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JIM DRIGGERS
From the community

Biological weapons of mass destruction

EXCEPT IN North Korea and Iran, you rarely hear about weapons of mass destruction. That's a shame because warfare with biological WMD is currently raging in the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Maybe the war's not reported because it's between AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria on one side and humanity on the other. Last year AIDS killed about 2 million people, TB killed about 1.7 million people, and malaria killed about 1 million.

In the battleground countries AIDS and TB fight together as a co-epidemic. AIDS weakens immune systems and TB overwhelms them. Worldwide about half of the AIDS victims also had TB.

People who are HIV-positive and infected with TB are up to 50 times more likely to develop active TB in their lifetime than people who are HIV-negative.

There is hope. AIDS is treatable with antiretroviral therapy. TB can be cured with drugs costing as little as \$15 per person. Malaria can be stopped with insecticide-laced bed nets costing as little as \$5 per net.

What's lacking is sufficient numbers of health-care providers, new drugs, and most importantly political commitment.

To deal with these diseases, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was created in 2001.

The Global Fund is a kind of international grant making organization funded by the developed countries.

An independent technical review panel approves grant proposals based on the

impact the program would have, how measurable the outcomes of the program will be, and the ability to report on progress made toward reaching the program's goals.

Not all proposals are accepted; in the last round of review, 52 percent were rejected because they didn't have enough impact, measurable outcomes or transparent reporting.

Since its inception, the Global Fund has provided \$14.9 billion to 140 countries. That's enabled the hiring of health care providers, training for non medical staff to assist in the fight, equipment and drugs.

Programs funded by the Global Fund have produced medal-worthy achievements. AIDS programs have provided more than 2 million people with antiretroviral therapy, 62 million HIV counseling and testing sessions, and 3.2 million orphans with medical services, education, and community care. TB programs have effectively treated 4.6 million people.

Malaria programs have provided 70 million insecticide-treated bed nets and treated 74 million people.

Because of Global Fund program success, its board and G8 leaders agreed in 2007 to scale up the Global Fund's annual funding to between \$6 and \$8 billion if countries crafted high quality proposals.

With that promise, the battleground countries based their latest requests on actual needs, not on what comparatively little money the Global Fund previously provided.

The Global Fund now has a surplus of high quality proposals, but lacks the promised funding.

Based on past funding level ratio agreements and with the U.S. comprising one-third of the global economy, the U.S. fair share in the Global Fund would be \$2.7 billion in 2009 and in 2010.

Like terrorism, we can either fight these diseases over there or over here.

Driggers is a resident of Concord.