

## Background Essay on Point Four Program



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On a frosty January 20th, 1949, after a dramatic re-election campaign, President Harry S. Truman delivered his Second Inaugural Address. In this speech, Truman described his foreign policy goals in four direct points. The fourth point, which has become known as the Point Four Program, took the country by surprise. This fourth point declared that the United States would “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”

Truman’s Point Four proposal, along with the much larger Marshall Plan, would not be a totally new idea. What *was* new was how Truman made a connection between foreign aid and freedom.

*“- Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.*

*- Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.*

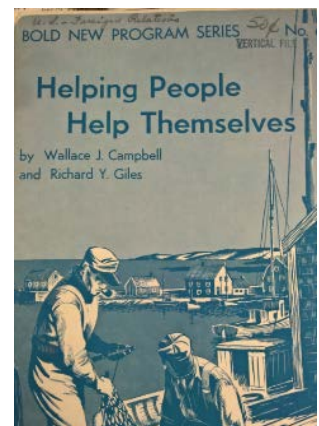
*- Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies- hunger, misery, and despair.*

*- On the basis of these four major courses of action we hope to help create the conditions that will lead eventually to personal freedom and happiness for all mankind.”*

In 1949 the need for American aid in the world was great. European and Asian nations were still recovering from the destruction left behind by WWII. Other areas in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia were gaining their independence after centuries of control by European countries. Harry Truman knew that when people struggle and suffer they are more likely to be dominated by stronger powers. He also knew that United States was the only country in the world in a position to help.

Everyone in the audience understood the context of Truman’s speech. In 1949 the United States was locked in a competition with the Soviet Union for influence in the world. When Harry spoke of *oppressors*, he was talking about that country’s efforts to spread *communism*. Since WWII the United States had been unable to stop the Soviet Union from dominating Eastern Europe. Americans were afraid that other struggling countries would experience a similar fate.

One way Truman hoped to combat this threat was to aid the *underdeveloped* parts of the world. This aid would come, not in the form of money, but by spreading *knowledge* and *expertise*. Instead of giving food, the US would help develop farms. “More food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power . . .” Helping countries take care of themselves, it was felt, would be the best way to ensure they find “prosperity and peace”.



While the idea was instantly popular, it turned out that providing international aid is a tricky business. Agencies created by Congress sent *technicians* to countries around the world to work on specific projects. Unfortunately, by 1952, officials were still hoping to have a few pilot programs in place to highlight the potential impact of Truman's proposal. Today, decades later, 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty. The world still struggles with ways to make a difference in these people's lives. A study of Truman's Point Four programs can help us understand this complicated process and begin to answer the question: "Why is providing International Aid harder than it sounds?"

### Timeline of Significant Developments Related to Point Four

January 20, 1949	Harry Truman introduces the Four Point Program in his Inaugural Address.
June 24, 1949	President Truman asks Congress pass Four Point legislation to appropriate \$45 million dollars for implementation.
May 1950	Four Point passes as the Act for International Development. The act created the <i>Technical Cooperation Administration</i> within the State Department.
1953	TCA was merged with the <i>Mutual Security Agency</i> . It's new focus became the importation of strategic raw materials.  1,500 Point Four technicians visit 35 countries
1955	President Eisenhower merges Point Four Programs into the <i>International Cooperation Association</i>
1961	President Kennedy combines all non-military security and aid programs into the newly formed <i>U.S. Agency for International Development</i> . See the <a href="#">USAID website</a> to explore the impact of this organization today.