

Firelight Newsflash! 10 November 2008 - Obama wins!

Dear partners,

Last week, we celebrated an historic moment in the United States' history with the election of Barack Obama as our 44th president, the first African-American to take this position. Below are some articles about Obama and the changes expected in U.S. policy on AIDS and development.

Hope is renewed for children, families and communities in Africa! This is a victory not only for Americans, but for the global common good. Please join us in the celebration!

Yes We ALL Can!
The Firelight Team

OBAMA, DEVELOPMENT, AID, and GRANDMOTHERS!

<http://www.comminit.com/en/node/271656/bbc>

Posted by [Warren Feek](#) on Wed, 2008-11-05 11:33

I am not an American and, to use that awful phrase, did not have a horse in this US Presidential race. However, now that Barack Obama is elected, don't we all need to consider the possible impact of his Presidency on how aid and development policy are conceived, prioritised, and delivered? With intransigent poverty levels, raging HIV/AIDS rates, a food crisis, stagnant infant mortality rates, and a whole host of other big development issues in the poorest countries of the world, maybe this is a good time to consider a fundamental policy shake-up in how we understand and implement effective development action. A good lens into that shake-up would be the possible approach that President-elect Obama might have to development action. For that, we need to look at his background and political principles. How do they translate to the development environment?

Three things jump to mind like an Obama 3-point basketball shot: Grandmother; Chicago; and "Yes - We Can!"

GRANDMOTHER

More than any other global leader the rich countries of the West have ever experienced Obama has a deep, personal connection to Africa - his Grandmother and relatives live in Kenya. The natural flow from this connection is to assume a high priority on development aid in his administration. But, within that high priority there could be deeper implications.

Obama will have seen, over a long time period, unfiltered by status and personal distance, both aid and development action as it affected his family and "African home" community in Kenya. His grandmother, relatives, and community members will undoubtedly, over many years, have let him know their views on what is working and not working in their communities and country. He will have heard their voices not as a leading USA political figure but as Barack, their family member.

Is it possible to surmise that an Obama aid and development policy would feature a strong emphasis on community engagement and voice?

CHICAGO

As we all know, Obama graduated in law from a very prestigious American university, with lots of job offers for Wall Street and the like, and went on, instead, to be a community organiser in the economically poorer neighbourhoods in Chicago. OK - he had political ambitions...but...a community organiser?

He obviously has a deep belief in the wisdom and desirability of communities organising to address and pursue the issues and goals that they decide. And he has strong personal knowledge, skill, and insight about how that happens.

Can we further surmise that this belief, principle, and experience will reinforce a community organisation and action priority in his aid and development policies?

"YES - WE CAN!"

There is general agreement amongst both the American public and the American political chattering class that Obama's political campaign has been at two levels. Yes - he wants to be President. But he also wants greatly expanded political participation.

Obama's style and approach has fomented an extraordinary level of political engagement, debate, and dialogue across all population groups, but particularly among young people. And he has done this in a way that seeks to place people and communities at the center of the action. His catchphrase is "Yes - We Can!". It is not "What I will do for You!"

If we are not running out of surmises, can we leap forward and see an Obama aid and development strategy that seeks to support greatly expanded public engagement in the decision making that affects those publics' future?

That an Obama presidency would move the development and aid priorities to:

Voice; Community Organisation; and Expanded Political Dialogue, Debate, and Participation?

Now that President Obama has been elected, should we not, as good policy makers and planners, spend considerable time trying to learn from the Obama approach and "doctrine". After all, we are all struggling to figure out what works for effective development action. Maybe the seismic development shift in development strategies that could come from an Obama presidency is badly needed.

Or do we all want to face, as he will, his Kenyan Grandmother if we do not do a much better job at aid and development?

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Condoms Trump Abstinence in Obama Global AIDS Policy

By Jason Gale and John Lauerman

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601082&sid=anhDOX7io78g&refer=canada>

Nov. 10 (Bloomberg) -- President-elect Barack Obama will reverse U.S. family-planning and AIDS-prevention strategies that have long linked global funding to anti-abortion and abstinence education, a public-health adviser said.

Public-health policies of President George W. Bush's \$45- billion PEPFAR program have brought AIDS drugs to almost 3 million people in poor countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, more than under any other president. Still, requirements that health workers emphasize abstinence from sex and monogamy over condom use have set back sexually transmitted disease prevention and family planning globally, said Susan F. Wood, co-chairman of Obama's advisory committee for women's health.

"We have been going in the wrong direction and we need to turn it around and be promoting prevention and family-planning services and strengthening public health," said Wood, a research professor at **George Washington University School of Public Health** in Washington.

