



NEWS RELEASE

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Melany Ethridge, (972) 267-1111, melany@alarryross.com

New Findings on How Conservatives Perceive Global Nutrition Show that “Feeding the Hungry” Not a Strong Impetus to Engage

NASHVILLE, TENN., Sept. 12, 2017 – Hope Through Healing Hands presented the latest findings of an important study on perceptions about international nutrition to key leaders in Washington, D.C., last week, with the goal of educating organizations promoting global nutrition about successful messaging for stronger advocacy, legislation, and funding for the issue. The study was funded by the Eleanor Crook Foundation, and it was conducted by executive director Jenny Eaton Dyer, Ph.D., and Brian L. Heuser, Ed.D of Vanderbilt University.

The purpose of the study was to identify how political, religious, social conservatives (PRSCs), as well as members of the general population (GP), understand issues related to global nutrition, and what language proved to resonate among these groups. Though some global health issues have enjoyed robust increased funding, bilateral nutrition funding has consistently remained at less than 2 percent of the global health account.

“This survey research is timely given the current crisis of famine in four sub-Saharan countries; President Trump’s proposed cut of bilateral funding for nutrition by 37 percent; and the rising questions of how climate change will influence access to water and food sources in the near future,” said Brian L. Heuser, EdD. “It is now more critical than ever to gain a better understanding of how PRSCs think and feel about global nutrition, so that with this knowledge, individuals and organizations on the frontlines of awareness, education, and advocacy for global nutrition can better shape the language, rhetoric, and arguments to compel conservatives and faith leaders to engage members of Congress to maintain or increase funding for global nutrition.”

The good news is that nutrition seems to enjoy bipartisan support across conservatives and progressives. The responses of both groups were very similar. This means that nutrition has stayed above the culture wars, and with stronger education, it will enjoy support across party lines. Unfortunately, very few respondents were able to construct a response that revealed more than a surface knowledge of nutrition-related issues. While other global health terms such as vaccinations, breastfeeding and family planning were familiar to respondents, terms related to malnutrition, such as child stunting and child wasting, were not.

While 70 percent of respondents reported that they believe it was important for the U.S. to have a positive image in countries around the world, only 42 percent of PRSCs believe that the U.S. should take a leading role in helping poor people in other countries. “There is an obvious ignorance to be rectified that foreign assistance funding is a critical component to boost U.S. branding worldwide,” Jenny Eaton Dyer, PhD said. “The public, including PRSCs, need further understanding on the role of foreign assistance as ‘soft power,’ ‘smart power,’ or the ‘third leg of

the stool' as development, alongside diplomacy and defense. As a correlate, debunking the belief among the public that foreign assistance comprises 31% of the U.S. budget remains a challenge.”

An overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) agreed that safeguarding national security is a key rationale for investment in global health. Other motivations for concern were protecting the public health of citizens and honoring moral or ethical responsibilities, which was the third most compelling rationale among respondents.

More than 85% of the PRSC respondents identified as “committed Christians,” yet, only 49 percent of that same group said that “feeding the hungry” in other countries is an important commitment with respect to their personal faith. That being said, the majority agrees that we should provide those in other countries with resources to prevent starvation from famines.

“Given the overwhelming need for the U.S. to lead in bi-lateral and multilateral international development assistance in nutrition, this finding is particularly disturbing,” Dyer said. “We are encouraged with this study’s results overall, but we have much work to do. These findings will give us a clear way forward in messaging to catalyze change in some of these perceptions of global nutrition for stronger clarity, comprehension, and advocacy to end hunger and malnutrition.”

The findings and analysis of the studies show that messaging that includes the narratives of mothers, infants, and children receive soaring response over other language. People do feel responsible for playing a role in ending malnutrition; the work of advocacy groups is simply to implement this language to galvanize the public to lend their voice for stronger legislation.

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For the INPS Research Brief, visit <http://www.hopethroughhealinghands.org/research-briefs>

Hope Through Healing Hands is a Nashville-based humanitarian organization with a mission to promote improved quality of life for citizens and communities around the world using health as a currency for peace. Senator Bill Frist, M.D., is the founder and chair of the organization, and Jenny Eaton Dyer, Ph.D., is the CEO/Executive Director.