

The Cost of Withdrawal: US Aid Cuts and the Unraveling of Public Health in Sub-Saharan Africa

The View from Mozambique

By Lia Moskov

August 2026

Introduction

Paciência Maherepa was eleven years old when she died on April 3, 2025, in the town of Manica in central Mozambique. She was living with HIV, and for years a case worker from a local organization called ANDA—funded by the United States Agency for International Development—had visited her home, made sure she took her antiretroviral medication, and accompanied her family through the routines that keep the virus suppressed. In late January 2025, the visits stopped. The case workers had been laid off, casualties of a stop-work order issued from Washington nine days after President Donald Trump's second inauguration. By the time Paciência's mother understood how sick her daughter had become, it was too late. ANDA's staff would later count twenty-two deaths of vulnerable people in Manica province in the months after the funding halt, sixteen of them children—and that tally covered only four of the province's nine districts.¹

Paciência's death was an early data point in what public health researchers now describe as the largest and most abrupt withdrawal of health financing in the history of development assistance. Between January 2025 and mid-2026, the United States dismantled USAID, terminated more than eighty percent of its foreign assistance awards, folded the remnants of its aid apparatus into the State Department, and replaced a two-decade-old architecture of global health programs with a smaller, openly transactional system of bilateral agreements. The consequences have fallen most heavily on sub-Saharan Africa, the region that received the largest share of American health assistance and that depended on it most deeply.

This article examines what the American withdrawal has meant for public health systems in sub-Saharan Africa, using Mozambique—a country where external donors financed nearly half the health sector and where the United States underwrote the great majority of the HIV response—as its central case. The

¹Jesse Copelyn, "Death in Mozambique: After US Funding Cuts, a Health System Crumbles," GroundUp and Spotlight, June 25, 2025, <https://groundup.org.za/article/death-in-mozambique-after-us-funding-cuts-health-system-crumbles/>.

evidence assembled here, which has been drawn from peer-reviewed studies, ministry of health data, United Nations agencies, and reporting from affected communities, supports three conclusions. Firstly, that the cuts produced immediate and measurable disruptions to HIV treatment, malaria control, child nutrition, and disease surveillance across the region, and these disruptions have already cost lives going up to hundreds of thousands by the most credible estimates. Second, the manner of the withdrawal did as much damage as the fact of it: an overnight halt, without warning or planning, imposed on programs into which frontline service delivery had been deliberately outsourced. Lastly, the shock has accelerated a reckoning over aid dependence that African institutions had already begun, though the arithmetic of replacing lost financing remains close to impossible in the near term for the poorest countries.

The Architecture of Dependence

The United States created USAID in 1961, under President John F. Kennedy, to consolidate American development programs into a single agency.² For most of its history the agency's health portfolio was modest. That changed in 2003, when President George W. Bush launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR—the largest commitment ever made by any nation to combat a single disease. Over two decades PEPFAR disbursed more than \$130 billion, supported HIV treatment for more than twenty million people, and is credited with saving roughly twenty-six million lives.³ The President's Malaria Initiative followed in 2005, eventually operating in some twenty-seven sub-Saharan African countries and helping, with its partners, to avert more than two billion malaria cases since 2000.⁴

By the eve of the cuts, the United States had become the indispensable node in global health financing. It accounted for forty-two percent of all health assistance provided by major donor governments, with a global health budget of \$12.4 billion in fiscal year 2025, less than one percent of federal spending.⁵ Within that system, USAID was the load-bearing wall: the agency implemented seventy-three percent of American bilateral global health assistance, including ninety-six percent of malaria funding and the entirety of bilateral spending on maternal and child health, tuberculosis, and global health security.⁶ In HIV, American dominance was even more pronounced. By 2025 the United States supplied nearly three-quarters of all donor-government funding for the global HIV response.⁷

²Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Assistance for Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview," R46368, updated November 7, 2023, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R46368/R46368.7.pdf.

³KFF, "The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)," updated July 27, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/the-u-s-presidents-emergency-plan-for-aids-relief-pepfar/>.

⁴KFF, "The President's Malaria Initiative and Other U.S. Government Global Malaria Efforts," updated March 23, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/the-presidents-malaria-initiative-and-other-u-s-government-global-malaria-efforts/>.

⁵Stephanie Oum, Adam Wexler, and Jennifer Kates, "10 Things to Know About U.S. Funding for Global Health," KFF, May 15, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-u-s-funding-for-global-health/>.

⁶Jennifer Kates, Anna Rouw, Stephanie Oum, and Adam Wexler, "How Much Global Health Funding Goes Through USAID?," KFF, February 7, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/how-much-global-health-funding-goes-through-usaid/>.

