypt and Israel only 42%.

### Preference for Giving Aid Through Multilateral Institutions

Consistent with the low emphasis on giving aid to for the purpose of gaining strategic influence, a solid majority expressed a preference for giving aid through multilateral institutions rather than bilaterally, even when the potential advantages of bilateral aid were pointed out (see box).



## 4. Support for Major Effort Against World Hunger

**Overwhelming majorities support a multilateral effort to cut hunger in half by the year 2015 and say that they would be willing to pay for the costs of such a program.**

Based on the results of a series of in-depth questions about the OECD goal of cutting hunger in the world in half by 2015, there are strong indications that many Americans would support such an international initiative. Asked, "Do you think that, if the other industrialized countries are willing to do their share, the US should or should not be willing to commit to a joint plan for



cutting world hunger in half by the year 2015?" an overwhelming 83% said that the US should.

When presented a series of pro and con arguments on the question, the pro arguments did much better than the con arguments. (see Table 2)

<b>Arguments For and Against a Program for Cutting Hunger</b>		
<b><i>Pro</i></b>	<b><i>Convincing</i></b>	<b><i>Unconvincing</i></b>
Given the high level of wealth in the industrialized countries, we have a moral responsibility to share some of this wealth to reduce hunger in the world.	69%	29%
Because the world is so interconnected today, reducing hunger in the world ultimately serves US interests. It creates more political stability, and by promoting economic growth helps create more markets for US exports.	64%	33%
The industrialized countries have huge economies and tremendous resources. If they would all chip in, hunger could be cut in half at an affordable cost.	75%	23%
<b><i>Con</i></b>	<b><i>Convincing</i></b>	<b><i>Unconvincing</i></b>
It is not the responsibility of countries like the US to take care of the hungry in other parts of the world; that is the responsibility of their governments.	45%	52%
It is unrealistic to try to cut world hunger in half. It would cost more money than people in the industrialized countries would be willing to pay.	42%	53%
The causes of hunger in other countries are complex and poorly understood. It is naive to think that outsiders can really make a serious difference by throwing money at the problem.	41%	55%
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	<b><i>Should</i></b>	<b><i>Should Not</i></b>
So, having heard all these points of view, do you think that, if the other industrialized countries are willing to do their share, the US should or should not be willing to commit to a joint plan for cutting world hunger in half by the year 2015?	83%	13%

Perhaps most significant is how Americans feel about paying for such an initiative. We first tried to find out how much respondents thought it would cost the average taxpayer for a program to cut hunger in half. Their median estimate was \$50 a year. We then asked respondents if they would be willing to pay the amount they had estimated. Sixty-nine percent said that they would. To find out how Americans would feel about paying a set cost of \$50 a year, PIPA posed the following question to a separate sample in a November 2000 poll:

The OECD, which is a group of all the major industrialized countries -- primarily the US, Europe and Japan -- have proposed a plan for cutting hunger in the world in half by the year 2015. Assuming that this plan would cost the average taxpayer in the industrialized countries \$50 a year, and that people in the other countries, as well as the US, were willing to pay their share, would you be willing to pay \$50 a year to cut world hunger in half?

In this case, 75% said they would be willing to pay \$50, and just 19% would not. It is likely that a near-unanimous majority would be willing to pay the significantly smaller amount that many experts believe would be necessary for a program to cut world hunger in half.

In 1995 PIPA asked respondents if they would be willing to pay \$50 or \$100 a year in increased taxes in support of an international program to eliminate hunger. An overwhelming 78% and 75%, respectively, said that they would.

In the focus groups, there seemed to be more pessimism about a program to halve hunger in 15 years. Some participants viewed the problem of hunger to be too extensive and the time frame too short. However, even given this pessimism, most focus group participants were willing to support such an effort. One man summed it up this way: "...eventually it would be solved. And if we didn't succeed in doing 50%, suppose we only did 25%, wouldn't that be an improvement?"

A number of focus group participants also emphasized that such a plan should be more comprehensive, going beyond just fighting hunger. Better birth control or family planning was mentioned as critical to a long-term solution. As one woman said, "...It can't just be the food, and it just can't just be birth control, it's an educational package...in every aspect: birth control, the food, the health, everything. It's not just give them money for food or let's feed them, that's not the answer." This is consistent with poll findings (discussed below) that reveal a strong preference for a development approach rather than a disaster relief approach to foreign aid.

