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A year after USAID cuts, local groups say impact on humanitarian work has been devastating

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ings outside a clinic in Thaba-Tsoeu,



BBC World Service





By **Craig LeMoult**

March 09, 2026 Updated March 10, 2026

When Brooke Nichols heard early one morning in January of 2025 that the Trump administration was putting a **90-day freeze** on all humanitarian assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development, she was in disbelief. As a professor of global health at Boston University, Nichols had worked on a USAID project in South Africa, and knew how efficient and impactful those investments are.

“I was terrified. Livid,” Nichols said. “I mean, I just, I couldn’t fathom what the world was going to look like if this actually happened. You can’t just stop these things for 90 days without people dying.”



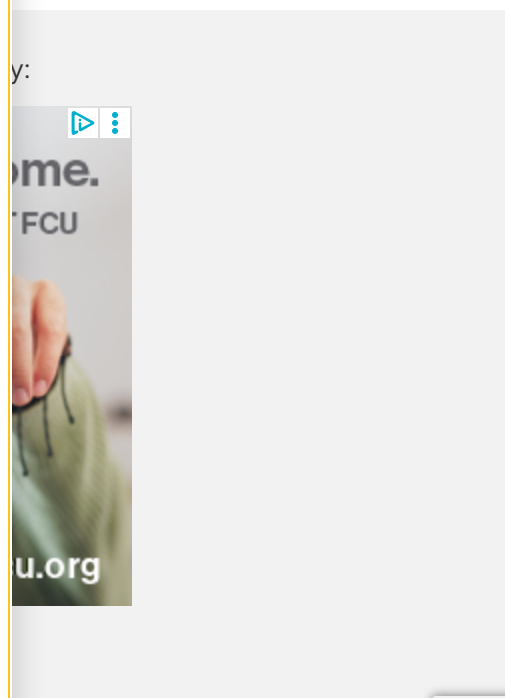
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just how many people would
U.S. President’s Emergency
has invested nearly \$110
aving more than 25 million



By 5 p.m. that day, Nichols had published estimates in an online [tracker](#). She estimated that a one-year funding freeze for PEPFAR would result in more than 150,000 adult deaths, as well as the deaths of nearly 17,000 children.

Nichols soon heard from colleagues working in other humanitarian areas, asking her to expand her tracker beyond PEPFAR. Ultimately, the expanded [tracker](#) estimated that in one year, 262,000 adults and 518,000 children would die as a result of the cuts to USAID.

“The purpose was to try to get these numbers in the hands of people that could advocate for something like a waiver or for stopping the pause and to get some more conversation going and advocacy to make sure that this didn’t happen,” Nichols said.

As she feared, the funding pause did become permanent. In July, an international team of researchers published an even more dire estimate in the medical journal

million people would likely die as children.

numbers as just statistics, but it’s

and feel what they mean, and made this choice ... I’m so more outraged.”

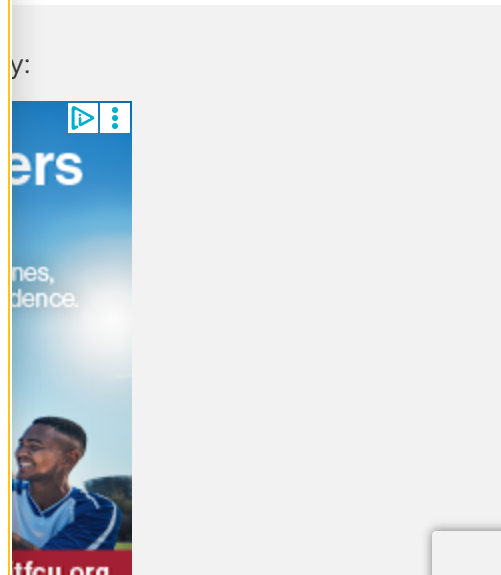


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Over the last year, the USAID cuts have hit global health programs in several ways, said Michael VanRooyen, director of the **Harvard Humanitarian Initiative**.

“The real impact is, first of all, on community level clinical services for healthcare delivery, and the shutdown of clinics and hospitals and dispensaries,” VanRooyen said. “The other one is procurement and commodities. How do you move and get supplies of medications, vaccinations, water sanitation treatment and other things to populations that depend on it? Those have also been disrupted.”

Food and nutritional assistance were also cut, he added.

“The sheer reduction of food distribution leads to increases in severe malnutrition



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Before the cuts last January, Waltham-based [Education Development Center](#) was working in 19 USAID-funded programs involving education, youth development and global health.

“And since that time, all of those programs have been terminated, said Alisha Keirstead, who leads EDC’s Global Health Team.

“So we were required to let go over 600 staff in those countries around the world as well as a large number of our headquarters-based staff who are managing and supporting those programs,” she said. “Needless to say, it’s been a tough year to lose so many amazing colleagues and to see such impactful, meaningful programs disappear.”

EDC was forced to cancel programs in countries like South Sudan, the Philippines and Liberia, that connected young people with job training and employment



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enrolled in those programs who world without that education, Keirstead said.

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On a recent trip to Sierra Leone, Mukherjee saw first hand children coming into the hospital extremely sick or in coma.

“I saw one child who became blind from very severe malaria, and the child could have been treated easily with no disability at all had they been treated earlier,” she recalled. “But because there were no malaria tests, the [medical clinic] could not initiate treatment.”

Mukherjee said she hopes the war in Iran does not distract the American public from what’s happening elsewhere in the world due to the USAID cuts. She points to President George W. Bush’s administration, saying that the U.S. still showed leadership on global health even while engaged in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Yes, we are at war,” she said. “And at the same time, we can say, ‘there’s this other urgent thing that needs to happen now.’ I just don’t think it’s an either or ... we



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