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Bilateral and Multilateral Organizations and Agreements

Overview

Both bilateral and multilateral organizations play a significant role in global health and international development. The conceptual and structural differences between “bilateral” and “multilateral” impact the mission, major activities, and scope of work of these organizations. Understanding such differences between influential organizations in global health will inform creative strategies and choices for tackling major health challenges.

Bilateral Organizations and Agreements

Bilateral Description

As the prefix suggests, a *bilateral* agreement or organization consists of two sides. More specifically, bilateral agreements are frequently used to describe agreements between two countries. The United States, for example, may engage in a bilateral agreement with Canada to trade oil: only two countries are involved. In global health, bilateral agreements primarily describe projects between a donor agency of one country and a recipient government in another.

Overall, bilateral agencies are key players in foreign assistance. In 2010, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries disbursed nearly \$129 billion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) through bilateral arrangements.¹ In terms of assistance intended solely for health development, bilateral agencies of OECD countries are important, but contributions from non-profit organizations are growing.² **Appendix A** shows the amount of Direct Assistance for Health by different organizations and agencies.³

Examples of Bilateral Agencies and Programs

The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) is one example of a bilateral organization.⁴ USAID operates under the Department of State and requested a budget of \$22.7 billion in

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