### **Perceptions of Others' Willingness**

Although a very large majority expressed readiness to accept the costs of a program to cut hunger in half, there was some skepticism about how much other Americans would accept. Those who gave an amount they would be willing to pay were asked whether they thought the average American would be willing to pay that much. Only 32% said yes, while 65% said no. Other research has shown that people tend to underestimate the average person as compared to oneself when it comes to making sacrifices for socially desirable goals.

Respondents were a bit more optimistic that the Europeans and Japanese would do their part in an international effort to halve hunger by 2015, though in both cases a slim plurality felt they would not. Forty-eight percent believed the Europeans would not be willing to do their part, while 43% thought they would be willing. Similarly, by 47% to 44%, respondents felt that Japan would also fail to do its part. In the focus groups, some expressed the view that Japan had too many of its own problems to deal with, and that the Europeans might be reluctant because, as one woman said, "they are already more heavily taxed [than Americans] to begin with."

## **5. Aid to Africa**

**Consistent with the strong concern for hunger and poverty, support for aid to Africa is very high.**

Consistent with the strong majority support for alleviating hunger and the relatively low priority given to strategic interests when thinking about foreign aid, Americans would also be

likely to respond positively to an aid program aimed specifically at Africa. In the current survey, respondents were presented with strongly stated pro and con arguments on foreign aid to Africa. An overwhelming 72% found convincing the argument that "Africa is the continent with the highest percentage of undernourished people, and where hunger is growing the fastest. Therefore the US should pay special attention to the problem of hunger in Africa" (unconvincing: 26%). By a two-to-one margin (65% to 32%), respondents also found convincing the assertion that "Africa has the potential to become a significant market for US trade. Therefore the US should make an effort to help Africa get on its feet." By contrast, 70% rejected as unconvincing the argument that "The US has no vital interests in Africa. Therefore the US should make Africa a lower priority when deciding where to distribute its aid" (24% convincing). (See Table 3.)

Table 3

<b>Arguments For and Against Aid Focused on Africa</b>		
<b><i>Pro</i></b>	<b><i>Convincing</i></b>	<b><i>Unconvincing</i></b>
Africa is the continent with the highest percentage of undernourished people and where hunger is growing the fastest. Therefore the US should pay special attention to the problem of hunger in Africa.	72%	26%
Africa has the potential to become a significant market for US trade. Therefore the US should make an effort to help Africa get on its feet.	65%	32%
<b><i>Con</i></b>	<b><i>Convincing</i></b>	<b><i>Unconvincing</i></b>
The corruption in the governments of African countries is so widespread that US aid does little good there. The US should stop throwing good money after bad.	53%	41%
The US has no vital interests in Africa. Therefore the US should make Africa a lower priority when deciding where to distribute its aid.	24%	70%

<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	<b><i>Increased</i></b>	<b><i>Cut</i></b>	<b><i>Kept Same</i></b>
So, in conclusion, do you think US aid to Africa should be increased, cut, or kept about the same?	31%	12%	50%

After having heard all the arguments, respondents were asked if "US aid to Africa should be increased, cut, or kept about the same." An overwhelming 81% said that aid to the continent should be increased (31%) or kept about the same (50%). Only 12% wanted to cut aid to Africa. This is far lower than the percentage that wanted to cut foreign aid in general (40%), and even lower than the percentage that wanted to cut the amount spent to reduce hunger in poor countries (20%). This is particularly striking because a 53% majority of respondents found convincing the argument that "the corruption in the governments of African countries is so widespread that US aid does little good there."

Other recent surveys have also found strong majority support for economic aid to Africa. In the

November 1998 Gallup/CCFR survey, 62% wanted to see "economic aid to...African countries" kept the same (38%) or increased (24%). Just 29% wanted it decreased (16%) or stopped altogether (13%). This was higher than the level of support for any other region asked about, including Russia, Israel, Poland or Egypt. As in the PIPA survey, CCFR found that support for increasing or maintaining the level of aid to Africa was higher than for foreign aid in general. Public attitudes on giving aid to Africa have grown more positive over the last few years. In June 1995, a Time/CNN poll found just a slim 48% plurality wanted to increase (13%) or maintain (35%) aid to Africa, while 43% wanted to see aid cut.

Many Americans are likely to be responsive to the idea that the US should pay more attention to Africa. A May 1999 Newsweek poll asked respondents whether the US is "is too concerned, is not concerned enough, or is about as concerned as it should be about problems in each of the following places." Of six regions of the world mentioned, Africa was the one about which the highest percentage said the US was not concerned enough, with 47% expressing this view. Only 11% said that the US was too concerned about Africa, and 34% said it was about as concerned as it should be.

