
Reforming US Foreign Assistance from the Ground Up: *A GFI Poverty Reduction Forum*

OVERVIEW

In these first months of the new Obama Administration a key debate facing international development organizations is whether and how the US foreign assistance system will be reformed. It has been widely recognized by development experts that our foreign assistance system is not equipped to meet today's global challenges and is in desperate need of updating. There has been no shortage of opinions, reports and recommendations on this issue flowing from thought leaders and policy experts throughout the development community. Notably missing from the dialogue, however, are the voices of foreign assistance program implementers such as government program managers, for-profit development organizations, NGOs and US Foundations engaged in international development initiatives.

There is no question that broad institutional level change must be made to bring US foreign assistance in line with modern development challenges and national security realities. Equally important is the need to implement this change with ground level realities incorporated into the overall foreign assistance reform process. Program implementers from both government and non-government institutions must play a role in helping form the recommendations and inform the process that creates the modern US foreign assistance system envisioned in the new Administration.

THE FORUM: Goals and Objectives

The Global Fairness Initiative (GFI) is actively seeking participants to participate in the GFI Forum on *Reforming US Foreign Assistance from the Ground Up*. Aimed at adding ground-level insight and experience to the ongoing foreign assistance reform debate, the forum will consist of four separate events focused on poverty reduction opportunities in a globalized economy and will draw on experience from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East respectively. Each regionally focused event will be convened in Washington, DC between April and November 2009. The events will be small, results driven forums focused on generating key recommendations and opening a dialogue between poverty focused development implementers and US Government policy makers. Each forum will generate a core document with recommendations and additional questions to be considered by US policy makers and other development implementers in addressing US foreign assistance program reforms. Participants will be drawn from the following target groups:

1. **International NGO Representatives**: NGOs involved with Implementing USG Funded Projects are the core "ground level" experts on poverty reduction programs. Each regional forum will include representatives of different International NGOs working in the region.
2. **Local NGO Representatives**: Local level NGOs working on USG funded projects represent the best resource for identifying opportunities and obstacles in poverty focused interventions.

3. US Foundation Representatives: US Foundations have been leaders and key implementer of strategic poverty reduction programs and represent an important voice in understanding effective strategies and potential pitfalls funding poverty programs.
4. Foreign Government and Multi-Lateral Organization Representatives: Foreign Governments, Development banks and Multi-lateral organizations are essential partners in implementing effective and sustainable poverty reduction development programs and are key allies to USG Agencies, NGOs and Foundations seeking to work on global poverty issues.
5. US Government Representatives: Foreign Assistance grant-making agencies of the US Government recognize the need to fund, but also learn from the implementing programs that are recipients of US Aid dollars and are a necessary audience for the Forum.

About GFI (convener of the forum)

The Global Fairness Initiative promotes a more equitable, sustainable approach to economic development for the world's working poor by advancing fair wages, equal access to markets and balanced public policy to generate opportunity and end the cycle of poverty. The GFI approach:

- **Engage multiple players** – workers, employers, and government – to find economic solutions and create economic opportunity.
- **Partner with locally established organizations** to have the greatest impact and lasting results.
- **Leverage international networks** of respected experts, political and social luminaries, trade and commerce officials, and business leaders to maximize the inputs and impacts of GFI programs.

Since 2002, GFI has improved hundreds of thousands of lives in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. We have developed innovative programs to preserve and create jobs, empowered women by removing barriers to economic success, implemented fair wages and increased revenues and attracted domestic and foreign direct investment. GFI programs achieve success in 5 core areas:

- **Engaging Government**
- **Investing in Women Producers**
- **Building Workforce Capacity**
- **Improving Access to Markets**
- **Bringing Fairness to Free Trade**