Bush on his first day in office, in January 2001, reinstated the so-called **Mexico City Policy** -- known to critics as the global gag rule. It bars U.S. family-planning assistance for organizations that use funding from any other source to provide counseling and referral for abortion, lobby to make abortion legal or more available in their country, or perform abortions except in cases of a threat to the woman's life, rape or incest.

Obama "is committed to looking at all this and changing the policies so that family-planning services -- both in the U.S. and the developing world -- reflect what works, what helps prevent unintended pregnancy, reduce maternal and infant mortality, prevent the spread of disease," Wood said.

Gag Rule

Wood resigned as the top U.S. regulator for women's health in 2005 in protest of the Food and Drug Administration's delay in clearing over-the-counter sales of the "morning after" emergency contraceptive. Sale of the pill, called Plan B, without a prescription was held up for more than two years, after FDA staff recommended its approval in 2003.

Critics of the FDA have named Wood as among candidates they would like Obama to consider for the agency's next commissioner.

"A lot of the family-planning associations in Africa refused the terms of the gag rule and they lost funding, they lost technical assistance and they lost contraceptives," said Wendy Turnbull, a senior policy research analyst with Population Action International in Washington.

On the basis of that policy, Bush halted support for the **United Nations Population Fund** in 2002, saying it supported "coercive" abortion programs in China -- an allegation the New York-based agency has denied. The directive cost the fund more than \$200 million in lost funding, said William Ryan, a Bangkok-based spokesman for the agency.

Condom Use

Restrictions on education about condom use have hamstrung effective promotion, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has had some condom information pulled from its Web Site, said Gill Greer, director general of **the International Planned Pregnancy Federation** in London.

"The U.S. administration has certainly succeeded in demonizing condoms rather than showing that they can be part of prevention of both unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections," she said in a telephone interview. "I've always joked that the whole world should vote in the U.S. election because the whole world is so affected."

Under President Bush, the U.S. has provided more money to fight AIDS than during any other administration. Seven years ago, before the Bush program

began with about \$15 billion, only about 200,000 people in poor nations got treatment, and few of them were in Africa.

Abstinence Success

The emphasis on abstinence and fidelity "has been shown to have demonstrable success in Africa," said Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association in Washington. "It would be more than unfortunate if that policy was changed."

Both Republicans and Democrats have indicated support for the focus on abstinence and education that goes along with PEPFAR, which has also been shown to reduce the spread of HIV in countries such as Uganda, Huber said.

"If the president-elect wants to be science-based in foreign sex-education policies, it would be wisest to continue this way because it's shown to be effective," she said.

Calls to the office of Mark Dybul, coordinator for the Bush AIDS treatment program, weren't returned.

Prevention Quest

The decision to focus on abstinence was "naïve and dangerous," and neglected prevention techniques with the most science behind them, said Mitchell Warren, executive director of the New York-based AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition.

"Everyone pretty much expects we'll see a return to a true science-based response to HIV under Obama," he said in a telephone interview. "We've seen eight years of a focus on things we know don't work."

Without a vaccine, AIDS advocates are looking for ways to slow the spread of the HIV virus that currently infects about 33 million people worldwide. Treatment, even with cheaper versions of HIV drugs, is beyond the means of many patients in Africa, where about 24 million infected people live.

The U.S. has played an important role in bringing life-saving treatment to HIV patients who had been unable to get it, said Adel Mahmoud, a former head of Merck & Co. vaccines and professor in the department of molecular biology at Princeton University.

"But when the data says for every person we put on anti-retroviral therapy in Africa there are six new infections and we are doing nothing about it, it's absolutely mind-boggling," he said in a telephone interview. "Prevention is really the solution."

U.S. Influence

Wood said that, in recent years, the U.S. government has influenced and "tightly vetted" international organizations to reflect its own policies.

Obama will bring "back a sense of balance and perspective and the use of good science and good medicine in these positions, and not just this narrow, political ideology," she said.

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Holding Him Accountable: What has Obama said he will do on global poverty and AIDS?

<http://www.onevote08.org/ontherecord/obamaupdated.html>

On reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis: I'll double annual foreign assistance from \$25b to \$50b by 2012. I was a co-sponsor of the Lantos-Hyde Act that authorized \$48 billion by 2013 for HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB. I support lifting the 33% cap on US contributions to the Global Fund, ensuring at least 4.5 million people are on ARV treatment by 2013, and preventing 12 million new infections.

On eradicating malaria: I will support the goal of ending deaths from malaria by 2015 by building on the \$1 billion per year commitment to malaria in the recent PEPFAR reauthorization and dramatically expanding access to mosquito nets that for less than \$6 will lower the risk of getting malaria and save lives. I will also expand access to ACTs - at the relatively inexpensive cost of \$2 per dose - to treat people who get malaria. **On improving child and maternal health:** I will increase funding for child and maternal health and ensure that increases in other important areas - including HIV/AIDS - do not come at the expense of child health and survival programs. I will expand access to vaccinations, increase research into new vaccines, and expand access to reproductive health programs. **On achieving universal primary education:** Worldwide, an estimated 100 million children - including nearly 60 million girls - are not attending school. By 2010, getting these children into school could cost \$10b annually. To meet our share of that sum, I look forward to signing the Education for All Act and will request the funding levels needed to carry it out.