Support for economic assistance to Africa is particularly high in the context of dealing with the HIV/AIDS crisis there. A June 2000 survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health found that almost two-thirds (63%) favored "the US government spending money to help solve the problem of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa." Just 29% opposed this idea. In the same poll, a slim majority (51%) also favored "reducing the amount of money these African countries owe to the United States, so they can use the money to deal with the problem of AIDS" (40% were opposed). It even appears that Americans are willing to provide this aid in addition to general economic assistance to the continent, rather than simply redirecting current spending to this end. In a January 2000 Newsweek survey, 48% favored and 43% opposed "spending more money generally on Africa, in addition to funds specifically for AIDS."

In the focus groups, knowledge of the problems in Africa and support for aid to Africa was quite high. As one woman remarked:

I think if we don't do something in Africa soon -- if the world doesn't do something in Africa -- you're going to lose more than what they are losing now. I mean AIDS is rampant, health issues are unbelievable, their hunger is unbelievable, their governments are unstable; all of that is going to bring down that whole continent...Millions of people are going to be gone because of these issues that we could address. And I think there also has to be a plan.

## **6. Development Aid**

**Strong majorities support the idea that the US should not only try to help alleviate hunger, but should also address the long-term goal of helping poor countries develop their economies. Support is derived from long-term self-interest as well as moral considerations. Programs that emphasize education, and helping women and girls are popular.**

In addition to supporting efforts to reduce hunger in poor countries, a large majority also supports foreign aid to help such countries develop their economies. Seventy-three percent said they favored "aid that helps needy countries develop their economies." This is virtually the same result Pew found in September 1997 (76% favored). As a reason for giving aid, "helping poor countries develop their economies" was given a mean score of 6.4, with 59% rating it 6 or higher -- ranking it second only to alleviating hunger and disease as a good reason for giving aid.

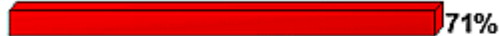
Arguments against development assistance - i.e., that it is ineffective, too complicated, or that it simply ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials - do not persuade the majority.

Presented two arguments, only 26% agreed with the view that "helping poor countries develop their economies is too complicated and we cannot really tell if it is doing much good," while 71% agreed that, "It is important to help poor countries develop their economies so that they can become more self-sufficient." An argument against development assistance that stressed the problem of corruption did somewhat better, with 39% finding convincing the argument that "Trying to help poor countries develop their economies is a bottomless pit and often ends up just enriching corrupt government officials." A solid 58% preferred the argument that, "Rather than simply responding to disasters, the US should work to help strengthen the economies of poor countries so that they will be in a better position to cope when disaster strikes."

## Development Assistance

When it comes to addressing the problem of hunger, there is a debate about whether the US should just provide food or if it also should help poor countries develop their economies. Here are two statements on the issue.

It is important to help poor countries develop their economies so that they can become more self-sufficient.



Helping poor countries develop their economies is too complicated and we cannot really tell if it is doing much good.



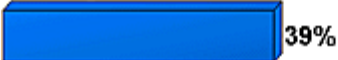
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Currently there is a debate about how best to approach helping countries that are at risk for humanitarian disasters. Please tell me which statement you agree with more.

Rather than simply responding to disasters, the US should work to help strengthen the economies of poor countries so that they will be in a better position to cope when disaster strikes.



Trying to help poor countries develop their economies is a bottomless pit and often ends up just enriching corrupt government officials.



This point of view was widespread in the focus groups. Most argued that simply giving food aid would never solve the underlying problems. One woman put it this way:

Going in there and learning what the people need is far more valuable than just giving all that food and letting it sit on the dock. That's where [programs like the] Peace Corps would be really wonderful -- to follow up and stay in there and see change come about and see the economy of that country start to grow and develop. We go in, we dump all this money and then we leave...and then we're in worse shape because they all hate us.

Another woman summarized this view by saying, "...to try to help build roads, build hospitals, educate, help farm land, to teach the [poor countries] how to become self-sufficient...that probably is the best way." Then she went on to say, as people do whenever this subject comes up, "You know, if you give a man a fish, he eats today; teach him to fish, he eats forever and can feed other people."

### Sources of Support

Support for helping poor countries is prompted by the belief that the US has a moral

responsibility. In an October 1999 PIPA poll an overwhelming 68% agreed (31% strongly) that, "As one of the world's rich nations, the United States has a moral responsibility toward poor nations to help them develop economically and improve their people's lives."

