

The Future of Africa Without USAID: Challenges and the Path Forward

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Dear Editor

The sudden shutdown of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) operations globally and the U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) present unprecedented challenges for Africa, threatening to reverse decades of progress in healthcare, education, and economic development. For years, USAID has played a vital role in improving the continent's healthcare, education, food security, and economic growth. Its absence will have profound and lasting effects, primarily on vulnerable populations who depend on these programs for survival and progress¹. USAID's contributions to Africa have been life-changing. The agency has supported healthcare initiatives by strengthening responses to diseases such

- HIV/AIDS
- Malaria
- Tuberculosis
- Maternal and young child nutrition
- Health-related issues

Programs like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have saved over 18 million lives as of 2024 and significantly reduced HIV-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. USAID's malaria control efforts have contributed to a 60% decrease in malaria-related deaths in regions like Zambia and Tanzania^{1,2}.

Without USAID, the impact will be felt immediately and severely. Health facilities that rely on external support may face challenges maintaining essential services, including medicines, vaccinations, and maternal care. The fight against malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition will weaken, potentially increasing mortality rates. For example, USAID's withdrawal could significantly increase malaria cases, reversing the progress made over the past decade. Economic development projects, particularly those supporting small-scale farmers, entrepreneurs, and job creation, will also suffer, limiting opportunities for many³. Beyond healthcare and economic growth, USAID has supported democracy-building, governance, and peacekeeping programs. Without this support, Africa may face challenges in strengthening institutions, such as increased corruption, reduced accountability, and weakened rule of law. These issues could manifest as diminished government transparency, increased misuse of public funds, and a decline in public trust towards government institutions. Many governments already facing financial constraints will struggle to fill the void left by USAID's withdrawal⁴ (Fig 1).

Adding to these difficulties, the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO further threatens Africa's health security. The WHO has played a crucial role in pandemic response, disease surveillance, and vaccination campaigns. For

instance, the WHO was instrumental in coordinating the international response during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014-2016), which killed over 11,000 people, helping contain the epidemic and prevent its spread to neighboring countries. The organization also supported vaccination campaigns during the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, saving thousands of lives. Without U.S. financial contributions, the organization's ability to coordinate emergency responses and manage outbreaks will be significantly weakened, leaving Africa more vulnerable to health crises^{5,6}.

While these challenges are considerable, they highlight Africa's capacity to innovate and lead its development. Africa must take proactive steps to protect its development progress. The continent must not remain passive but instead work towards self-reliance and stronger regional partnerships. African governments should allocate more funding to public health, education, and infrastructure to reduce dependence on foreign aid. Strengthening national health systems will ensure continuous access to essential medical services. The African Union and regional economic blocs like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC)

must lead efforts to mobilize resources, strengthen financial ties, and enhance policy coordination to address challenges collectively. A united approach will help the continent reduce vulnerability to external funding cuts and build long-term resilience.

Africa should also actively engage with alternative international partners, including the European Union, China, and private investors, to secure funding for critical sectors. Exploring innovative financing models, such as public-private partnerships, can help sustain essential services. Additionally, governments should promote homegrown solutions by investing in education, research, and entrepreneurship. Encouraging local healthcare, agriculture, and technology innovation will contribute to long-term sustainability.

Now is the time for African leaders to unite and take decisive action toward sustainable independence and resilience. By prioritizing investment in local solutions, strengthening governance frameworks, and fostering collaborative efforts across regions, Africa can position itself to face these challenges with greater autonomy and strength. Strategic investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure will mitigate the risks of external funding cuts and foster long-term economic and social stability for generations to come⁷.

