



Building Prosperity, Stability, and Security Through Strategic Health Diplomacy: A Study of 15 Years of PEPFAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As outlined in our 2015 report, the theory of strategic health diplomacy (SHD) is that investments in health programs have the potential not only to have extraordinary positive impacts on health, but also to advance key strategic and foreign policy objectives. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program—launched in 2003 by President George W. Bush and a bipartisan group of legislators in the form of a groundbreaking bill that provided \$15 billion in emergency funding for antiretroviral treatment, care for orphans, and HIV transmission prevention—provides an exceptional example of strategic health diplomacy.

With two bipartisan reauthorizations and 15 years of experience, PEPFAR's performance has set a new standard for the scale and ambitions of global health aid, by proving that strategic investments can change the course of one of the worst epidemics the world has ever encountered. Working closely with partner countries and the Global Fund, PEPFAR is providing support to the most vulnerable and, in many cases, the most productive segments of some of the poorest societies in the world. It is, as President George W. Bush said, “a work of mercy...” that now supports over 14 million people on life-saving treatment and has enabled 2.2 million babies of HIV-positive mothers to be born free of HIV.

PEPFAR has evolved rapidly to stay ahead of a dynamic HIV pandemic and is now working towards the long-term goals of achieving epidemic control and ending AIDS as a public health threat. To achieve these goals, the program has:

- Embraced the power of detailed data that allows for efficient and effective targeting of program investments;
- Accelerated the use of new treatment and prevention technologies; and
- Developed a highly transparent and collaborative approach to its planning and implementation, resulting in greatly enhanced program performance, accountability, and efficiency, even in an environment of flat funding.



We believe that the SHD effects of PEPFAR are derived from the six attributes shown in the table below.

ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL SHD PROGRAMS	PEPFAR
Clearly defined goals	✓
Real need, visible impacts	✓
Global goals, local focus	✓
Long-term commitment	✓
Capacity-building	✓
Transparency	✓

Broader Effects of PEPFAR and SHD

Since our 2015 report, we have found through published research and our own analyses that PEPFAR's broader effects include improved:

- Socioeconomic development;
- Public opinion toward the United States;
- Governance, stability and civil society engagement; and
- Diplomatic engagement with the United States.

Together, these broader effects, along with the health impacts of PEPFAR, derive mutual benefit for U.S. foreign policy and security objectives and our partner countries.

SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Although the response to the HIV epidemic faces many challenges, including a burgeoning youth population at high risk for HIV, PEPFAR has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to address health challenges and create broader benefits for the countries where it invests most intensely. One of the problems is that the epidemic exacerbates preexisting socioeconomic problems by eroding household and labor force productivity, which reduces economic growth rates by an estimated two to four percent. PEPFAR's programs help to restore the economic productivity of those infected or affected by HIV, and to protect families, communities, and societies from destabilization.

As a result, we find that countries with higher PEPFAR investment have had greater growth in worker productivity and economic development than other countries. Population-based increases in employment have also been correlated with greater treatment access supported by PEPFAR. PEPFAR has, therefore, been critical to the restoration of economic growth in many of the countries hardest hit by HIV, and supports their development as U.S. trading partners.

PUBLIC OPINION

Through a series of new analyses, we find that PEPFAR investments have been strongly associated with improved perceptions of the United States throughout the world. The program's positive impact on public opinion has been sustained through 2016 (the latest date that data was available).

Foreign public opinion of the United States has important implications for everything from our country's national security and ability to work with allies, to our trade relationships, to our ability to lead and respond to disease outbreaks and secure cooperation with development goals.

GOVERNANCE, STABILITY, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

We also find that a higher level of PEPFAR funding in a country is associated with greater improvements in World Bank Indicators of governance, including:

- Government effectiveness;
- Regulatory quality; and
- Rule of law.

These positive findings on PEPFAR's effects on governance are complemented by recent research demonstrating that the highest per capita spending by the United States on health aid was associated with a large and immediate decline in the level of state fragility, which directly impacts U.S. national security interests.

In the case of the HIV epidemic, one of the most destabilizing forces was the loss of millions of parents, and the explosion of orphan-hood. We find that countries where PEPFAR invested the most experienced the greatest declines in orphan-hood, likely because of greater access to lifesaving treatment and related care. Along with the care that PEPFAR provides for those orphaned by AIDS, we expect that these investments have had substantial effects on bolstering family, community and perhaps societal stability.

DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT

Diplomatic engagement is a fundamental element of U.S. foreign policy, and has been a critical, if under-recognized, feature of the PEPFAR program from the start. Government-to-government engagement focused on addressing HIV often strengthens relationships and builds the capacity for U.S. ambassadors to address other, more contentious issues, such as human rights for marginalized populations and military readiness in regions affected by terrorist activities.

We conducted 15 interviews with U.S. ambassadors to deepen our understanding of PEPFAR's effects on diplomacy. These interviews highlight the ways in which PEPFAR has supported this broader work. PEPFAR has, for example, enabled much greater U.S. engagement with more diverse and broader swaths of society in partner countries, helped to build and strengthen key relationships, and supported further development of governance and rule of law in partner countries. The program has also been successful in encouraging governments to invest much more substantially in their own HIV and broader health responses, which is key to long-term sustainability of the impacts of U.S. aid.

As an additional analysis, our report also explores PEPFAR's role in the response to the 2014 Ebola outbreaks—a less-explored lens through which to view the broader impacts of the program. While the role of capacities developed through other development efforts have been well documented, the role of PEPFAR funding has received less attention. We find that long-term PEPFAR investment in laboratory capacity-building in Nigeria and Uganda has repeatedly worked to prevent and respond to Ebola, including in the 2014 West Africa outbreaks, in ways that were distinct from countries with little or no PEPFAR investment. Though PEPFAR was by no means the only investment in the fight against Ebola, the program played a critical role in building the foundation for epidemic outbreak response.



Way Forward

A renewed examination of the wide-ranging impacts of PEPFAR has once again demonstrated that U.S. investment in this vital program not only benefits the countries it serves, but provides an exceptional example of SHD. We find that SHD has the potential to advance each of the four pillars of U.S. national security identified by the White House:

- Protecting the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life;
- Promoting American prosperity;
- Preserving peace through strength; and
- Advancing American influence.

We strongly encourage policymakers to look at additional opportunities to engage in strategic health diplomacy to secure U.S. interests across the globe. We suggest evaluating numerous other targets for their potential as SHD initiatives, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, non-communicable diseases, and cervical cancer. We believe there are three main criteria that should be considered when considering and prioritizing these investments:

- The prevalence or the rapidity of epidemic growth;
- Its treatment potential, or the potential for containment through prevention strategies; and
- The strategic value of stricken areas.

We also believe that there is tremendous potential to build even greater goodwill, stability, and security through continued investments in PEPFAR. One of the key elements of success we have documented is sufficient funding to accomplish the mission. While PEPFAR has become a far more efficient and effective program, achieving ever-improving results even in an environment of flat funding, the program's ability to continue expansion under current funding levels—including advancing the goal of epidemic control—may be waning. This represents a threat for the strategic impact of the program going forward and, we believe, indicates strongly that the United States must remain committed to robust investments in PEPFAR.



Read the report at bipartisanpolicy.org/national-security