



## **Support programs to reduce poverty worldwide**

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Last summer I traveled to Ethiopia and saw the impact of one U.S. foreign aid program providing peas, wheat and cooking oil to people during times of drought and poor harvests.

I was proud to see the American flag on bags of grain carried by needy families along the side of the road. In a town called Dire Dawa, I visited with moms and their newborn babies. The Missionaries of Charity there (the Catholic religious congregation established by St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta), provides pregnant women with care through childbirth and into the critical early months of their babies' lives.

However, these moms and babies often return to families struggling with basic needs. The families I encountered inspired me to learn more about their situation. Their young children are full of potential yet are negatively impacted by poverty. The effects of a poor start are long-lasting. Poor health and nutrition, inadequate learning and lack of protection and nurturing care can impair children's brain development and have repercussions for a country's peace and prosperity. Studies show that children in such circumstances grow up to earn 26 percent less than the average adult income in their country. This traps families in poverty and lowers a country's Gross Domestic Product.

There is something that can be done to alter this trajectory. Early childhood development interventions provide young children with early learning and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating.



These techniques are easily taught to caregivers and help mitigate the worst aspects of poverty.

According to Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman, investment in early childhood development programs can produce a 13 percent annual return on investment by improving health outcomes, boosting salaries, improving a country's economy, and reducing the deficit.

U.S. foreign aid has focused on keeping young children alive. Thanks to the U.S. and others, preventable deaths of children under 5 worldwide have dropped from over 12 million a year to just over 5 million. This is a great achievement! Now we know how to ensure that children living in poverty not only survive but thrive.

I want to live in a world where all children are valued so that they grow to their God-given potential. There is legislation just introduced by Sen. Christopher Coons of Delaware and Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri that would direct the U.S. government to integrate early childhood development interventions into international programming for young children.

The Global Child Thrive Act of 2019 focuses on utilizing existing funding strategically to improve the impact of programs. Sen. Marco Rubio is a long-time supporter of poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance. As a key member of the Foreign Relations Committee that would oversee this bill, I encourage him to champion it in committee.

Link: <https://www.jacksonville.com/opinion/20191121/support-programs-to-reduce-poverty-worldwide>