However, there is also strong support for the idea that promoting development of poor countries serves the long-term US interest. Nearly two out of three (65%) agreed with the argument: "The world economy is so interconnected today, that in the long run, helping third world countries to develop is in the economic interest of the US. Many of these countries will become trading partners that buy our exports, so eventually our aid will pay off economically." Just 32% disagreed. Sixty-five percent also found convincing the argument that the US should help Africa because it has the potential to become a big market for US goods.



Other polls have also found evidence that Americans believe that it is in the US interest to see developing countries grow, even though they may ultimately become economic competitors. In an October 1999 PIPA poll, 63% said that "In the long run, if developing countries do become stronger economically," it would have a positive impact on "jobs in the United States"--presumably because of increased demand for American products and the decline of wage competition as developing countries grow. Also, 74% said that if developing countries become stronger economically it would have a positive impact on "U.S. business opportunities in developing countries," and 70% said that it would have a positive impact on "the U.S. economy." In a 1993 ICI poll, 67% disagreed with the idea that it was "against our interests to help developing countries, because they will compete with us economically and politically." In the 1995 PIPA poll, only 33% said that it had been a mistake for the US to help South Korea develop because it is now an economic competitor.

In the focus groups, this basic point of view held even when potential trade-offs were highlighted. For example, we asked participants if it would be better to just provide food to needy countries, which would provide significant benefits to US farmers, or to provide development assistance that would allow such countries to become self sufficient over time, which might hurt US farmers. Although there was sensitivity to American farmers, the general feeling was that, as one woman said, "to develop their countries to be more self-sufficient would benefit everyone in the long run."

## **Support for Focus on Women and Girls in Development Aid**

Many experts on development stress that a critical factor in promoting development is to help women and girls. This idea was well received in the current survey. Sixty-one percent gave a positive score to programs that focus on helping women and girls. In a separate question, respondents were also presented the debate over whether to focus on women and girls:

Some people who study economic development say that aid programs should put special emphasis on helping women, because they are more apt to share the benefits with children and other family members, and because when women are more economically secure they tend to have fewer children. Others argue that it is not right to emphasize women because it discriminates against men and it might interfere with the prevailing culture in those countries. Do you think that it seems like a good idea or not a good idea for aid programs to put special emphasis on helping women?

Sixty-six percent felt this was a good idea while 30% did not.

Research by other organizations has also found substantial support for efforts to improve the lives of women and girls in developing countries. In the 1998 survey detailed in the Rand report cited above, respondents were asked if they favored or opposed a number of programs aimed at helping women. "Programs to give girls in developing countries the same opportunities for education as boys have" were favored by 91% and opposed by just 9%. "Programs to improve women's health generally" (88%); "efforts to reduce domestic violence against women" (85%); and "programs to help women support themselves and their families financially" (84%) were also supported by very strong majorities.

## **Support for Various Forms of Development Assistance**

Americans support a number of specific kinds of development aid. As noted earlier, 67% gave a positive rating to efforts to educate and train people in poor countries. A plurality (46%) responded positively to micro-loan programs that help people in poor villages start small businesses.

Earlier polls have also shown strong support for various ideas that would promote development by extending the benefits of globalization to poor countries. An idea currently under discussion at the WTO for giving poor countries preferential trade treatment received strong support in an October 1999 PIPA poll, even when it was suggested it might threaten some American jobs. The question read:

Currently there are efforts to find ways to help the very poorest countries in the world, other than giving them direct aid. One idea being discussed is for the wealthier countries to allow in more of the products from these very poor countries. Some say that this would be a good idea because it would help these poor countries get on their feet, and, because their imports would still be no more than one percent of all imports, it would cost the wealthy countries very little. Others say that allowing in more goods from these very poor countries is a bad idea because it might threaten the jobs of American workers producing the same kinds of products. Do you



think it is a good idea or bad idea to allow in more products from the very poorest countries?

Sixty-three percent said it was a good idea, while just 30% said it was a bad idea.

Consistent with this view, there is public support for the recently proposed trade agreement with African countries, according to an August 1998 poll by Penn, Schoen and Berland, 56% agreed that the US should pass legislation to open up trade with the African continent.

Another idea explored in the October 1999 PIPA poll was to transfer trade quotas from wealthier to poor countries. Respondents were introduced to the debate on the issue as follows:

Some people say that we should give more of these quotas to poor countries, especially those that presently receive US foreign aid, because this would help their economies and may even help some foreign aid recipients get to the point that they will not need aid. Others argue that this is not a good idea because we may have to take quotas away from the wealthier countries that presently have them, and this could be politically sensitive.

Seventy-two percent said they favored the idea while 21% were opposed. The January 1995 PIPA poll posed the same question and found 69% support.

