

USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation News

Notes . . . Reviews . . . Perspectives

Should USAID Make Reducing Poverty a Strategic Goal?

Aim Is Implicit, But Not Spelled Out, in Agency Policy

REDUCING POVERTY underlies many of USAID's program goals. Almost 80 percent of the Agency's development assistance funding is aimed at improving the well-being of poor people. Yet because poverty reduction is neither part of USAID's mission statement nor a specifically stated strategic objective, some people doubt the Agency's commitment and contribution to poverty alleviation.

In "USAID and Poverty: A Policy Background Paper," PDC deputy director Michael Crosswell calls such doubts unfounded. In "Poverty: A CDIE Experi-

Quotable

"The poor can afford the 2,200 calories of food a day needed to keep the body functioning, but little else. Such extreme deprivation is an assault on what it means to be a human being."

—POVERTY: A CDIE EXPERIENCE REVIEW

ence Review," economist Joseph Lieberson and program economist Jonathan Sleeper (both of CDIE) agree.

They point out several USAID programs that had explicit poverty-reduction strategies: the Development Fund for Africa; the PL 480 Title III programs in Bolivia, Indonesia, and Peru; and the in-country partnership techniques, begun in 1995 under the New Partnerships Initiative. But many programs do not have a poverty-reduction goal.

A GOOD DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IS A GOOD POVERTY-REDUCTION STRATEGY

Lieberson and Sleeper review USAID's portfolio over the past 25 years to assess the Agency's impact, if any, on poverty. Having moved beyond its 1970s policy of emphasizing basic human needs and also beyond the economic policy reforms of the 1980s, the Agency has for the last decade emphasized broad-based sustainable development.

see Poverty, page 4

Capital Markets Can Help Make Poor Countries Rich

Study Argues: Even the Poorest Benefit; USAID's Role Is to Prevent Insider Manipulation

WHAT MAKES some countries rich and others poor? Why, for example, would the economic growth rate of one nation outpace another's by 15 times, when the two share similar climates, landscapes, and economic bases?

The difference is evident in the structure of capital investment, argues former USAID senior economist James W. Fox, in *Efficient Capital Markets: A Key to Development* (PN-ACG-620). In poor countries, most capital consists of land. In rich countries, land's relative value is dramatically smaller, and most capital consists of

man-made structures and equipment. Vast differences in nonmaterial aspects of the two types of societies are also an important part of the reason rich countries are more productive. A well-developed capital market—the medium through which investment is allocated among alternative uses in a market economy—can help make a poor country wealthy.

The Fox report synthesizes CDIE studies of recent USAID-funded capital markets projects in India, Kenya, Morocco, the Philippines, and Romania as well as an

examination of an earlier Agency capital market development effort to create investment banks in Central America during the 1960s.

But, the study goes on to suggest, businessmen and stockbrokers can be a devious lot, playing fast and loose with other people's money. Capital market development left solely to market forces will produce poor results. Regulation is needed to make possible the development of a vibrant market. Legal protection of minority stockholders and of

see Capital Markets, page 3

In Complex Emergencies, Aid Does Save Lives

But Snags and Booby Traps Abound; Sometimes Relief Prolongs Conflict

THE GOOD NEWS is that USAID's humanitarian assistance during complex emergencies clearly saves lives and alleviates suffering. The bad news, according to a POA study published in December, is how difficult it is to quantify those and other results of emergency assistance programs. *Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and USAID's Humanitarian Response* (PN-ACG-605—by Donald G. McClelland with Elizabeth Adelski, Richard Hill, John Mason, and Robert Muscat) reviews aid to Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda.

From those three experiences and earlier evaluation results including (among others) syntheses by Raymond Apthorpe and by John Borton and Joanna Macrea, the authors shed light on USAID's humanitarian response that should make future interventions more effective. Relief agencies may ask, why bother?

Every crisis is unique, so mining past experiences in this way serves no purpose. Not so, claim the authors. Past experience can provide valuable lessons for the future. But the difficulty of evaluating humanitarian responses cannot be overestimated. Multiple players working toward various purposes complicate the goal. Planning an appropriate humanitarian response and monitoring its effectiveness during a complex emergency (an armed conflict or civil war as distinct from a natural disaster) could cause delays and cost lives. In other words, paradoxically, being able to ascertain how effective we are can reduce our effectiveness.

