

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## Americans on Addressing World Poverty

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### **PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland



### **Knowledge NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California

## INTRODUCTION

At the upcoming G-8 Summit of major industrial powers in Gleneagles, Scotland, a key focus of discussion will be several ideas for addressing world poverty, especially in Africa.

One idea is to revive a long-standing concept that the developed countries should commit themselves to the goal of devoting spending seven-tenths of one percent of their GDP to addressing world poverty. While a few small industrialized countries have achieved this level, most have not.

Another idea is that the developed countries should recommit themselves to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were agreed upon in 2000. These call for the developed countries to reduce hunger by half, provide basic sanitation, and achieve other development goals by the year 2015. To fulfill these goals would require significant increases in development aid for most developed countries, especially the US, which spends the lowest percentage of its GDP for development assistance.

There are varying ways to estimate the costs of meeting the Millennium Development Goals. If only one goal is pursued—cutting in half the number of people living on one dollar a day--the World Bank estimates a cost of \$39-54 billion a year in additional aid. If all twenty of the OECD countries that give aid paid their share on a per capita basis, this would result in a cost of approximately \$15 per household. If all the Millennium Development Goals are pursued and are pursued interdependently (the most economical approach) by both donor and recipient countries, the World Bank estimates that the cost would be \$40-60 billion a year, or roughly \$30 per household. Allowing for large errors in these estimates, or a lack of coordination in execution, the figure of \$50 per household annually is a very high-end estimate for pursuing all the MDGs.<sup>1</sup>

Another key topic related to world poverty to be discussed at the G-8 Summit is farm subsidies. Farmers in developing countries have had a difficult time competing with farmers in developed countries, in part because the latter receive major subsidies from their governments. Advocates for reducing world poverty have called for cutting back or eliminating such subsidies.

To find out how the American public feels about these issues related to world poverty, PIPA and Knowledge Networks conducted a poll June 22-26 with a nationwide sample of 812 Americans (margin of error was +/-3.5-4.0% depending on the sample size for each question). The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp). Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Ford Foundation and Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> (See <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/mdgassessment.pdf> for the World Bank summary paper, “The Costs of Attaining the Millennium Development Goals.”)

**FINDINGS**

***I. Commitments to World Poverty***

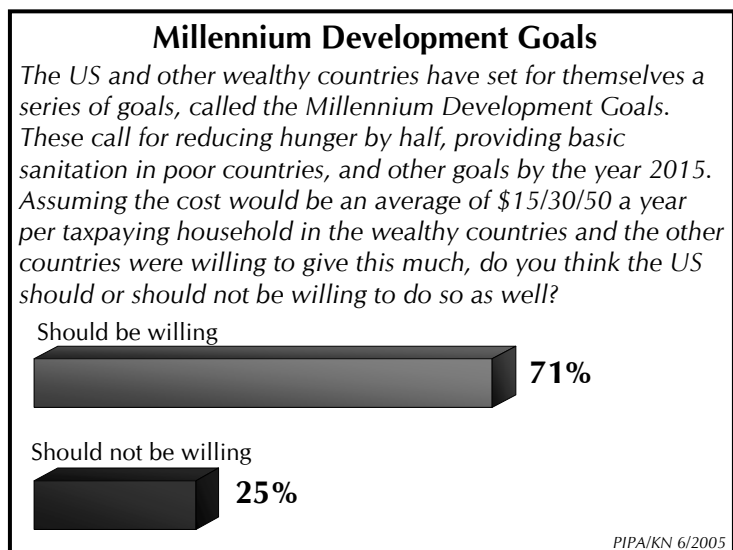
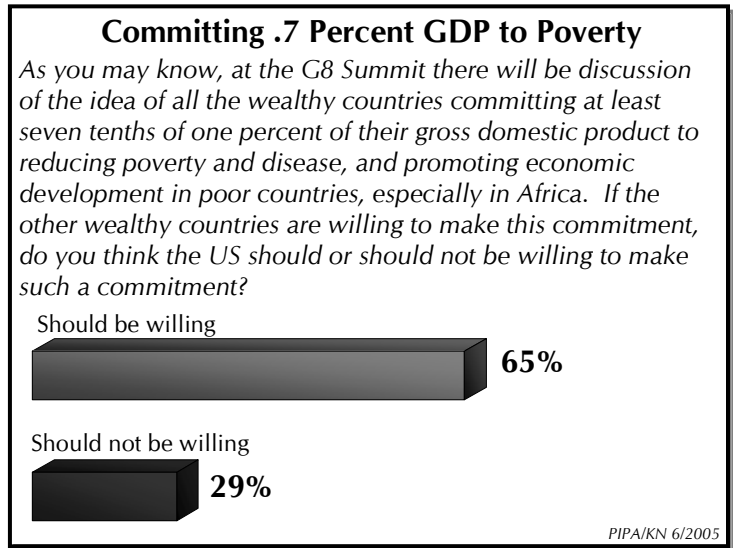
**A large majority of Americans favors the US committing to the goal of devoting seven-tenths of one-percent of GDP to reducing world poverty, provided that other developed countries do so as well. An equally large majority favors the US committing up to \$50 a year per taxpaying household to meet the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015—once again, provided that other developed countries do so as well.**

A key idea in the field of development is that wealthy countries should commit to spend seven-tenths of one percent of their GDP to address world poverty, especially in Africa. Sixty-five percent of Americans favored the US making such a commitment, provided that the other wealthy countries do so as well. Support was higher among Democrats (77%), but was still a majority among Republicans (57%).

