

THE 2010 WORLD FOOD PRIZE LAUREATE LECTURE: DAVID BECKMANN
October 15, 2010 – 1:00 p.m.

David Beckmann – President, Bread for the World

Well, it’s great to have a chance to speak to you again. I think I’ve had some chance to speak to most people.

What I want to do today is to talk about three really good things that the U.S. government has recently decided to do for hungry people around the world and then a couple of decisions that are pending in Congress that all of us who have connection to the U.S. Congress have to influence.

First, I just want to say again, now that I’m close to the mic, to express my deep gratitude to the World Food Prize Foundation and to John Ruan and his family for their generosity — this prize money and also just the whole event is helping us, in fact, to raise awareness and knowledge about how to reduce hunger and to feed the world adequately. And so I am deeply grateful. I’m going to give my share of the prize money to Bread for the World, because we think now is the time to change the politics of hunger.

This morning Rajiv Shah talked about Feed the Future — this is the U.S. initiative to promote agriculture and also to improve child nutrition in poor countries around the world. I think Rajiv laid that out clearly. The part of Feed the Future that I like the most is that the U.S. government is using its influence with other governments around the world, and with corporations and civil society, to mobilize an international effort to invest more in poor farmers around the world and also, specifically, in things that will reduce malnutrition among babies. I think that’s just a brilliant move.

So it’s not just Rajiv administering \$1 billion a year — that’s sort of the scale of what he had this year — but it’s also the Secretary of State of the United States and the President of the United States leaning on other governments to say, “World hunger is a problem that we’ve got to deal with; world hunger has increased. The price increases in agriculture give us a chance to reduce world hunger in a durable way by investing in agriculture.” And so all of the G-8 governments have made substantial commitments.

And then, with that, they’re going to developing-country governments and saying, “We want to invest in agriculture in some countries where the national government is also investing more, and in a smart way, in its own farmers.” They’re also using their muscle with companies and with civil society to get all of us working together. I think it’s just – as an American, I’m deeply proud that this U.S. Secretary of State is using our power to do good things for poor farmers around the world.

And, let me just make it clear. This is not just that Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are doing this; Congress has also been very supportive, both Republicans and Democrats. So the money that Rajiv has to spend for Feed the Future was approved by Congress, and as some of you know, some key members of Congress introduced legislation, the Global Food Security Act, months before the administration unveiled their initiative. So it really is the whole U.S. government reaching out to poor farmers around the world.

The second thing I want to flag is part of Feed the Future, and Rajiv mentioned it in passing this morning, but it’s new, and I think many people don’t know about it yet — it’s a small component of Feed the Future, focused on malnourished babies. So it’s called the 1000 Days campaign and was really launched at the Millennium Development Goals summit just two or three weeks ago.

The Gates Foundation [and] the World Bank funded a series of studies across the world to find out what kinds of nutrition programs are most effective in reducing death and disability among children. So, as of

January 2008, we know better than we have ever known before what works. If you have a limited amount of money, if you spend that, in what ways will you have the biggest impact on reducing the damage to children that malnutrition still causes on such a large scale? Then remarkably, all of the big international agencies, many of the small international agencies that promote nutrition programs in developing countries, were able to come to an agreement based on this new knowledge about, “What’s the program then? What’s the priority program for the world to reduce child malnutrition?”

And finally, the U.S. government and the Irish government and the United Nations at the Millennium Development Summit pulled together a political-level meeting in order to recruit high-level government support and corporate support for what they are calling the 1000 Days campaign. It’s just extraordinary; the world never works this way. You get new knowledge, and the technical people all agree, “Yeah, that’s what we ought to do,” and then the political people say, “Okay, let’s do that.” This doesn’t happen – and [now] it’s happening.

And you can summarize the 1000 Days campaign in six sentences.

First, focus on the first 1000 days of life, from conception to 2. Now, nobody’s against feeding 5-year-olds, but if you have limited amounts of money, the most crucial thing to do is to feed pregnant women, to get good nutrition to pregnant women and babies.

Second, you can do a lot to reduce malnutrition among babies by teaching poor parents good nutrition habits — things like breastfeeding and the importance of washing your hands with soap.

Third, organize in poor communities. Help them set up a system so that they can identify severely undernourished kids, and you get fortified foods, like Plumpy’nut, to those severely undernourished kids.

And then find ways to get a few of the key vitamins and minerals to those babies; that’s especially iodine, [vitamin] A, zinc. So that’s now four ideas.

The fifth one is, pay attention to nutrition in broader programs to develop agriculture. There are different kinds of agriculture, and we want the kind of agriculture that’s going to reduce malnutrition among children.