TARGETING IS A FORMIDABLE TASK

Distributing relief supplies is nearly always problematic. Beneficiaries do not always receive timely and sufficient food,

in part because food is stolen, diverted, and used by unscrupulous political leaders. But there are ways to minimize abuses: stock and distribute food aid in neutral settings (schools, factory yards), use ration cards to track the receipt of food aid, have NGO personnel and even police present to monitor distribution, and use commercial channels (such as local merchants) to distribute goods. If targeting becomes too great a problem or relief aid is assisting people guilty of crimes against humanity, then operations may need to be suspended.

Determining the effectiveness of a targeting strategy requires two bits of knowledge: 1) the percentage of the target population being reached by assistance and 2) the impact food aid is having on the nutritional status of those beneficiaries.

see Aid, page 6

Women Seek Empowerment In Postconflict Societies

A New Study Analyzes the Role of International Aid in the Effort

INTRASTATE CONFLICTS and their aftermath generate dramatic transformations in the lives of individuals and in the evolution of civil society. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of civil wars worldwide has increased. Now a POA Synthesis Report provides the first comparative analysis of the status of women and gender relations in six postconflict countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda.

Women and Women's Organizations in Postconflict Societies: The Role of International Assistance (forthcoming) investigates the social, economic, and political effects of

intrastate conflict on women and evaluates the work done by women's organizations to alleviate suffering and encourage women's economic and political empowerment. The study finds that women were rarely passive victims but instead engaged in complex survival strategies to aid their families and communities.

The report, by CDIE senior social scientist Krishna Kumar, stresses the role of international assistance in sustaining women's organizations during and after conflict. International aid acts as an adjunct to the transitional government, *see Empowerment, page 5*

USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation News
Notes ... Reviews ... Perspectives

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USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation News is a publication for the development community. It provides information on recent evaluations and related policy issues. It is produced by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE), with assistance from Conwal Incorporated for writing, editing, and production support. The views and interpretations expressed herein are those of the authors and should not necessarily be attributed to the Agency for International Development.

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Capital Markets

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creditors from the managers and majority stockholders of firms is closely linked to development of strong regulatory bodies. Countries with such protections have larger and broader capital markets, wider share ownership, and more efficient capital allocation among firms than countries without.

SIMILAR CITIES, DIFFERENT ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Fox compares Bombay and Singapore, two island cities reclaimed from swampland. Fifty years ago they had similar standards of living. Today the average Bombay worker earns US\$1,000 a year, the average Singaporean \$50,000. Why?

India until recently attempted to industrialize by using central planning to allocate capital; its government viewed getting maximum production from industry as a straightforward engineering problem. It conceived of the types of goods to be produced in simplistic terms—tons of steel, pairs of shoes—implicitly assuming that each industry produced homogenous products for which the needs of the economy could be measured quantitatively. Investments were directed to factories that would produce the needed goods. Only recently (and with USAID assistance) has India attempted to develop its capital market.

Singapore, by contrast, has since independence used a market system, where the producer is rewarded for meeting demands of specification. This offers greater flexibility and potential for growth. Lacking natural resources, Singapore created an export-oriented economy. The country is a center of international banking, having attracted

investments from more than 3,000 multinational corporations.

USAID'S ROLE IN FINANCE

Why should USAID, given its interest in reducing poverty, care about finance?

First, there is the obvious connection that developed financial markets are associated with low levels of poverty. Countries with large numbers of poor people have undeveloped financial markets, whereas countries with little poverty have well-developed financial markets.

Second, as its title foretells, the Fox report shows that an efficient capital market is an important ingredient of a successful development strategy. Though the effects of capital market strengthening on the poor are indirect and long term, they do have direct consequences in generating increased investment and creating more productive employment. Moreover, failure to provide strong oversight of capital markets can have severe consequences for poor people—as evidenced by the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98.

Finally, the Agency has already been successful in promoting capital market development. The general approach promoted by USAID—emphasizing the strengthening of regulatory agencies—is sound, and USAID has been able to contract capable expertise to carry out such projects in the case-study countries.

WHAT THE AGENCY CAN DO

Government oversight is needed to prevent market intermediaries from maintaining monopolistic arrangements that lead to high transactions costs, to an atmosphere permissive of self-dealing and rigged transactions, and to insuffi-

cient flow of information to potential investors. Fox advises that donor support should concentrate primarily on strengthening the regulatory framework. Benefits from such support are likely to be much higher than direct support of individual enterprises or investment houses.

USAID support should emphasize technical assistance and training rather than financing of equipment for the operation of the market itself. Nevertheless, some support of the latter may be useful in supporting regulatory goals.

