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## Hillary Clinton on Development Issues

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Sec. Clinton gave an [excellent speech](#) on development today. She has a longtime interest in poverty issues, and President Obama's mother was a pioneer in microfinance, yet so far the Obama administration hasn't been particularly engaged in global poverty issues. It took forever, after all, to get an administrator for USAID, the aid agency. In contrast, President Bush never seemed very interested in global poverty, but he left a quite impressive legacy there — with PEPFAR, the AIDS effort; the President's Malaria Initiative; and his Millennium Challenge Corporation directing aid to countries with good governance.

So I hope Clinton's speech, which hit all the right notes but didn't unveil any specific new initiatives, marks an increased focus on these issues. One crucial point: Clinton emphasized, rightly, that development is a security issue. We fight terrorism not only by dropping bombs, but also by building schools. A couple of other points caught my eye:

—She emphasized measuring results, an approach that has gained ground recently in part because of the work of the Poverty Action Lab at MIT. Some people complain that results are difficult and expensive to measure, but I think this approach is yielding important new insights into what kind of interventions are most cost-effective.

—She talked about partnerships with local countries, and consulting them rather than dictating to them. It's generally agreed that one of the big mistakes we make in foreign aid is to march in and tell everybody what we're going to do, so a new emphasis on listening would be a good step forward.

—She focused on investments in women and girls, saying that women will be central to her development efforts. Not surprisingly, I think that's just right. You just get more bang for the buck when you focus on girls, as Clinton noted. And, more broadly, she talked about investments rather than just aid, which is also the right way to think about some initiatives.

Frankly, USAID is something of a mess, and has been for decades. It's bureaucratic, lacks focus and doesn't get respect at home or abroad. Let's hope that the Obama administration will turn that around. A lot of you readers work in the development field, so what do you think of the speech?

UPDATE: [Here is](#) Professor Bill Easterly's more skeptical take on the Clinton speech.