## **7. Reservations About Aid's Effectiveness**

**Concurrent with support for many aid programs, support for foreign aid per se is lukewarm due to a variety of problems Americans perceive in US aid programs, especially a lack of effectiveness and the siphoning off of aid money by corrupt officials. These perceptions may contribute to the public's incorrect belief that world hunger is increasing.**

Even though an overwhelming majority of Americans supports the principle of giving foreign aid and support specific kinds of foreign aid, they are rather lukewarm about foreign aid overall. As noted above, one major reason for this is the public's extreme overestimation of the amount of money spent on foreign aid. In addition, the public harbors several strong reservations about the effectiveness of aid and the propriety of giving aid to certain recipients.

One major reservation that dampens support for foreign aid is the widespread belief that US aid often goes to governments whose policies do not reflect US values. Fully 77% agreed (49% strongly) with the argument that, "Too much US foreign aid goes to governments that are not very democratic and have poor human rights records. This is not consistent with American principles." Just 18% rejected that view. In a January 1995 PIPA poll, 80% agreed with the same argument.

Perhaps even more critical is the public's strong belief that a large proportion of aid money does not reach the people it is intended to help. When asked to give their best guess about "what percentage of US aid money that goes to poor countries ends up helping the people who really need it," respondents gave a median estimate of just 10%. That is, 90% of the money never reaches those it was meant to help.

Apparently, the public assumes that a large percentage of assistance funds is siphoned off by unethical actors in the recipient country. Respondents estimated the median amount of US aid money that "ends up in the hands of corrupt government officials" in poor countries to be a remarkable 50%. Presumably, the remainder is taken up in administrative and logistical costs, thus painting a fairly dim picture of the effectiveness of US aid.

### **Perceptions of Ineffectiveness and Corruption -Median estimates-**

**Percentage of US aid money that ends up helping the people who really need it.**



**Percentage of US aid money that ends up in hands of corrupt government officials.**



*PIPA, 2000*

Other questions also reveal a very strong level of concern about waste and corruption in the provision of US aid. In the current survey, 53% found convincing the argument that corruption in Africa is so widespread that US aid does little good there. There are many similar results in previous surveys. In the January 1995 PIPA survey, 83% agreed (59% strongly) with the argument that, "There is so much waste and corruption in the process of giving foreign aid that very little aid actually reaches the people who really need it." A similar question from a March 1995 Roper Center poll found that 83% agreed with the argument, "There is so much waste in our foreign aid program that very little actually reaches the people who need it." In the 1995 PIPA survey, 58% even agreed they would "be willing to pay more in taxes for foreign aid" if they knew it "was going to the poor people who really need it, rather than to wasteful bureaucracies and corrupt governments" (41% disagreed).

The perception of widespread corruption and the belief that very little aid actually reaches those it is intended to help always emerged as dominant themes in the focus groups.

For every dollar you send, how much do they get? Ten cents? (Man)

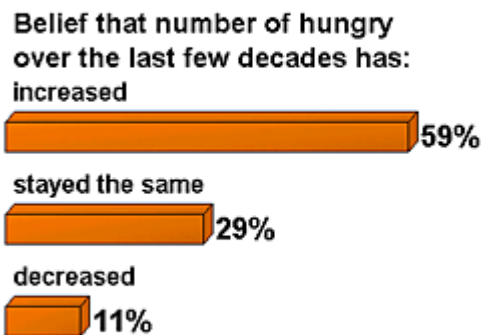
I still don't feel that much of what is supposed to be received by the people on the other end [is] getting [to them]. A lot of greed, a lot of corruption. (Woman)

Well, money goes there and from what I've heard from people that talk about it, a lot of it goes into the pockets of the dictators and the heads of the country, instead of going to where it's supposed to go. (Man)

The concern that so much aid money ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials and the discomfort with using aid to increase US influence over other countries may be two sides of one coin. Americans may assume that in giving aid to developing countries especially those who are undemocratic it is all but inevitable that much of this aid ends up in the pockets of government officials by dint of their control over resources in their country. At the same time, Americans may also assume that, due to the fact that the US government seeks to gain influence other these officials, the US effectively turns a blind eye to this corruption, thus making it more possible for these officials to get as much as half of all US aid dollars. While Americans are not overwhelmingly opposed to using aid to increase US influence, they are not clearly enthusiastic about it, and the idea that so much aid does not fulfill the purposes that they do support dampens support for aid overall.