Another idea that received strong support in the poll was for the wealthy countries to financially commit to a set of goals—called the Millennium Development Goals. Respondents were told, “As you may know, the US and other wealthy countries have set for themselves a series of goals, called the Millennium Development Goals. These call for reducing hunger by half, providing basic sanitation in poor countries, and other goals by the year 2015.” They were then asked to assume that the costs would either be an average of \$15, \$30 or \$50 “a year per taxpaying household in the wealthy countries” and that “other countries were willing to give this much.” (See the introduction above for the explanation of these cost estimates.)

Overall, 71% said that the US should be willing to give the \$15, \$30 or \$50. There was no significant difference in the level of support depending on the amount assumed. Democrats were only slightly more likely to approve than Republicans.

Previous polling shows that Americans sometimes resist major efforts to address world poverty because they tend to incorrectly assume that people in other countries are not giving as much as they are. However, when it is assumed that all of the wealthy countries will be doing a comparable amount, Americans show a readiness to spend substantial amounts to address world poverty.



**2. Farm Subsidies**

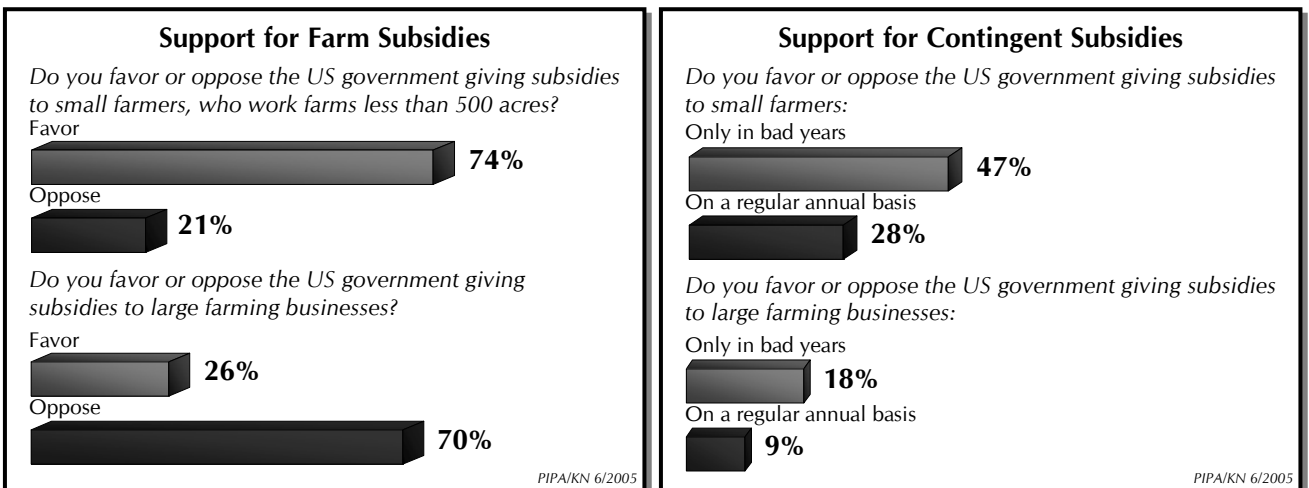
While a very strong majority favors subsidies for small farmers, most Americans oppose subsidies for large farming businesses—the primary recipient of subsidies. The majority favors limiting subsidies to bad years and opposes the present policy of providing them on a regular annual basis. If the public’s preferences were to be followed, actual farm subsidies would be far lower than they are at present. However opposition is not related to concerns about poverty in other countries, as most Americans do not see how US farm subsidies affect farmers in the developing world.

Another key topic related to world poverty to be discussed at the G-8 Summit is farm subsidies. Farmers in developing countries have had a difficult time competing with farmers in developed countries, in part because the latter receive major subsidies from their governments. Advocates for reducing world poverty have called for cutting back or eliminating such subsidies.

Within the US, as well, current US farm subsidy policies are controversial, as 80% of subsidies go to large farming businesses (farming more than 500 acres), and while most of them get subsidies, this is true of only a minority of small farmers. Large farming businesses overall receive a greater share of their income from subsidies than small farms (source: USDA). Another controversial point has been that subsidies overall have increased since the farm program changed in 1996—from primarily helping farmers on a contingent basis in bad years through price supports, to making guaranteed payments on a regular annual basis (in addition to price supports).

The present poll found that US public attitudes are quite at odds with current US policies. Asked about providing subsidies to small farms (under 500 acres), an overwhelming 74% favored doing so. However, only 26% supported providing subsidies to “large farming businesses,” while 70% were opposed.

Most Americans do not support the current policy of providing subsidies on a regular annual basis, rather than only in bad years. Only 28% (of the whole sample) favored giving small farmers regular annual subsidies, while 47% favored giving them only in bad years. While 18% favored giving large farming businesses subsidies in bad years, just 9% favored the actual current policy of giving them regular subsidies on an annual basis.



Thus, while the public would strongly oppose eliminating all farm subsidies, the scope of subsidies the public supports is so much narrower than is currently provided that, if the public’s preferences were followed, this would dramatically reduce the actual amount of US farm subsidies.

The motive for opposing most of the subsidies given by the US government is not, however, derived from concerns about their impact on poor farmers abroad. Most Americans do not appear to understand this impact. Only 19% said that they thought that US farm subsidies “hurt farmers in poor countries,” while 71% assumed that they “have no significant effect on farmers in poor countries.”

While most Americans do not seem to understand how US farm subsidies can hurt farmers in poor countries, nonetheless, an overwhelming majority opposes most of the subsidies the US gives to farmers, i.e., regular annual subsidies to large farming businesses. Thus the public would probably support the US agreeing to significant cuts in US farm subsidies at the G-8 Summit.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:

[www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**Knowledge Networks** is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

**The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)**, at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

**The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA)** is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis, and Stephen Weber designed the questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaires and managed the fielding of the polls.

Melanie Ciolek, Shiela Lee, and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

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