And then finally, allow local people to plan the program. Because these ideas are great ideas at a global scale, but when you get to a particular country or a particular community, you may need to adapt to what really is going to work there. That’s the 1000 Days campaign.

And what the Secretary of State is saying to the world, together with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the foreign minister of Ireland, is, let’s take it – in the next thousand days, let’s take actions that will make sure that all the world’s children are well-nourished in the first 1000 days of life. It’s just an extraordinarily good, practical initiative, and it’s part of Feed the Future, and it hasn’t been talked about too much here.

The third thing that our government is doing – and this again is Congress and the administration together, some Republicans and some Democrats, working with the executive branch – and that is that we are seeing a process of reforming U.S. foreign assistance, to make our whole foreign-assistance program and the related policies more effective in reducing poverty and hunger. The ideas are things like: let’s have a coordinated program, let’s have a strong lead agency, let’s have monitoring and evaluation, less earmarking so that you can be responsive to local people. Just put more emphasis on development and poverty reduction. And then there’s also an interesting emphasis on economic growth, because in fact the U.S. assistance program has become primarily a program for the social sectors. So the emphasis on agriculture is part of a broader re-emphasis on sustainable, inclusive, economic growth, so that it reduces poverty over the long haul.

Just a couple weeks ago President Obama issued a directive to all the agencies of the federal government, outlining a new policy, a U.S. policy, to promote global development. It is the first time that our government has had a coherent policy since John Kennedy. It did not start with Obama; in fact, his ideas, he always liked

these kinds of ideas when he served in the Senate, but you may remember that when they came to power they had a few other things to do. And so senior people in the administration said, “Look, we just do not have the political capital to work on foreign assistance reform while we are fighting two wars. We’re trying to deal with the economy.” They had a lot going on.

So it really came from Bread for the World and from many other groups, private groups, non-governmental organizations that care about hunger, poverty, [and] development. We pushed and we managed to get legislation moving in both the House and the Senate, so that, then, provided the momentum that made it possible for the State Department and the White House to go through really major policy processes that culminated in the President of the United States giving a global development policy to our government.

It just finished, and then there are a couple of things that need to be done in Congress — “Now” meaning starting now and, say, to the end of next year.

One is we need to get the money. This is not a lot of money; development assistance is about 1% of the federal budget. President Bush asked for increases in development assistance because he believed it was the right thing to do; he thought it was important to U.S. national security, the U.S. economy. President Obama is also asking for increases in development assistance, and much of that increase is for his new initiative, Feed the Future, [for] agriculture and nutrition. And Congress is not now on track to provide all of the money that he has requested for next year. This year, the fiscal year that just ended, the United States spent twice as much on agricultural development in poor countries as we did in the prior year. And the President has asked to go up by a similar jump in the next fiscal year.

But we need to encourage Congress to provide all of the money that the President’s requested to reduce poverty and hunger in the developing countries. Senator Harkin is on the Appropriations Committee; I think he could make it happen. He’s on my board; I don’t mean to put all the pressure on him – but he’s an honorary member of Bread for the World’s Board. But he could make this happen. So if you’re from Iowa, let Senator Harkin know that you had a great time at this conference and you want him to get the money for development assistance that the President has requested. If we come back a year from now, and Congress does not provide the money he’s requested, we will not feel so ebullient about all the change happening in the world. Partly the President’s ability to move the rest of the world will be undercut. If he goes back to the G-8 next summer and he hasn’t been able to raise the money that he committed, how do we expect that the Germans and the French and the Spaniards and the rest are going to come up with the money that they committed in response to his elbow-twisting?

The other thing that’s really exciting, I think, is that next year, despite all the budget problems and everything, all the partisanship, I think we have a chance to get legislation that will reform foreign assistance not just for one administration – you know, the President’s directive is good, but if he’s interested in something else next year, it only has force as long as the President, the White House, the State Department are pushing; or, you know, when he’s no longer President, it disappears.

So what we need, in order to make our foreign aid more effective for the next 20-30 years, is bipartisan agreement on legislation that will give foreign-aid reform the force of law. And Bread for the World and many other groups are going to be campaigning for that all next year, especially if the House is controlled by the Republican Party. You know, the initial thing, there will be a lot of tugging back and forth. We need to get them working together, to use our foreign aid dollars better to help hungry people; that’s what it’s about.

So just let me close with an ad, since I’m an activist. Go to bread.org if you want to know how to help on precisely these issues. These things will not go the right way if we are not part of it. And one way that you can become part of it is to go to bread.org, become part of Bread for the World, follow these issues. Let your own members of Congress – even if you don’t live in this country, many of you have ties into the U.S. government, the U.S. Congress – speak from your expertise and let them know that we need them to do their part in order to end hunger in the world. Thank you very much.