This skepticism about whether aid reaches those who need it may explain why Americans do not believe that much progress has been made in alleviating hunger. As shown in the box above, a strong majority believes that over the last few decades the number of hungry in the world has increased, when in fact it has substantially decreased.

### Majority Incorrectly Believes Hunger is Growing



Note: Since 1970 the number of hungry has decreased from 959 million to 792 million.

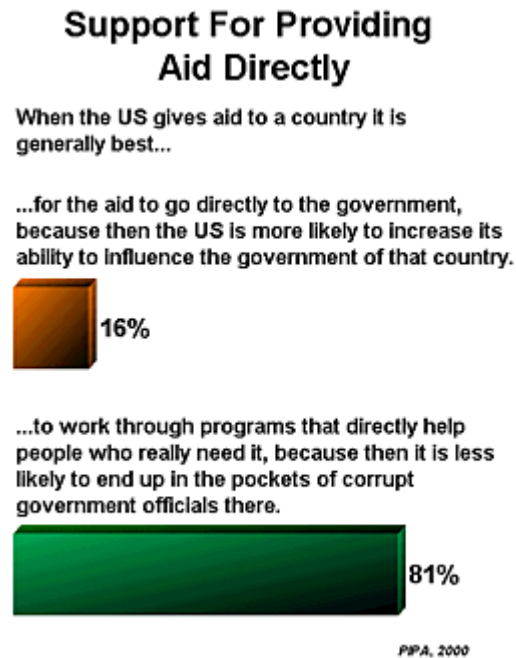
Source: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

## 8. Preferences on Channels for Aid

**Strong majorities support providing aid directly to the needy rather than through recipient governments. Strong majorities also support channeling aid through private charitable organizations and believe that such aid money will be much more effective.**

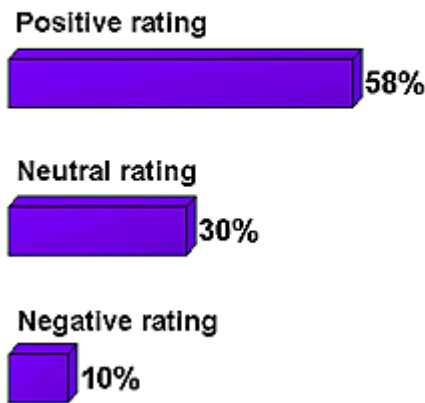
It is clear that Americans have a very pessimistic view of how much US aid money actually goes to those who really need it, with the lion's share ending up in the pockets of corrupt officials of recipient governments. However, a good deal of US aid is not given directly to foreign governments, but rather is channeled through private charities that work with people in poor countries. Does the public have a more positive view of foreign aid in these situations?

The answer appears to be yes, even when respondents are reminded that giving aid directly to a government may be more effective in gaining influence. Respondents were given two assertions about how best to implement US assistance and asked to choose which one best reflected their views. The one in support of channeling aid through programs that work directly with the people who need it was overwhelmingly preferred (see box).



There also seems to be a positive view of channeling aid specifically through private organizations. When asked to rank the idea of channeling aid "through private charitable organizations such as Care or Save the Children: 58% gave this idea a positive rating. When the question was asked in terms of working through religious charities support was slightly lower.

## Channeling Aid Through Private Organizations



There also seems to be optimism that channeling aid through private charities will increase the effectiveness of aid, presumably because it decreases the likelihood that it will end up on the hands of officials in recipient governments. Again, when PIPA asked respondents to estimate how much of US aid money actually made it to those in poor countries that it was intended to help, the median response was 10%. However, for half of the sample, we followed up that question with this.

Some of the US aid money that goes to poor countries is spent through private charitable organizations such as Care or Save the Children, who then use it to directly help people in those countries. In these cases, what is your best guess about what percentage of US aid money ends up helping the people who really need it?

The median estimate in this case was 30%. While this is by no means a high percentage, it is three times larger than the previous estimate.

We also sought to determine if it would make a difference if the private charitable organization were faith-based. With the other half sample we asked about aid money going through "religious charities such as Catholic Relief Services or Church World Service." Again, the estimate of how much US aid reaches those who need it was 30% -- no difference.

The focus groups reflected these views as well. Most participants expressed the belief that private groups would do a better job of overseeing aid. One man remarked, "[my] ten cents... should go through a private organization. I would feel like my ten cents would be going for something better." Another man captured another widely shared philosophy saying, "I tend to favor a non-government approach whenever that's possible." Some said private charities were more "unbiased" or less "driven". However, others gave voice to a more skeptical point of view; one man said, "a lot of the private charities turn out to be a bunch of crooks, scams." Another was not convinced that private efforts would be that much more efficient because of "logistical issues," noting that there are "situations where we need to use some military

transport planes" or other government assets to get the job done right.