On cutting in half the number of people without clean water or enough food: More than 1b people lack access to clean water, and that number will increase with the impact

of climate change. The US has an obligation to increase access to clean water and sanitation. Through increased funding of up to \$1.3b annually and innovative programs like 'play pumps,' I will expand access to clean water and sanitation.

On additional commitments to the world's poor: I'll make the Millennium Development Goals American policy. By the end of my first term I expect to see progress to meeting the MDGs, including reducing by half the number of people living on less than a dollar a day and suffering from hunger, and reversing the number of new HIV infections and malaria cases.

Obama makes hope possible again!

We can hope again and be courageous enough to embrace change
Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (2008-11-06)

<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/panafrican/51793>

Barack Obama, 47 years old, son of an African from Kenya and a white American was on 5 November 2008 declared the 44th president-elect of the most powerful country in the world, the United States of America. When he was born in 1961 black people were still unable to vote effectively and if his Kenyan Dad had been an American he would have had little in the way of electoral representation. In the year when we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the assassination another African-American icon, Martin Luther King Jr, how more just can it be that the first ever black president of the US was elected. Just imagine a black couple and their two girls in the White House, not mowing the lawns or as 'selected' advisers holding office through patronage but as elected president and family occupying the Oval Office, the West Wing and with the buck stopping at his table!

But the election of Obama has too many symbolisms not just for America, for Africa, but for the whole world. Across the world many people felt connected to him and able to claim him for their own dreams of a better world.

There are many angles to look at this victory and hopefully, barring the assassin's bullet, we will have four or even eight years to judge this captivating personality against performance. Today is for celebration of the possibilities and the ways in which the campaign and the candidate has touched so many people.

One, it is a victory for all mothers, especially those forced to raise their

children alone. It is a victory for family, in the broader sense of the word, not the very narrow and increasingly narrower nuclearism of the West and the middle classes globally. Here was a man raised by his maternal grandparents and from all accounts with love, emotional security and extreme confidence to believe he could beat the best in a world that set limitations based on race and class on his ambitions. Can you imagine how challenging it must have been to raise a mixed-race kid in the 1960s? It is a shame that his grandmother was not able to hold out to see the promise come through. It must touch Obama most deeply too that neither his father nor mother whose 'forbidden love' that gave life to him were alive to see this great moment. It is prove that love across all kinds of divide is not wrong.

Two, in a world distinctly lacking in visionary and inspiring leaders Obama's message of hope and 'yes we can' resonates with the frustration of the young and all marginalised peoples, giving rise to the notion that they can do better for themselves and are not hopeless or powerless.

Three, American democracy has been described as 'the best democracy money can buy.' While this is true – and this election is by far the costliest ever in the US – the balance has shifted in favour of ordinary people. Money was traditionally seen as in the big corporations and financial houses, and in special interests more generally, but Obama's faith in the ordinary people who donated \$5, \$10, \$100 forged a formidable movement and force buoyed by his vision, a vision eloquently carried across the length and breadth of the world and echoed thanks to the new information technology bringing 'unyielding hope' to many.

Four, in a cynical world, dominated by the 'me me' ideology of greed from which decades of neoliberalism decreed TINA (There Is No Alternative), Obama made 'change' relevant and inspired millions to believe that business should not and cannot continue as usual. So successful was he that even his opponent became a candidate for both of them effectively repudiating Bush's legacy of right-wing extremism. It is a triumph of Obama's possible change, and McCain not being seen as a credible agent of change, that won it for Obama.

Five, the pride that Kenyans and other Africans and peoples of the world take in Obama's candidacy and victory is not just the fact of his partial African ancestry, but the potential for it to inspire a new way of playing politics in our own countries where candidates may be judged 'not by the

colour of their skin' or their ethnic, religious or social affiliations but – as Martin Luther King put it – 'by the content of their character.'

Six, Obama becoming president of America does not mean that racism has ended in America or the poor will suddenly become rich, but they will be able to count on the listening ear of someone they trust and who understands their plight as a result of his own experience.

Finally Obama's presidency may not mean that the US will suddenly be at peace with the rest of the world, but there is hope that his administration will stop treating the rest of us as tenants and be able to listen to other peoples and take their interests and sensitivities seriously, ushering in a real multilateralism in sharp contrast to the unilateralism of the Bush years. It may be 'good morning' again not just for America but potentially for the whole world.

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* Please send comments to editor@pambazuka.org or comment online at <http://www.pambazuka.org/>

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