

News



A woman attends to her malnourished child at the United Nations Nutrition Center in Banki, on the outskirts of Maiduguri, Nigeria, May 3, 2022. (AP/Chinedu Asadu)



by Tawanda Karombo

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Harare, Zimbabwe — February 11, 2025

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Across the continent of Africa, the U.S. suspension of aid funding ordered by the Trump administration has left chaos, fear and looming devastation, Catholic clergy and social service agency officials told National Catholic Reporter.

Crucial charity, aid and relief programs have halted. Clinics and centers that offered affordable HIV/AIDS treatment [have closed](#) in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Humanitarian efforts in crisis hotspots such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan have paused.

Fr. David Banda, parish priest in Zambia, said he fears that the suspension in assistance from the United States will have a "devastating impact on vulnerable groups" in Africa and place a burden on the church and the government whose budgets are already stretched.

Catholic Relief Services heavily relied on funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for development, health and life-saving programs in Africa. With the United States government directing that the aid funding programs be halted for 90 days pending review, there are [widespread fears among the African humanitarian](#) and government sectors that this will culminate in some funding programs for Africa being put on ice.

Banda said his worst fears regarding the withdrawal of U.S. funding, especially from programs like USAID and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) would be "the devastating impact it could have on the most vulnerable populations in Africa."



Laborers rest as they offload bags of grains at the World Food Program warehouse in Adama, Ethiopia, Sept. 8, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Tiksa Negeri)

"These programs have been lifelines for so many – particularly in areas like Zambia – providing critical food aid, health care and support for economic development," said Banda, whose parish, St. Paul's, is located in Chongwe district, about 30 miles outside the Zambian capital, Lusaka.

The United States is the biggest provider of bilateral aid to African countries, providing \$15.7 billion in 2023, according to the [Center for Global Development](#). About \$11.8 billion of this was funneled through USAID. In 2023, the [top recipients of USAID funds in Africa](#) included Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Nigeria and South Sudan.

Catholic Relief Services, which heavily relies on U.S. assistance for development programs in Africa, did [not comment](#) to NCR on the impact of the funding freeze by the United States. The agency had been forced to cut its \$1.5 billion annual budget, about half of which was funded by USAID.

The head of the Catholic Church's global charity arm blasted the Trump administration's [decision to gut foreign aid](#) as "reckless" and lamented that it will likely "kill millions of people and condemn hundreds of millions more to lives of dehumanizing poverty."

"This is an unhuman affront to people's God-given human dignity, that will cause immense suffering," said Alistair Dutton, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis in a Feb. 10 statement. Caritas, the Catholic Church's leading social service confederation, is active in more than 200 countries and territories around the globe.

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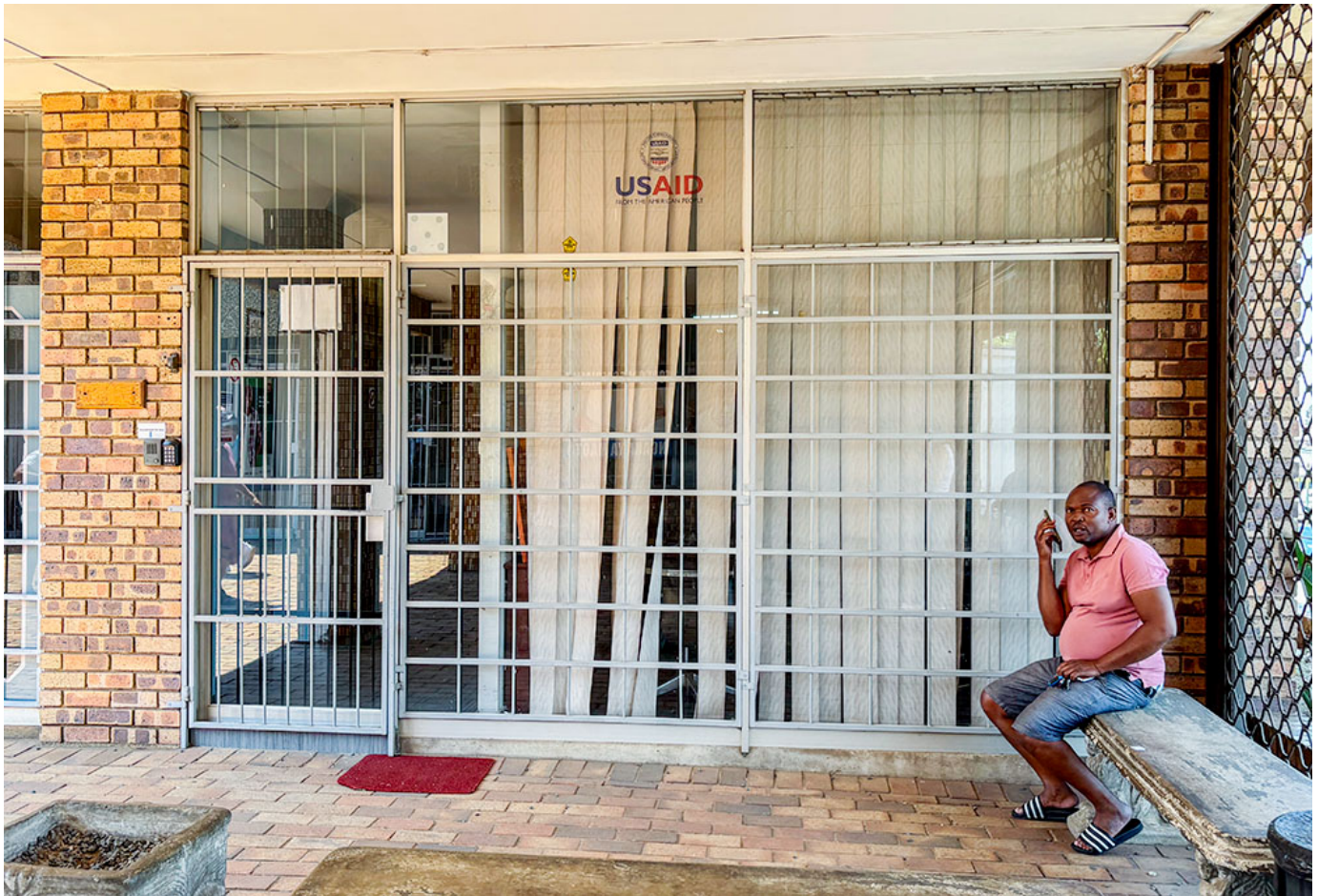
Kevin Carvajal, director of the Salesian Missions' Office for International Programs, said the foreign aid cuts could also reduce shipments of essential items being sent by other charities to Africa at reduced costs through USAID's Ocean Freight Reimbursement Program.