Similarly, there was a divide as to whether religious or secular organizations would do a better job. Expressing one viewpoint, a man said, "I would trust the churches more than the private organizations." However, others were not swayed by the religious connection. For example, one woman noted, "I think that no matter what organization it is, you're going to run the risk of things not being done properly...whether they be a church, or the Red Cross, or whoever..."

## **Conclusion**

In the six years since PIPA's 1995 study it appears that there has been a discernible shift in the public's attitudes about foreign aid. While in 1995 a strong majority wanted to cut foreign aid, this has now dropped to a minority, albeit still a substantial one.

This decline in the public's desire to cut has not been driven by a change in Americans' beliefs about the size of the foreign aid program. An overwhelming majority continues to misperceive foreign aid's size as an order of magnitude bigger than it really is. And-when they are asked to do so-Americans continue to propose a "lower" level that is actually many times higher than foreign aid's real level as a percentage of the federal budget.

This shift does not appear to be driven by some change in Americans' underlying values. This study asked again a number of pro and con questions that had been asked in our 1995 study--arguments which clearly express key values and often serve as points in the debate for or against foreign aid. In all cases, the answers were so close as to fall within the margin of error for comparison.

One possible explanation for this change is the good economy. Americans may feel that they can afford to be more generous during these prosperous times. However, looking at past trends, while there is some evidence for such a relationship, the pattern is not consistent.

Another possible explanation is that Americans may believe that as the Cold War recedes into the past, the characteristics associated with foreign aid during the Cold War are receding too. An abundance of evidence shows that Americans are quite unenthusiastic about the Cold War tradition of giving aid as a means of gaining influence over other countries. This attitude appears to be part of a trend. In the mid-1980s, a plurality felt that countries important to the US for security reasons should be the primary recipients of aid. Soon after the Cold War ended, this view declined until it was held by less than a quarter of Americans, and there it has remained. Given the end of the Cold War, Americans may believe that this kind of influence-buying, while still present, is on the wane.

At the same time there appears to be a consolidation in the public's mind about what kind of aid they do want. In the above-mentioned question, the percentage saying that the primary recipients of foreign aid should be the countries with the poorest economies has risen steadily from a third in the mid-1980s to a solid majority today. Perhaps the most striking finding of this study is the overwhelming support for aid that is targeted at the poor and hungry. No less than 83% said that they would support US participation in an international effort to cut world

hunger in half by the year 2015, and 75% said they would be willing to pay an extra \$50 a year in support of such a program. When presented reasons for giving aid, as well as different forms of giving aid, in every case those that mention reducing hunger or poverty received the highest endorsements.

The question arises whether this support is superficial, driven by mechanisms like the storied "CNN effect"-simply reflex responses to dramatic images of need that have no staying power. Were this true, presumably the public would then prefer emergency aid that responds to war, famine and disaster and be unresponsive to the long-term processes of development assistance. There is no evidence of this, however. On the contrary, in addition to supporting emergency humanitarian aid, strong majorities endorse the perspective of long-term efforts that seek an eventual payoff for both recipients and donors, in the form of growing trade with more resilient societies.

So if there is such strong support for reducing hunger, why then do six out of ten respondents say that the US spends too much on foreign aid? We would suggest three possible explanations, all of which are probably contributing factors.

One possible explanation is that, their values notwithstanding, many Americans feel that the extremely large amounts they think goes to aid (median estimate: 20% of the federal budget) is simply too much. Indeed, only a very small minority said that they thought the actual percentage of 1% would be too much. And in focus groups, when told that the actual amount is 1%, many changed their initial position of believing that too much went to foreign aid. Americans also overestimate how much the US gives relative to other countries, leaving them with the uneasy feeling that they are doing more than their fair share.

Another possible explanation is that Americans believe that too much aid still either goes to countries that are not really needy, or is not aimed at helping the needy in recipient countries. Indeed, aid to Israel and Egypt and military aid were the least popular forms of aid.

A last possible explanation is that when Americans say that too much money goes to foreign aid, in some cases they may be expressing their extreme frustration about the amount of aid that they believe does not really help the people who need it. In the current study the median respondent gave a shockingly low (and quite improbable) estimate that only 10% of aid money ultimately helps those who need it.

Equally striking, the median estimate was also that a full 50% of aid money ends up in the pockets of corrupt government officials in the recipient countries. Presumably much of this is assumed to be due to the officials secretly siphoning off a substantial share of the aid meant for the needy. However, it may also include money that respondents assume the US gives to (or turns a blind eye when taken by) government officials that the US seeks to influence.