⁷KFF, "Donor Government Funding for HIV Drops by \$2.1 Billion in 2025 Due to Declines in Funding from the United States, Marking Largest Annual Decrease Since Scale-up for the HIV Response Began," July 27, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/donor-government-funding-for-hiv-drops-by-2-1-billion-in-2025-due-to-d>

This architecture mattered the most in sub-Saharan Africa. The region received more than \$12.7 billion in direct US foreign assistance in 2024.⁸ In 2021, half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa relied on external financing for more than a third of their health expenditures, and external donors funded roughly eighty percent of HIV prevention programming across the region.⁹ However, the logic of this arrangement had always been double-edged and yes, donor money saved lives on an extraordinary scale: a landmark retrospective study published in *The Lancet* in mid-2025 estimated that USAID-supported programs prevented ninety-one million deaths between 2001 and 2021, including some thirty million among children, with mortality from HIV/AIDS falling seventy-four percent faster in countries receiving high levels of USAID support than in those receiving little.¹⁰ But the same money built parallel systems of salaries, supply chains, laboratories, and data platforms that ran through American implementing partners rather than national treasuries which left ministries of health acutely exposed to decisions made in Washington.

Few countries embodied that exposure more completely than Mozambique.

The Dismantlement

On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14169, "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," which declared that the "foreign aid industry and bureaucracy" were "not aligned with American interests and in many cases antithetical to American values," and ordered a ninety-day pause on new disbursements of development assistance pending review.¹¹ Four days later, Secretary of State Marco Rubio went further than the order's text and cabled stop-work instructions that froze existing awards along with new obligations. Within days, clinic services, drug deliveries, and the salaries of hundreds of thousands of health workers across the developing world had stopped.¹²

What followed was less a policy review than a demolition. Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency turned to the agency in early February; on February 2, Musk posted that "USAID is a criminal organization. Time for it to die," and the next day, as the agency's Washington headquarters was closed,

declines-in-funding-from-the-united-states-marking-largest-annual-decrease-since-scale-up-for-the-hiv-response-began/.

⁸Gabrielle Emanuel, "The Head of Africa CDC Thought News of a U.S. Aid Freeze Must Be 'a Joke.' Now What?," NPR, March 31, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/03/31/g-s1-56094/africa-centers-disease-control-aid-freeze-jean-kaseya>.

⁹Allison Krugman, "Africa's Health Financing Gap," Think Global Health, August 29, 2024, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/africas-health-financing-gap>; UNAIDS, "AIDS, Crisis and the Power to Transform: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2025" (Geneva: UNAIDS, July 2025), https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025-global-aids-update-summary_en.pdf.

¹⁰Daniella Cavalcanti et al., "Evaluating the Impact of Two Decades of USAID Interventions and Projecting the Effects of Defunding on Mortality up to 2030: A Retrospective Impact Evaluation and Forecasting Analysis," *The Lancet* 406 (2025), [https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736\(25\)01186-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736(25)01186-9/fulltext).

¹¹Executive Order 14169, "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/>.

¹²Jennifer Kates, "The Status of President Trump's Pause of Foreign Aid and Implications for PEPFAR and Other Global Health Programs," KFF, February 3, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/the-status-of-president-trumps-pause-of-foreign-aid-and-implications-for-pepfar-and-other-global-health-programs/>.

boasted that "we spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper." Within weeks nearly all of USAID's direct hires had been placed on administrative leave and sixteen hundred staff had received reduction-in-force notices.¹³ On March 10, Rubio announced the review's outcome on social media: "After a 6 week review we are officially cancelling 83% of the programs at USAID."¹⁴ A subsequent analysis of the termination list provided to Congress found that 5,341 of the agency's roughly 6,200 awards had been cancelled, removing \$27.7 billion in planned assistance, \$7.4 billion of it for global health.¹⁵

The administration had, in principle, protected lifesaving services. A humanitarian waiver issued on January 28 and a PEPFAR-specific waiver on February 1 exempted "urgent life-saving HIV treatment services," including care for pregnant women. But the waivers excluded most prevention programming—pre-exposure prophylaxis for anyone other than pregnant and breastfeeding women, community outreach, and programs for orphans—and, more fundamentally, they proved largely inoperative in the field: the payment systems that would have moved money to implementing partners were frozen, and the staff who processed disbursements had been locked out or laid off.¹⁶ In Mozambique, the health ministry later reported, Rubio's waiver was never meaningfully implemented; organizations received contradictory instructions and then, in many cases, termination notices.¹⁷

The formal end came on July 1, 2025, when USAID ceased to exist as an independent agency and its surviving programs moved to the State Department. In a valedictory essay titled "Making Foreign Aid Great Again," Rubio dismissed the agency's legacy (\$715 billion in inflation-adjusted spending, by his accounting) as a failed "charity-based model" that had built an "NGO industrial complex," and promised "trade over aid, opportunity over dependency."¹⁸ Former presidents saw it differently. "Gutting USAID is a travesty, and it's a tragedy," Barack Obama told departing staff. George W. Bush posed a single question about the program that defined his legacy: "Is it in our national interests that 25 million people who would have died now live?"¹⁹ Congress ratified the retrenchment in July with a \$9 billion rescission package—though the Senate, notably, stripped a proposed \$400 million cut to PEPFAR from the bill—and

¹³Elissa Miolene, "Deep Dive: The Unraveling of USAID," Devex, August 4, 2025, <https://www.devex.com/news/deep-dive-the-unraveling-of-usaid-110584>.