In an email, he said a reduction in U.S. foreign assistance would have "far-reaching consequences" beyond food security and health care assistance, likely to "lead to greater exploitation, child labor, forced labor and human" trafficking.

It will also "significantly increase demands on Catholic relief and development organizations. They will need to fill critical voids left by the decreased U.S. government funding by scaling up their services and leveraging more private funding to meet the increased need for food assistance, health care, and education."

Other channels such as U.S. embassies in numerous African countries also facilitated funding for development, relief and health programs. In Zimbabwe, the U.S. embassy was supporting 500 000 people through humanitarian assistance, and [1,600 public hospitals and clinics](#) benefited from training and technical support from the United States.

The U.S. government has invested more than \$1.7 billion in Zimbabwe since 2006 to strengthen health systems and support people living with HIV, the embassy's [website said in a 2023 news statement](#) on the 20th anniversary of the PEPFAR program there.



A man sits outside the closed Isizinda Sempilo clinic in the Johannesburg township of Soweto, South Africa, Jan. 30, 2025. (AP/Alfonso Nqunjana)

In neighboring South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa [said last week](#) that he was concerned "about the potential impact of the decision by the United States government to suspend some of its funding for HIV and TB [tuberculosis] programs in African countries" for 90 days. The U.S. funds about 17% of South Africa's HIV and TB programs.

According to Banda: "The loss of this funding could lead to fewer resources for treatment, prevention and care, risking a resurgence of these diseases and putting millions at greater risk," particularly in African countries with high HIV/AIDS rates.

The lack of funding also leaves African governments and churches — already stretched for funds — with an extra financial burden.

"It puts a strain on local governments and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]. For example, Zambia may need to rely more heavily on its own resources, or on aid

from other countries or organizations, to fill the gap left by the U.S. However, local governments and NGOs might lack the capacity to fully address the needs such as health care and food security by vulnerable populations, leading to longer-term setbacks in development," Banda said.



A woman holds cans of vegetable oil provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development in Pajut, South Sudan in 2017. (CNS/Catholic Relief Services/Nancy McNally)

Three program officers with Catholic charities working in Africa, speaking on condition of anonymity, told NCR that their agencies are scrambling for replacement funding to plug the gaps left by the suspension of USAID funding. The agencies' own staff was also uncertain of future employment.

"It is a precarious situation, especially for field workers with aid agencies as they have to explain to beneficiaries about the cut in funding. Most of the recipients, especially those who were being provided with HIV/AIDS treatment are often from poor backgrounds and have little alternatives," said one of the program officers

stationed in Malawi.

"It's emotional; Having to explain that we have closed the clinics yet you know that these people rely on supplies from the clinics is something I never thought I would have to do," said another program officer with an HIV/AIDS support organization providing antiretroviral treatment in South Africa.

The United States Embassy in Zimbabwe said [in a statement](#) that it was now "time for Zimbabwe to take seriously its responsibility for the health" of its people.

Jesuit Fr. Jean Baptiste Musiitwa of the Wau Diocese in South Sudan told NCR that it was important for Africa to wean itself off overreliance on aid.

But Banda said vulnerable groups will be affected the most and a "surge in hunger and malnutrition" was likely to be seen over the coming months as "many communities rely on food assistance provided" by the U.S. programs.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)