

# The Charlotte Observer

## To address global poverty, first fight for global health

By William H. Frist  
Special to The Observer  
Thursday, May. 14, 2009

Here's the fundamental truth: Developing countries will not grow out of poverty if their citizens are sick. As a physician, I've listened to people in the clinic beds of some of the world's poorest communities. They cannot think about lifting themselves out of poverty and contributing to the economic growth of their countries as they face daunting health risks.

U.S. support for global health – especially through the innovative use of development assistance – will continue to deliver life-saving returns. Recognizing that the interconnected world demands an integrated approach to global health, President Obama unveiled a bold initiative last week to invest \$63 billion over six years in a comprehensive global health strategy. This smart use of resources improves the health of the world's poorest and strengthens the global economic climate for us all.

### **Healthy workforce is needed**

Economists would argue that one of the surest ways out of poverty is for people to increase their incomes to take care of themselves and their families. For incomes to rise, developing economies must work to generate growth opportunities through trade and commerce, reliable infrastructure, and sound policies that create and sustain jobs for the poor.

When the poor are stricken by disease and weak health, they are unable to take advantage of these opportunities. Rather than climbing out of poverty, they fall deeper into it. It's clear that economic development and human development are intertwined. Growth needs a healthy workforce. The productivity and development of communities – and their ability to participate in the global economy – rely on the physical well-being of citizens to innovate, build, harvest, and work. Sustaining such productivity requires children to learn in school, not fall behind because they are too sick to concentrate. By building healthier, hopeful, and productive communities, we build safer and more secure societies that can alleviate global poverty and contribute to global prosperity. When communities are productive and thriving they don't become breeding grounds for dangerous extremism.

We need to rethink America's global health diplomacy within this context. It is more than doctor-patient relationships or medicines to relieve immediate symptoms. To date, Congress authorized

billions to combat global HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria to demonstrate America's commitment to this issue. These are important steps, but we must not overlook other factors that directly affect global health. Roads, for example, are essential not only to transport crops to market to generate livelihoods for farmers but also to provide them access to health clinics. Reliable water and sanitation systems are vital community services, but also reduce deadly water-borne diseases.

Development assistance through the federal government's Millennium Challenge Corporation takes a holistic approach to global health, laying the groundwork for poverty reduction and economic development. MCC awards assistance to countries already committed to practicing sound policies that invest in human development. The policy factors MCC uses to determine with whom to partner include a country's immunization rates, total public expenditure on health and commitment to combating corruption, which siphons resources away from healthcare.

### **Helping across the world**

These policies support results-oriented health programs, like building clinics, delivering immunizations, fighting HIV/AIDS, and expanding prevention initiatives. For instance, in Indonesia more than three million children under the age of one received measles and DPT3 vaccines. More than 3,463 participants attended awareness and prevention sessions in Cape Verde on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. MCC partners are building roads to connect communities and health clinics. Mozambique is constructing water and sanitation systems. And, coordination between PEPFAR and MCC is strengthening health systems in Lesotho. By deepening support for effective development assistance, like MCC grants, Congress stands in solidarity with the world's poor and invests in their health and productivity.

Eradicating global poverty starts with the health of the world's poor. It starts with empowering them physically to contribute to the vitality of their countries. This benefits them as much as the rest of us, who want healthy partners with which to trade and do business. This makes as much good sense for the world's poor as for our collective international economic growth.

**Republican former Sen. Bill Frist, M.D., is the former U.S. Senate Majority leader and a member of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Board of Directors.**



U.S. initiatives are building water and sanitation systems to help children in Mozambique.