¹⁴Marco Rubio (@marcorubio), X, March 10, 2025, <https://x.com/marcorubio/status/1899021361797816325>; Melody Schreiber, "Rubio Announces That 83% of USAID Contracts Will Be Canceled," NPR, March 10, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/03/10/g-s1-52964/rubio-announces-that-83-of-usaid-contracts-will-be-canceled>.

¹⁵Jennifer Kates, "The USAID List of Terminated Global Health Awards – What Does It Tell Us?," KFF, April 2, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/the-usaid-list-of-terminated-global-health-awards-what-does-it-tell-us/>.

¹⁶Kates, "Status of President Trump's Pause"; Miolene, "Deep Dive"; John McCormack, "PEPFAR Organizations Struggle to Access Funds Despite Waivers," The Dispatch, March 10, 2025, <https://thedispatch.com/article/pepfar-state-department-funds-waivers-rubio/>.

¹⁷Jesse Copelyn, "After US Funding Cuts, Mozambican Children Died: Who Bears Responsibility?," Spotlight and GroundUp, July 21, 2025, <https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2025/07/21/after-us-funding-cuts-mozambican-children-died-who-bears-responsibility/>.

¹⁸Marco Rubio, "Making Foreign Aid Great Again," U.S. Department of State Substack, July 1, 2025, <https://statedept.substack.com/p/making-foreign-aid-great-again>.

¹⁹"Obama, Bush Decry 'Travesty' of Trump's Gutting of USAID on Its Last Day," Al Jazeera, June 30, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/30/obama-bush-decry-travesty-of-trumps-gutting-of-usaid-on-its-last-day>.

the Supreme Court in September allowed the administration to withhold a further \$4 billion in appropriated foreign aid through a legally untested "pocket rescission."²⁰

A Continental Shock

The effects of the freeze registered across sub-Saharan Africa within weeks, and they are now visible in hard program data as much as in projections. The clearest window is PEPFAR's own reporting. When the State Department finally released results for fiscal year 2025—after withholding three quarters of data amid what it called "reporting and implementation challenges"—the numbers showed a system holding its core while shedding its edges. The number of people on HIV treatment held roughly stable at just over twenty million, in large part because national governments took over patients the American system had dropped. But new enrollments on treatment fell sixteen percent, HIV testing fell seventeen percent (4.7 million fewer tests than the year before), and initiations of pre-exposure prophylaxis collapsed by forty-one percent. The DREAMS program for adolescent girls and young women, operating in the populations at highest risk of new infection, recorded an eighty-six percent drop in completions; services for orphans and vulnerable children fell from 6.5 million children reached, to 1.7 million.²¹ Overall donor-government funding for HIV dropped by \$2.1 billion in 2025, a twenty-five percent decline and the largest single-year fall since the global scale-up began two decades earlier.²²

Country-level assessments filled in the texture behind the aggregates. In Malawi, where PEPFAR had funded 88.5 percent of HIV prevention, authorities recorded the termination of 247 nurses and more than 3,500 community health workers. In Kenya, roughly 41,000 US-supported health workers, nearly a fifth of the country's health workforce, faced layoffs, and clinicians reported young people rationing, sharing, and stockpiling antiretrovirals. In South Africa, community-based HIV testing largely halted, and roughly 15,000 US-funded health workers were affected.²³

²⁰Kevin Freking, "What's in the GOP Bill Clawing Back \$9 Billion from Foreign Aid and Public Broadcasting?," Associated Press, July 17, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/whats-in-the-gop-bill-clawing-back-9-billion-from-foreign-aid-and-public-broadcasting>; Michael Macagnone, "Supreme Court Allows US to Cancel \$4 Billion in Foreign Aid Funds," Roll Call, September 26, 2025, <https://rollcall.com/2025/09/26/supreme-court-allows-us-to-cancel-4-billion-in-foreign-aid-funds/>.