Given all of these incorrect and negative assumptions that Americans have about foreign aid, it is quite surprising that support is as high as it is! This shows how deep-seated and persistent are the values that sustain support for aid.

The outlines of a strong potential consensus on foreign aid are not hard to discern. There is overwhelming support for an aid program whose primary aim is to reduce hunger and poverty in the world, that seeks to help poor countries develop their economies, and that emphasizes education and helping women and girls. Africa is seen as an especially appropriate recipient of aid money. There is a clear preference for channeling aid through private charitable organizations, which are seen as considerably more capable of getting help to the needy (perhaps, in part, because they are not tempted to try to use aid to gain influence).

This consensus extends to support for increasing spending as part of an international effort to cut hunger. What is interesting is that the amount Americans say that they would be willing to spend as part of an international program to reduce world hunger by half is substantially more than most estimates of the actual cost.

This does not mean that Americans are likely to show a sudden surge of enthusiasm for aid programs. At present the belief that the US spends too much on foreign aid relative to the federal budget and relative to other countries dampens enthusiasm. Changing this perception is not easy, as it is embedded in a broader perception that the US generally does more than its fair share in maintaining world order. The belief that so much aid is wasted will continue to be an obstacle. In the focus groups participants said that they regularly heard news stories about how aid money was misused, but rarely heard success stories.

But overall, there is no more evidence today than there was in 1995 that the American public in the wake of the Cold War is going through a phase of isolationism and have lost interest in foreign aid. The basic value of generosity, especially to help the hungry become self-sustaining, and the belief that it is the proper role of the government to express this value collectively, continues to sustain support for foreign aid, while evidence suggests that some of the hindrances to this support may be eroding.

## **Appendix: HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED**

To prepare this study, PIPA conducted a nationwide poll, focus groups, and a comprehensive review of previous polls done by other organizations.

### **The Poll**

The poll was conducted November 1-6, 2000 with a sample of 901 American adults. Communications Center, Inc. interviewed respondents by telephone on a CATI system, using a survey designed by PIPA. Respondents were chosen from all households in the continental United States by a random digit-dialing sample generated by Scientific Telephone Samples. Interviewers observed gender and region quotas. Questions directed to the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.3%; those to a two-thirds sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 4%.

One question was fielded as part of an omnibus poll conducted among 1023 adults November 16-19, 2000. Opinion Research Corporation International interviewed respondents by phone on a CATI system, using questions designed by various research organizations, including PIPA.



Respondents were chosen from all households in the continental United States using GENESYS random-digit dial sample. Completed interviews were weighted by age, sex, region, and race. Margin of error is +/-3%.

### **Survey Methodology**

Data for this survey were collected using telephone interviews with Americans 18 years or older living in the continental United States. The telephone exchanges for this sample were drawn from residential working block exchanges excluding blocks assigned exclusively for business use, mobile phones, military or governmental purposes, and known business numbers. Selection from these working blocks was weighted according to the estimated number of working residential telephones within each. The exact number of RDD numbers generated per working block was calculated proportional to the estimated working residential telephones for the particular working block against the total estimated working telephones for the entire sampling frame. Estimates of household telephone coverage were derived from census data on residential telephone incidence and updated with information from local telephone companies and other sources and cross-checked with Bellcore files. For the purpose of this study, a working block was defined as those with more than three known working residential telephones out of the 100 possible numbers within that block.

The sample was released for interviewing in replicates. Using replicates to order the sequence of calls eliminates potential calling order bias.

Data were weighted to the actual national proportions for age and gender, based on estimates from the US Census Bureau.

### **Focus Groups**

COPA used focus groups to better understand how people think and talk about health care issues. Focus groups provide citizens with an opportunity to talk about their views and feelings in their own words, and to explain the underlying assumptions behind their views.

PIPA conducted four focus groups: in Richmond, Virginia on June 24, 2000; in Cleveland, Ohio on July 8, 2000; in Baltimore, Maryland on October 4, 2000 and in San Mateo, California on October 10, 2000. Each discussion lasted about 2 hours and included 10-12 participants. The Survey Research Center at the University of Connecticut recruited participants for the focus groups in accordance with guidelines specified by COPA. In all cases, a strong effort was made to recruit participants who reflected the demographic makeup of the region.

### **Review of Other Polls**

PIPA performed a comprehensive review of publicly released polls on health care covered in this report. The primary sources were the public Opinion Location Library database of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.