Agency assistance should promote the general approach used in the U.S. capital market. That approach—including a strong governmental regulatory body—has proven appropriate for developing countries. Emphasizing credibility and transparency provides more flexibility, wider ownership, and greater opportunity for new activities than models based on government approval of individual issues of capital stock.

WHERE NOT TO TREAD

USAID should not undertake capital markets projects where the economic climate is unfavorable. A stock market is an institution that promotes faster economic growth in a favorable environment, but it is unlikely to be an important catalyst for adopting better economic policies.

Inflation, large budget deficits, and uncertainty about the path of future government policies all deter investment. Capital market reforms will not produce growth in a stagnant economy. Rather, such projects are best suited to rapidly growing economies where existing capital structures are limiting investment and where firms are interested in additional financing. □

—MICHAEL HOPPS

Poverty

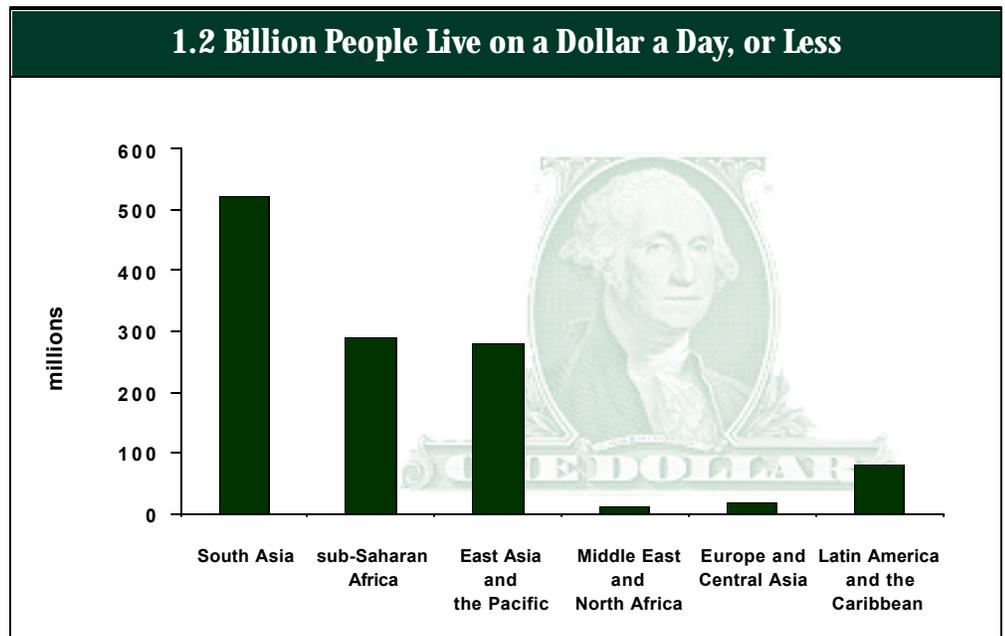
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That approach, used by East Asian countries with great success, combines economic growth and economic liberalization along with health, education, and other social services for the poor.

Evidence shows that this is, in fact, a poverty-reduction approach. Evidence also shows that USAID is part of the solution to global poverty:

- USAID is the leader (and largest bilateral donor) in child survival and family planning. Smaller families have higher incomes and savings than larger families.
- The Agency was one of the first donors to invest in girls' education. By increasing knowledge, education improves the health and income of poor people.
- By strengthening the capacity of local governments, USAID improves the quality of municipal services (water, trash, and sanitation) available to the poor. Working with local governments also significantly increases political participation of marginal groups and minorities.
- The Agency's gender initiatives indirectly reduce poverty by working to eliminate practices that endanger and oppress women. Programs ensuring gender equity in land ownership and tenure also help alleviate poverty.
- USAID's microenterprise lending, considered by many to be the Agency's main poverty program, currently benefits about a million poor households.

Some, Crosswell points out, would argue that the real difference between a good development strategy and a good poverty-reduction strategy may merely be packaging and labeling. Maybe the



Agency needs only to work on its public relations.

Indeed, Crosswell finds that USAID's collective strategies for sustainable development are fully compatible with lasting reductions in global poverty. After all, broad-based development progress strengthens institutions, augments human resources, and raises overall incomes. He cites several studies showing that fears (prominent in the 1970s and persisting today) that growth and development in poor countries systematically increase income disparities are not justified by the development record.