²¹Jennifer Kates, Anna Rouw, and Anna Nandakumar, "What We Know from the Latest PEPFAR Data: Analysis of FY 2025 Quarter 4 Results," KFF, April 23, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/what-we-know-from-the-latest-pepfar-data-analysis-of-fy-2025-quarter-4-results/>; William Herkewitz, "Global Health Checkup: PEPFAR, HIV, and Africa," Healthbeat, April 23, 2026, <https://www.healthbeat.org/2026/04/23/global-health-checkup-pepfar-hiv-africa/>.

²²KFF, "Donor Government Funding for HIV Drops by \$2.1 Billion in 2025."

²³UNAIDS, "Impact of US Funding Cuts on HIV Programmes in East and Southern Africa," March 31, 2025, https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2025/march/20250331_ESA-region_fs; Physicians for Human Rights, "The System Is Folding in on Itself: The Impact of U.S. Global Health Funding Cuts in Kenya," July 24, 2025, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/the-system-is-folding-in-on-itself-the-impact-of-u-s-global-health-funding-cuts-in-kenya/>; Physicians for Human Rights, "Wasted Investments, Looming Crisis: The Impact of U.S. Global Health Funding Cuts on HIV in South Africa," April 21, 2026, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/wasted-investments-looming-crisis-the-impact-of-u-s-global-health-funding-cuts-on-hiv-in-south-africa/>.

Beyond HIV, the pattern repeated across every domain the United States had dominated. The World Health Organization warned in April 2025 that more than forty percent of planned insecticide-treated bed-net campaigns for the year—designed to reach 425 million people—were delayed or at risk, and that stocks of malaria tests and medicines were "critically low" across many African countries.²⁴ A geospatial modeling study in *The Lancet* estimated that the President's Malaria Initiative, if allowed to operate in 2025, would avert 13.6 million malaria cases and 104,000 deaths in twenty-seven African countries.²⁵ USAID had supplied more than half of external financing for tuberculosis programs; modelers projected that a slow recovery would mean hundreds of thousands of additional TB cases and deaths by 2030.²⁶ Stocks of ready-to-use therapeutic food (the fortified peanut paste that has cut death rates from severe child malnutrition from twenty percent to under one percent) ran short across Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, and South Sudan; at Médecins Sans Frontières facilities in northern Nigeria alone, 652 malnourished children died in the first half of 2025.²⁷ Cholera deaths across sub-Saharan Africa nearly doubled in 2025, to roughly 7,500, as water-and-sanitation contracts were cancelled and outbreak response faltered.²⁸ The Demographic and Health Surveys program—the statistical backbone for tracking health outcomes in ninety countries—was halted outright.²⁹

The multilateral system that might have cushioned the blow was itself under American assault. On his first day in office, Trump had also announced the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organization, which left a \$1.9 billion hole, some forty-five percent, in the agency's planned 2026–27 budget. The WHO began merging departments and shedding staff at the very moment African member states most needed it.³⁰ In April 2025, the WHO, UNICEF, and Gavi jointly warned that outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease were rising as immunization campaigns and surveillance faltered: measles cases had already climbed to their highest levels since 2019, meningitis was surging across the African belt, and roughly half of WHO country offices reported moderate-to-severe disruptions to routine vaccination. "Vaccines have saved more than 150 million lives over the past five decades," WHO

²⁴World Health Organization, "Malaria Progress in Jeopardy amid Foreign Aid Cuts," April 11, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-04-2025-malaria-progress-in-jeopardy-amid-foreign-aid-cuts>.

²⁵Tasmin Symons et al., "Estimating the Potential Malaria Morbidity and Mortality Avertable by the US President's Malaria Initiative in 2025: A Geospatial Modelling Analysis," *The Lancet* 405 (2025), <https://malariaatlas.org/news/map-study-highlights-impact-of-threatened-malaria-funding-cuts/>.

²⁶Sandip Mandal and Carel Pretorius, "Projected Impact of U.S. Funding Cuts on Tuberculosis in 26 High-Burden Countries," *PLOS Global Public Health*, September 10, 2025, <https://journals.plos.org/globalpublichealth/article?id=10.1371/journal.pgph.0004899>.

²⁷"Millions of Children at Risk across Africa as Aid Cuts Impact Food Supplies," Al Jazeera, August 28, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/28/millions-of-children-at-risk-across-africa-as-aid-cuts-impact-food-supplies>; Atul Gawande, interview, Democracy Now!, November 13, 2025, <https://www.democracynow.org/2025/11/13/usaid>.

²⁸Eeshani Kandpal, Charles Kenny, Brian Webster, and Markus Goldstein, "Cholera Deaths Nearly Doubled in Africa in 2025; Cuts to Aid May Have Contributed," Center for Global Development, April 27, 2026, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/cholera-deaths-nearly-doubled-africa-2025-cuts-aid-may-have-contributed>.