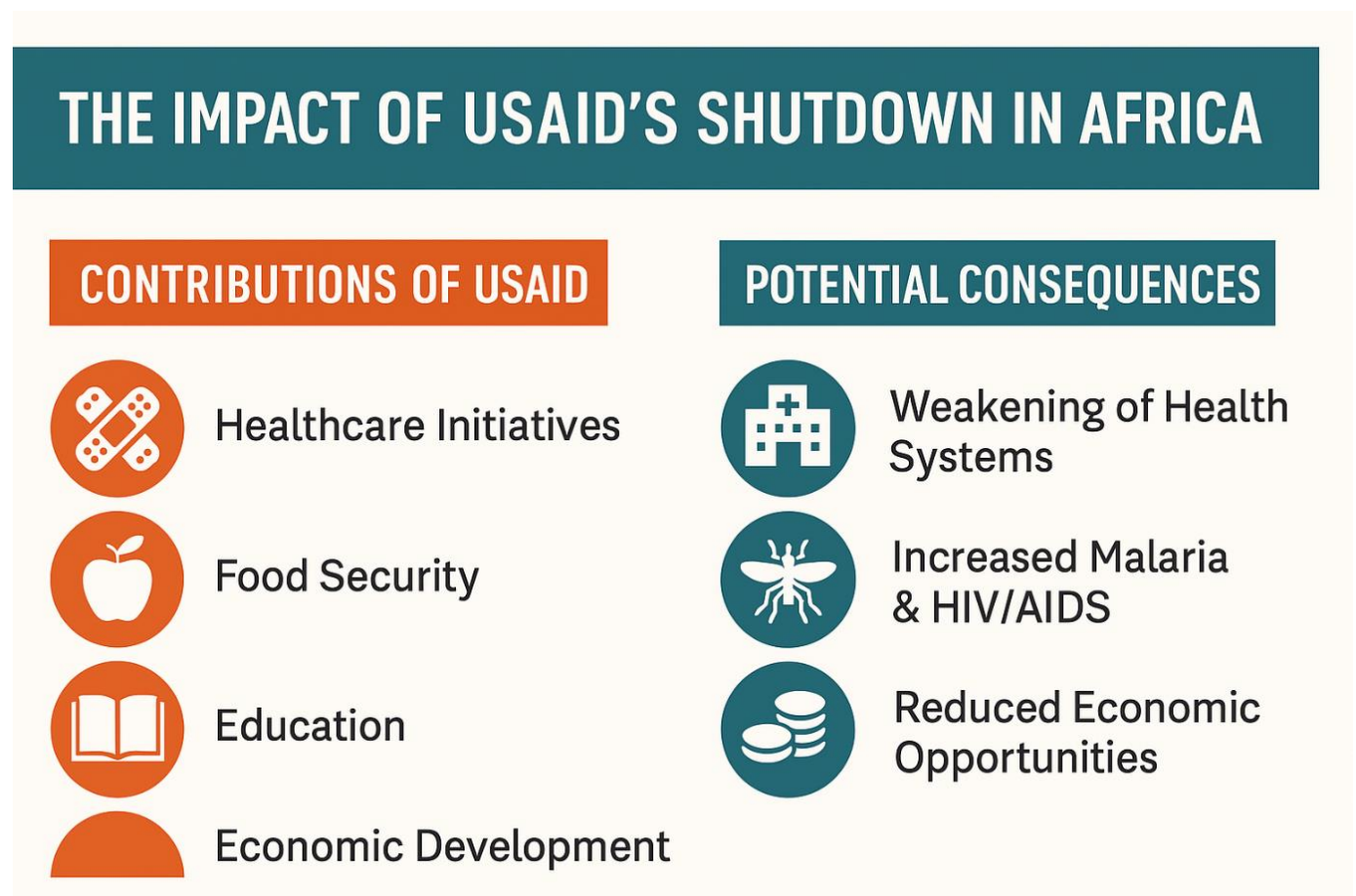


Figure 1. The Impact of USAID's Shutdown in Africa: Contributions and Potential Consequences

Authors' Contributions

AR Auwal conceived the idea. All authors wrote, revised, and approved the manuscript.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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