He argues that a good development strategy places some, though limited,

China's Great Leap out of Poverty

In 1978 some 260 million Chinese lived on 70 cents or less a day—the official poverty baseline at that time. Economic reforms concentrated in poor rural areas went into effect that same year. The resulting growth in the Chinese economy—combined with effective family planning measures—reduced the number of people living in poverty to 42 million by 1998.

emphasis on income redistribution. Such targeted interventions are often cited as distinctive features of a poverty-reduction strategy. In his view, a strategy that concentrates explicitly on poverty is likely to overemphasize income redistribution and income-generating activities targeted directly and exclusively at the poor. This sort of approach is likely beyond the institutional and political capacity of most low-income countries that account for most global poverty. It would work to the detriment of both growth and poverty reduction.

SHOULD THERE BE A TILT TOWARD THE POOR?

Ample evidence exists that poor countries are often security risks, weak trading partners, and sources of criminal trafficking, environmental degradation, and costly emergency assistance. Doing more to reduce global poverty would surely be in the U.S. national self-interest.

A scourge of the earth, poverty is what aid donors must target. Beyond its surface of joblessness lie hunger, stunted growth, illness, chronic disease, and premature death. According to the World Bank, fully 1.2 billion people—one out
see Poverty, page 7

Empowerment

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which is not in a position to fund activities of women's organizations. Donor agencies, the study finds, should continue to foster the growth of women's organizations while rehabilitating societies devastated by civil war.

At the same time, donors need to rethink policies proven inefficient or detrimental. For example, the evidence suggests that excessive requirements for reporting and monitoring programs impede fledgling women's groups, which are often understaffed. Thus, donors should provide extra funds to cover costs of data collection, basic staffing, and technical assistance.

Another obstacle to efficiency is the annual funding cycle. It encourages flavor-of-the-month programming, ties up staff time, and hampers long-term planning. Agencies should consider multiyear funding to stabilize the programming process. Above all, women's organizations should never be viewed in isolation, but as vital components of all development initiatives in postconflict societies.

PHYSICAL SECURITY IS ESSENTIAL

Civil wars are characterized by the infliction of enormous physical and psychological violence on civilian populations and the displacement of large groups of people. Women, like men, are both victims and perpetrators of violence, but it is primarily women who suffer from sexual violence. Women and children also make up the majority of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Women's organizations in the case-study countries developed refugee assistance

programs, health and vaccination programs, centers to aid victims of sexual and domestic violence, and strategies to fight the spread of prostitution and HIV/AIDS (both of which tend to increase as a result of conflict and displacement).

International organizations can help assuage the suffering associated with violence and displacement by putting into effect new programs to enhance women's physical security—including protection from violence and hunger—and by supporting indigenous approaches to healing men, women, and children who have experienced physical or psychological trauma. The report advises USAID to review and, when appropriate, endorse proposals to prevent sexual abuse.

ECONOMIC BURDENS SHOULD LEAD TO RIGHTS

In the chaos of war and postconflict economies, women's economic responsibilities increased in all case-study countries. With men away from home fighting, imprisoned, disabled, or dead, more women participated in the paid labor force and acted as heads of households. Women's organizations established microcredit, vocational training, agricultural assistance, and income-generating programs to help women support their families and climb out of poverty. But traditional limits on women's property rights erected barriers to their economic progress. And women were frequently fired from jobs in favor of male workers.

Women and Women's Organizations argues that economic aid programs (such as microcredit plans) targeted to women are valuable—but not as important as international support of property-rights reform and the removal of structural

barriers based on gender. Thus, the international community should offer reforms to increase women's access to productive assets, so economic gains made during conflict will be sustained and built upon, rather than undermined.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IS PARAMOUNT

A paradox of women's experience in the six case-study countries is that intrastate conflicts generated both extreme hardships and unprecedented opportunities. Nowhere were the opportunities more pronounced than in the increasing representation of women in local and national politics.

During wartime, women raised funds, mobilized public opinion, generated support for military operations, organized public meetings and marches, and took over local political institutions. Following conflict, after a brief period of disfranchisement, they increased their numbers in political parties and national parliaments. Organizations expanded women's political participation through education, voter registration, and assistance to women candidates. In many postconflict societies, gender issues became part of the national agenda, thanks to the lobbying of women's groups.

International assistance, the study concludes, has been vital to the sustenance of path-breaking women's political organizations. Such assistance will remain necessary for the foreseeable future. Kumar stresses that in the past the international community underestimated the importance of political participation and power sharing by women. Gains in health, security, education, and poverty eradication cannot be sustained without women's full political participation.