²⁹"When Health Data Go Dark: The Importance of the DHS Program," *BMC Medicine* 23 (2025), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12916-025-04062-6>.

³⁰Elaine Ruth Fletcher, "WHO Budget Crisis Bigger Than Previously Thought: \$2.5 Billion Gap for 2025–2027," Health Policy Watch, April 2, 2025, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/who-budget-crisis-bigger-than-previously-thought-2-5-billion-gap-for-2025-2027/>.

director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "Funding cuts to global health have put these hard-won gains in jeopardy."³¹

How many lives has this cost? The estimates vary by method, but they converge on a grim order of magnitude. Brooke Nichols, an infectious-disease modeler at Boston University, built a tracker matching disease burden to lost funding; by November 2025 it estimated roughly 600,000 deaths attributable to the cuts, two-thirds of them children.³² The *Lancet* retrospective study projected that if cuts of the announced depth persisted, more than fourteen million additional deaths would accumulate by 2030, including 4.5 million children under five.³³ UNAIDS projected that a permanent discontinuation of American HIV support would produce six million additional infections and four million additional AIDS-related deaths by the end of the decade — its executive director, Winnie Byanyima, called the situation "not just a funding gap" but "a ticking time bomb."³⁴ A team led by Oxford's Lucie Cluver estimated that the loss of stable PEPFAR support could mean up to half a million additional child deaths from AIDS by 2030, warning that the retreat "sets global progress to end HIV/AIDS back to the dark ages of the epidemic."³⁵ These projections are contested at the margins—they depend on assumptions about how much service delivery governments can absorb—but the documented service declines of 2025 and 2026 have tracked their pessimism more closely than their hope.

Mozambique: Anatomy of a Rupture

A system built on external money

Mozambique entered 2025 as one of the most aid-dependent health systems on earth. External funds financed forty-two percent of the country's health sector in 2022, down from nearly half the year before, and eighty-five percent of its capital investment in health; three-quarters of its medicine spending arrived as in-kind donations. Government health spending amounted to about twenty-eight US dollars per person

³¹World Health Organization, UNICEF, and Gavi, "Increases in Vaccine-Preventable Disease Outbreaks Threaten Years of Progress, Warn WHO, UNICEF, Gavi," April 24, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-04-2025-increases-in-vaccine-preventable-disease-outbreaks-threaten-years-of-progress--warn-who--unicef--gavi>.

³²Atul Gawande, interview, Democracy Now!, November 13, 2025; "USAID Cuts Have Caused More Than 330,000 Deaths Worldwide, BU Professor Estimates," Boston Globe, July 5, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/07/01/metro/malnutrition-cuts-usaid-impact-on-children/>.

³³Cavalcanti et al., "Evaluating the Impact of Two Decades of USAID Interventions."

³⁴UNAIDS, "About the Impact of US Funding Cuts on the Global HIV Response," 2025, <https://www.unaids.org/en/impact-US-funding-cuts/About>; Kerry Cullinan, "Millions at Risk of HIV Infection and Death after US Funding Cuts, Warns UNAIDS," Health Policy Watch, July 10, 2025, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/millions-at-risk-of-hiv-infection-and-death-after-us-funding-cuts-warns-unaids/>.

³⁵University of Oxford, "Nearly 500,000 Children Could Die from AIDS-Related Causes by 2030 without Stable PEPFAR," April 8, 2025, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2025-04-08-nearly-500000-children-could-die-aids-related-causes-2030-without-stable-pepfar>.

per year, a third of the WHO's benchmark for a basic package of services.³⁶ The country fielded eighteen health professionals per ten thousand inhabitants, against a WHO standard of forty-five.³⁷

Within this dependence, the American position was singular. Total US assistance to Mozambique reached \$821 million in fiscal year 2024, roughly half of it health-related; the annual PEPFAR-supported HIV operational plan approved for 2023 alone was \$404 million.³⁸ Mozambique carries one of the world's largest HIV burdens: some 2.4 million people living with the virus, with around two million on antiretroviral therapy and roughly 80,000 new infections a year.³⁹ Ninety-three percent of the country's HIV service-delivery costs were externally financed in 2022, overwhelmingly by PEPFAR, which also supplied 81.8 percent of HIV prevention funding, among the highest dependency ratios in Africa.⁴⁰ More than 21,000 Mozambican health workers—counselors, community outreach workers ("activists," in local parlance), data clerks, laboratory staff—were paid through American funding.⁴¹ The centerpiece of this investment, USAID's ECHO project, had more than doubled the number of people on treatment in the four provinces it served, raised three-month retention from 58 to 98 percent, and pushed pediatric treatment coverage from 60 to 98 percent.⁴²

The strategy that produced these results—outsourcing frontline delivery to externally funded implementing partners—was precisely what made the system brittle. As Mozambique's own health ministry and National Institute of Health later concluded in a candid post-mortem, the ministry had "delegated critical logistic and operational functions to externally-funded implementing partners," so that when the stop-work order arrived without notice, the functions stopped with the funding.⁴³

The stop-work order arrives

³⁶Observatório do Cidadão para Saúde, "Mozambique Continues to Depend on Foreign Aid to Purchase Medicines," analysis of Ministry of Health budget execution reports, <https://www.observatoriodesaude.org/en/mozambique-continues-to-depend-on-foreign-aid-to-purchase-medicines/>.

