



## **RESPONDING TO CRITICS: GLOBAL POVERTY FAQ'S**

Aid to the world's poor is a topic that few people know anything about and those against it tend to be the least knowledgeable. If you're comfortable answering these questions, you'll rarely encounter a critic that you can't handle.

- 1. What about poverty in America?** "The Borgen Project is in 100 percent agreement that U.S. leaders should be doing more to address poverty domestically. Our focus, however, is on U.S. foreign policy. We're working to improve living conditions for those living in chronic hunger by making it a priority of U.S. foreign policy. Addressing poverty at home and abroad aren't competing interests."

### **Talking Points:**

- In March of 2011, U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner testified before Congress that cutting foreign aid would hurt the U.S. economy and make the U.S. less competitive with China.
- Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, Gen. Colin Powell, and over 50 retired three and four star Generals have all called on Congress to better fund global poverty-reduction efforts.
- The National Security Strategy of the United States outlines development and improving living conditions for the world's poor as critical steps to combat terrorist groups and drug cartels.
- The United States has a foreign policy and domestic policy. As a nation it's in our strategic interest to improve conditions for those living in severe poverty.
- Overpopulation, national security, immigration and U.S. job creation are all tied to the issue of global poverty. When the plight of the world's poor is improved, everyone on the planet benefits.

- 2. What about corruption in poor countries and dictators or warlords stealing aid?** "Corruption exists, but it's by no means a valid justification for letting 4 year-olds starve to death. There are several methods for helping people that bypass corruption, and we need to be investing in those. Doing nothing is not a solution. Doing things that we know work is."

### **Talking Points:**

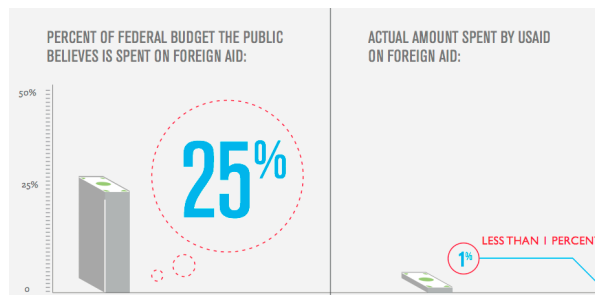
- In 2004, the United States created the Millennium Challenge Account, a program that requires countries to address corruption and meet strict transparency guidelines before receiving aid from the United States. The program has been hugely effective at providing an incentive for transparency, and many countries have made sweeping changes in order to receive the assistance.
- During the Cold War, the United States often gave "aid" money to use to buy off dictators and sway them from aligning with the Soviet Union. However, such behavior is in the historical past and we want to direct our energies toward the future good.

- Often the chaos and lawlessness of countries experiencing wars and disasters provide unique challenges, but overall agencies are highly effective at reaching those in need. The war and disaster situations represent a small percentage of those impacted by hunger.
- Without fail, when the media covers a major disaster, within a few weeks the coverage shifts to stories of situations where the intended aid isn't reaching those impacted by the disaster. This constant coverage of failed aid and rare coverage of the vast majority of aid that is working contributes to the public's misperceptions about aid.

3. **Doesn't the U.S. do enough already?** "No. The U.S. does embarrassingly little as compared to other wealthy nations and when compared on a per capita level, we're consistently ranked toward the bottom in international assistance. We give more money to our largest defense contractor than we give to all aid efforts combined. That means one company gets more money from tax-payers than we allocate toward reducing world hunger, helping people impacted by war and disaster, and all other programs aimed at assisting people internationally combined."

**Talking Points:**

- The superstar nations in global do-gooding are: Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and the Netherlands. All give over .7% of their Gross National Income to help people in developing nations. The U.S. allocates .2% and is ranked near the bottom among wealthy nations.
- Americans drastically overestimate the United States' role in fighting global poverty. On average, Americans believe that 25 percent of the Federal Budget goes to international aid; in reality, it's less than one percent.



*Note: Ironically, many of the people who want international aid cut, are also people who profess that, "no country does more." In lump sum, the U.S. government gives more than other wealthy nations, but with an economy, population and resources that dwarf other wealthy nations, the stat is largely misleading. For example, Canada's population is comparable to that of California's... The fact the U.S. gives more than Canada doesn't say that much in relation to our potential to give.*

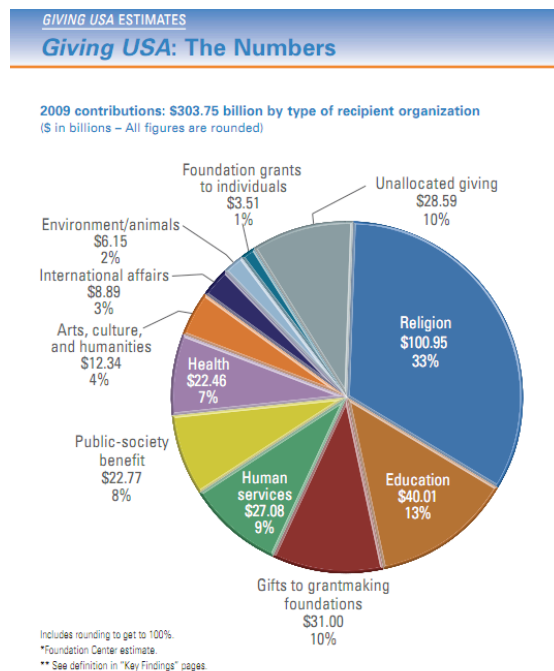
4. **We've already thrown billions at the problem and nothing has been accomplished.** "Over the past 20 years malnutrition has been cut in half. There are more children in school today than at any time in history. Widespread diseases such as smallpox and polio have nearly been eliminated. Considering we only give about \$28 billion per year (\$550 billion going to Defense, \$130 going to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), I'd say a whole lot has been accomplished."

5. **Aid is bad. It creates more problems.** “There’s definitely good aid and less effective aid, but the success rate of investments in sustainable, long-term solutions has been phenomenal. Education, malaria-fighting bed nets, training poor farmers how to increase crop productivity, building wells and providing people access to clean water are all examples of how effective aid has improved lives.”

*Note: The aid is bad argument is an easy claim to make from the well-heeled shores of America. It’s a harder belief to live by, if you and your family have just fled a war, are living in a refugee camp and will die within a week if food and water aid isn’t provided to the camp.*

6. **Poverty should be addressed by charities not the government.** “Wouldn’t it be great if people would scale back their spending and allocate some of that money to helping starving children on the other side of the planet? Unfortunately, they don’t. And for the problem to be widely addressed it’s going to take business, government and everyday people fighting the good fight .”

*Note: It probably goes without saying that most people suggesting it should be done by charities alone and not the government probably have never actually donated to a charity fighting global poverty, and they probably have no idea how little the government is doing. As you can see in the graph below, American’s give very little to International Affairs.*



7. **With our budget crisis, the U.S. can’t afford to be helping other nations.** “One of the worst things you can do to our own economy is stop helping the global poor... We’ve made modest investments in assisting the world’s poor, and we’ve already seen a large return on that investment. For example, over 40 percent of U.S. exports now go to developing nations. Most of our top trading partners were once recipients of U.S. aid. We benefit when people in developing countries are thriving and becoming consumers. We don’t benefit when they’re barely surviving and living in slums.