—SHELLEY SPERRY

Aid

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EXPECT POLITICAL FALLOUT

Rarely is complex-emergency assistance politically neutral. It can help maintain social calm, but it can also exacerbate political tensions. (In Rwanda, for example, assistance had the unintended effect of prolonging the conflict.) Each humanitarian response should be monitored carefully to determine its political effects.

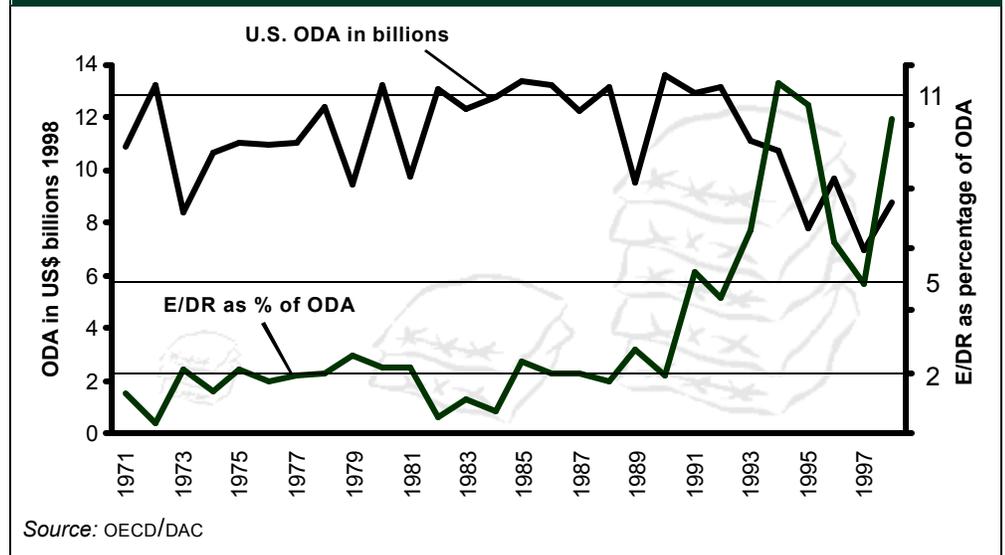
Some have argued that the U.S. government should use food aid to force peace negotiations and cease food aid if there's a lack of peace progress. Others argue that relief should not be used as a political weapon. Either way, the authors contend, the relief community needs to recognize that in some places and at some times, humanitarian agencies may be needed less than political or military actors. As a case in point, according to the World Food Program and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, generous quantities of food aid may have postponed the military intervention that ultimately was needed to end the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At a minimum, aid that is intended to help victims in war settings should not cause additional harm. It's crucial that relief workers stay alert to potential undesirable political or social effects that aid may cause. This can be done only through effective communication and coordination among all authorities, including military and diplomatic.

MOVING FROM RELIEF TO RECOVERY

Obviously, relief cannot be replaced with development activities in a country characterized by little or no governance and inadequate physical security—both are prerequisites. But emergency assistance that meets people's immediate needs can also help reduce dependency and contribute to future sustainable economic development.

U.S. Official Development Assistance and Emergency/Distress Relief as Percentage of Overall ODA, 1971–98



U.S. emergency assistance was typically less than 2 percent of overall official development assistance (ODA) during the 20-year period 1971–90. But in 1991 it more than doubled to over 5 percent of ODA—and in 1994 leapt to over 11 percent. This occurred as ODA began to decline, so that humanitarian assistance was absorbing a growing share of a smaller level of resources.

In all three countries, USAID emergency assistance generated employment (through food-for-work programs) and agricultural production (through donations of seeds, tools, and fertilizer). Additionally, in Haiti, small grants funded more than 1,900 microprojects, such as construction of schools, bridges, and roads and the implementation of literacy, sanitation, and reforestation activities. All were designed to bridge the gap between relief and development.

Societies recovering from conflict are often in the process of remaking themselves. By being at the right place at the right time, relief agencies can help shape the pattern and direction of future economic development.

To make all humanitarian assistance more effective—and results more tangible—the authors suggest that in the early weeks of a crisis, an agreed-upon authority assume monitoring and data-collection duties. (The United Nations designated the Pan American Health Organization to oversee all health planning and services during the crisis in Haiti.) This will also help prevent

the common problems of overlapping donor efforts and donors working at cross-purposes.

AND WHAT ABOUT PREVENTION?