³⁷"Corte de financiamento dos EUA compromete programas de saúde em Moçambique," *Lusa*, February 7, 2025, https://www.sapo.pt/noticias/atualidade/corte-de-financiamento-dos-eua-compromete_67a635ba3d9fcf7462548309.

³⁸USAFacts, "How Much Foreign Aid Does the US Provide to Mozambique?," accessed August 2026, <https://usafacts.org/answers/how-much-foreign-aid-does-the-us-provide/countries/mozambique/>; U.S. Embassy Maputo, "United States and Mozambique Approve \$404 Million to Support HIV/AIDS Response in 2023," <https://mz.usembassy.gov/united-states-and-mozambique-approve-404-million-to-support-hiv-aids-response-in-2023/>.

³⁹"UNAIDS and Chapo Discuss Impact of US Financial Cuts in Health Sector," Agência de Informação de Moçambique, February 17, 2025, <https://aimnews.org/2025/02/17/unaid-and-chapo-discuss-impact-of-us-financial-cuts-in-health-sector/>.

⁴⁰Yara Paulo et al., "Health System Reliance and Disruption: Lessons from Mozambique's Experience with the U.S. Aid Freeze" (presentation, CQUIN 9th Annual Meeting, November 2025), https://cquin.icap.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/C3.-Health-system-reliance-and-disruption_lessons-from-Mozambiques-experience-with-the-U.S.-aid-freeze.pdf; UNAIDS, "Impact of US Funding Cuts on HIV Programmes in East and Southern Africa."

⁴¹UNAIDS, "Impact of US Funding Cuts on HIV Programmes in East and Southern Africa."

⁴²Abt Global, "From Crisis to Control: Sustained Impact of U.S. HIV Investments in Mozambique," 2025, <https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/impact-briefs/2025/from-crisis-to-control-sustained-impact-of-us-hiv-investments-in-mozambique>.

⁴³Paulo et al., "Health System Reliance and Disruption."

The freeze reached Mozambique in the last week of January 2025, suspending roughly \$90.6 million in PEPFAR-funded activities that fell outside the waivers.⁴⁴ By early February the government acknowledged the scale of the blow. "The abrupt withdrawal of this support compromises efficiency in program implementation," government spokesman Inocêncio Impissa conceded, noting that American money financed "a considerable part of health professional provision, especially in HIV/AIDS assistance."⁴⁵ The health ministry recorded some 2,100 immediate layoffs of health personnel, with disruption rippling through laboratory services, supply-chain logistics, community outreach, and clinical follow-up.⁴⁶

The national data tell the story of the months that followed. Comparing February through May 2025 with the same period a year earlier, Mozambique's National Institute of Health documented more than 15,000 fewer people starting HIV treatment, a fourteen percent decline, with adult initiations down a quarter in the worst months. Viral load testing fell thirty-eight percent among adults and forty-four percent among children; the number of children with test results showing viral suppression fell by roughly a third. Treatment interruptions (patients missing their medication pick-ups) rose thirty-nine percent.⁴⁷ Modeling by the institute with UNAIDS projected that a sustained disruption would produce 83,000 additional HIV infections and 14,000 additional deaths in Mozambique by 2030, increases of fifteen and ten percent over baseline.⁴⁸

Behind each of these numbers were people like the ones the South African journalist Jesse Copelyn found when he traveled through Sofala and Manica provinces in mid-2025. In rural Sofala, the USAID-funded organization ComuSanas had employed hundreds of case workers to reach orphans and other vulnerable children with HIV. "We worked with children aged 0 to 17, especially orphans and vulnerable children," one former worker, Joaquim Issufo, told him. After the stop-work order, an eight-year-old boy in the program fell critically ill after his medication deliveries ceased; a two-year-old girl in Dondo district died after the activist supporting her family was dismissed. Some case workers, unpaid, kept visiting their children in secret, defying the stop-work order. At one health facility, monthly tuberculosis case detection fell from about thirty to fewer than ten—not because tuberculosis had retreated, but because no one was looking for it.⁴⁹ When Rubio insisted that no one had died because of the cuts, a former case worker

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵"Corte de financiamento dos EUA compromete programas de saúde em Moçambique," *Lusa*, February 7, 2025.