Donor agencies are too often reactive rather than proactive, and they pay too little attention to preventing violent conflicts in the first place, say the authors. They make clear the ingredients for disaster: Take a poor agricultural country, especially one polarized along ethnic or religious lines. Skew economic growth so that large numbers of the population are left wanting. Add some human rights abuses. And get ready: violent conflict, often leading to civil war, is likely to erupt.

What can be done to prevent this downward spiral? Promote economic growth by investing in the agricultural sectors within poor countries. As James Kunder has said in reference to the Rwanda crisis, “an ounce of prevention is worth 25,000 tons of food aid.” □

—LYNDA DEWITT

New Evaluation Support Services Contracts Available

Four Firms Ready to Assist in All Six Agency Goal Areas

USAID STRIVES TO BE a learning organization that puts a premium on results-based management. But how does an organization learn? And how does it measure results to improve management performance?

The Agency has put in place a new set of evaluation indefinite-quantity contracts, or IQCs. These contracts are a valuable resource to help USAID's Washington bureaus and field missions monitor program performance and evaluate impact. The IQCs will help USAID

- Undertake activity-, program-, results-, and goal-level evaluations and related performance monitoring
- Reexamine or test the validity of hypotheses and assumptions embedded in strategic objectives and results frameworks

- Determine whether the needs of intended customers are being met
- Determine whether conditions for sustainability exist
- Distill lessons learned, lessons that may be useful elsewhere in the Agency
- Provide evaluation methodology design and training

There are four evaluation IQC firms: 1) Checchi/Louis Berger, 2) Development Associates Inc., 3) Management Systems International, and 4) the Mitchell Group. The contractors stand ready to provide a range of performance monitoring and evaluation technical skills to support bureaus and missions. The evaluation IQCs are available for five years. Each contract contains a prenegotiated set of

labor rates for 60 different technical skill categories. These cover all six of USAID's strategic goal areas: economic growth; democracy; human capacity development; population, health, and nutrition; environment; and humanitarian assistance.

Electronic copies of the four contracts (AEP-I-00-00-00022, 23, 24, and 25) may be obtained by e-mail request to Bettie Bowles, M/OP/B. To access the IQCs, an office or mission should first check with Joseph Lieberman (PPC/CDIE). He needs to review the scope of work to make sure the requirements are consistent with the IQC objectives. The next step is to have your own contracting officer determine how an individual IQC firm will be selected. After a firm is selected, the contracting officer will negotiate an IQC task order. □

—JOSEPH LIEBERSON

Poverty

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of every five souls—live on just \$1 or less a day. The poor can afford the 2,200 calories of food a day needed to keep the body functioning, but little else. “Such extreme deprivation,” write Lieberman and Sleeper, “is an assault on what it means to be a human being.” Reducing poverty worldwide would go a long way toward achieving USAID's other goals.

The importance and desirability of reducing global poverty is not an issue in the two papers. Instead, the debate is about what strategy will best get the job done, particularly in the low-income developing countries where most of the world's poor subsist.

Although sustainable development and poverty reduction may overlap, and

economic growth reduces the number of people living in poverty, Lieberman and Sleeper suggest it may be time to tilt growth more intentionally toward the poor. Most bilateral donors are taking that approach. And the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have all made poverty reduction a priority. In fact, a study of donors by OECD/DAC found that the United States was one of only a few donors whose overarching goals did not include poverty reduction.

What if USAID made a similar strategic shift? Lieberman and Sleeper contend it would enable mission personnel to better analyze the causes of poverty and, hence, to devise the best approaches to reducing it. Such a shift would also hold managers

accountable for poverty-reduction indicators in the field. It would allow USAID to demonstrate to Congress and the American people the linkage between U.S. aid and poverty alleviation.

Crosswell contends that such a shift would lead to a smaller rather than greater impact on poverty. It would, he maintains, divert attention away from the sorts of growth-oriented interventions that he views as the most effective way to raise incomes of the poor in low-income countries where poverty is widespread. Lieberman and Sleeper are somewhat sympathetic to this concern, but they are convinced that growth-oriented strategies can be presented just as effectively, if not more so, within a poverty-reduction framework. □

—LYNDA DEWITT

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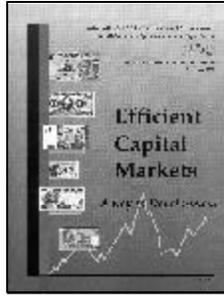


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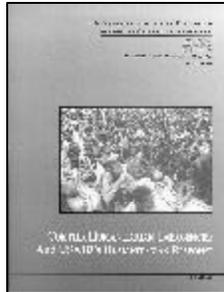
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