⁴⁶Isidoro Nobre et al., "Mozambique CQUIN Poster" (CQUIN 9th Annual Meeting, November 2025), https://cquin.icap.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Mozambique-CQUIN_Poster_Nov-2025_Final-for-Print.pdf.

⁴⁷Dorlim Moiana Uetela et al., "The Impact of the U.S. Funding Interruption on HIV Services and the HIV Epidemic in Mozambique" (abstract OASo102LB, IAS 2025, Kigali, July 2025), reported in Keith Alcorn, "US Funding Cuts Cause Immediate Drops in Numbers Testing and on HIV Treatment," *aidsmap*, July 2025, <https://www.aidsmap.com/news/jul-2025/us-funding-cuts-cause-immediate-drops-numbers-testing-and-hiv-treatment>; Paulo et al., "Health System Reliance and Disruption."

⁴⁸Uetela et al., "Impact of the U.S. Funding Interruption."

⁴⁹Jesse Copelyn, "Mozambique: These Are the Children the United States Left to Die," *GroundUp and Spotlight*, June 19, 2025, <https://groundup.org.za/article/mozambique-these-children-usaid-left-to-die-part-1-the-abandonment-orphans-with-hiv/>.

named Faustino Samuel offered a standing invitation: "If he could come here, we could show him the evidence."⁵⁰

The losses were not confined to treatment. In Gaza province, where one in five adults lives with HIV, the DREAMS program had offered adolescent girls an alternative to the transactional relationships that drive infection: vocational training, school support, mentorship. It was eliminated across all ten of its program countries, Mozambique included. American reporters who visited the province in 2026 found young women who had trained as mechanics through the program now cut adrift, and the prevention infrastructure around them—community testing, peer outreach, condom distribution—reduced to what the state clinic could offer inside its walls.⁵¹

Compound fractures

The American withdrawal struck a country with no fiscal or institutional reserves left to absorb it. Mozambique was still contending with the legacy of the "hidden debt" scandal, in which some \$2 billion in secret state-guaranteed loans had triggered a donor freeze, a default, and years of debt distress.⁵² Its October 2024 elections had been followed by the most violent unrest in its democratic history, with security forces killing more than 300 protesters by Amnesty International's count, and a new president, Daniel Chapo, inaugurated amid the crisis in January 2025.⁵³ In the north, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado had displaced 1.3 million people, and the humanitarian operation supporting them was itself collapsing as American humanitarian funding, which had made up the largest share, evaporated: the 2025 response plan was eventually cut to a fifth of its original target population.⁵⁴ Cyclone Chido had torn through Cabo Delgado in December 2024, killing at least 120 people; cyclones Dikeledi and Jude followed within months, and severe flooding in early 2026 damaged more than 250 health facilities.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Copelyn, "Death in Mozambique."

⁵¹Juana Summers, Patrick Jarenwattananon, and Vincent Acovino, "U.S. Aid Cuts Are Affecting HIV/AIDS Care in Sub-Saharan Africa," NPR, May 22, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/05/22/nx-s1-5825889/u-s-aid-cuts-are-affecting-hiv-aids-care-in-sub-saharan-africa>; UNAIDS, "Impact of US Funding Cuts on HIV Programmes in East and Southern Africa."

⁵²Copelyn, "After US Funding Cuts, Mozambican Children Died"; "The 'Tuna Bonds' Debt Scandal: How a Maritime Dream Sank Mozambique," The Africa Report, <https://www.theafricareport.com/404002/the-tuna-bonds-debt-scandal-how-a-maritime-dream-sank-mozambique/>.

⁵³Amnesty International, "Mozambique: Authorities Must Investigate Reports of More Than 300 Unlawful Killings during Post-Election Protest Crackdown," February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/mozambique-authorities-must-investigate-reports-of-more-than-300-unlawful-killings-during-post-election-protest-crackdown/>.

⁵⁴Will Worley, "Mozambique: A Case Study of Growing Need and Global Aid Cut Confusion," The New Humanitarian, September 10, 2025, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/09/10/mozambique-case-study-growing-need-global-aid-cut-confusion>.

⁵⁵UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Mozambique: 2025 Tropical Cyclones (Chido, Dikeledi and Jude) Humanitarian Response, as of 30 September 2025," <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/mozambique/mozambique-2025-tropical-cyclones-chido-dikeledi-and-jude-humanitarian-response-30-september-2025>; Global Fund, "Global Fund Launches Regional Malaria Grant for Southern Africa," April 23, 2026, <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/news/2026/2026-04-23-global-fund-launches-regional-malaria-grant-southern-africa/>.

Each crisis magnified the others. After the 2026 floods, malaria cases surged ninety percent in Maputo province and more than two hundred percent in Gaza province compared with the year before. It was precisely the moment when American malaria support, which had underwritten spraying and net campaigns since 2007, could least be counted on.⁵⁶ A cholera outbreak beginning in October 2025 spread through twenty-two districts in seven provinces, sickening more than 5,600 people and killing seventy-one by late February 2026.⁵⁷ In March 2026, the pediatric AIDS foundation Ariel Glaser suspended the contracts of 632 workers in Cabo Delgado, the province least able to spare them, citing reduced American financing.⁵⁸ "Here, we depend on Trump," a village leader in central Mozambique told Copelyn. It was said not as complaint but as plain description.⁵⁹

Adaptation under duress

Mozambique's response combined triage with improvisation. The health ministry issued guidance on prioritization and task-shifting, integrated community interventions into routine facility services, suspended decentralized drug distribution through private pharmacies, and pushed monthly monitoring reviews to catch failures early. By May 2025 some indicators had begun to recover: treatment re-initiations rose seventy-three percent from their trough as tracing resumed, and tuberculosis screening ticked upward.⁶⁰ Health minister Ussene Isse was frank about the trajectory. "The reduction in external funding has impacted the achievement of goals and universal health coverage, leading to a setback in the country's achievements," he told the national health conference in October 2025, pledging to build "a resilient health system with the capacity to absorb the effects of shocks."⁶¹

The Global Fund stepped partially into the breach, approving emergency malaria funding for the flooded south and launching a \$24 million regional malaria grant spanning Mozambique, South Africa, and Eswatini.⁶² And in December 2025, Mozambique signed what Washington presented as the template for its new approach: a five-year memorandum of understanding worth up to \$1.8 billion under the "America First Global Health Strategy," covering HIV prevention (including access to the long-acting injectable lenacapavir), malaria, and maternal and child health. In exchange, Mozambique committed to raise health's share of its domestic budget by roughly thirty percent over five years and to accept a shift from

⁵⁶Global Fund, "Global Fund Launches Regional Malaria Grant for Southern Africa."

⁵⁷"Mozambique Records over 5,600 Cholera Cases, 71 Deaths," Xinhua, February 20, 2026, <https://english.news.cn/20260220/73e0142c712145709368129e1f4e6b3d/c.html>.

⁵⁸"Moçambique: ONG de combate ao HIV/SIDA suspende mais de 600 trabalhadores em Cabo Delgado," e-Global (Lusa), March 19, 2026, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/mocambique/mocambique-ong-de-combate-ao-hiv-sida-suspende-mais-de-600-trabalhadores-em-cabo-delgado/amp/>.

⁵⁹Copelyn, "After US Funding Cuts, Mozambican Children Died."

⁶⁰Nobre et al., "Mozambique CQUIN Poster"; Paulo et al., "Health System Reliance and Disruption."

⁶¹"Mozambique: Reduction in External Funding Impacts Health Goals," Agência de Informação de Moçambique via AllAfrica, October 3, 2025, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202510030036.html>.

⁶²Global Fund, "Global Fund Launches Regional Malaria Grant for Southern Africa."

NGO-implemented programs toward direct government-to-government administration.⁶³ The agreement restored predictability, but at a lower level of support, on a countdown clock, and with the explicit expectation of "rapid weaning" from American funds. One year into the crisis, the Clinton Health Access Initiative's market survey found HIV services across affected countries—Mozambique included—"still falling," with "minimal recovery."⁶⁴

The Scramble to Respond

The continental response to the withdrawal has been shaped by a hard fact: no combination of actors can currently replace American money at scale. Development assistance for health fell twenty-one percent worldwide in 2025, to its lowest level in fifteen years, as European donors (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany among them) cut alongside Washington; sub-Saharan Africa absorbed a twenty-five percent reduction, with Mozambique among the four countries facing the deepest proportional losses in total health spending.⁶⁵ The Global Fund's eighth replenishment, hosted for the first time on African soil in Johannesburg in November 2025, raised \$11.3 billion against an \$18 billion target.⁶⁶ Gavi, the vaccine alliance, raised over \$9 billion of an \$11.9 billion goal after Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced by video that "the United States won't contribute more to Gavi."⁶⁷ The Gates Foundation pledged to spend down \$200 billion over twenty years, most of it in Africa, a historic commitment, though one spread across two decades.⁶⁸ China, sometimes imagined as the natural beneficiary of American retreat, operates a global aid budget of roughly \$3 billion a year and has shown no intention of replicating American-style health programs; as the analyst Hannah Ryder put it, "they don't give aid in that way, so they can't 'replace' USAID."⁶⁹

African governments and institutions have responded with a mixture of emergency spending and longer-horizon reform. Nigeria added \$200 million to its 2025 health budget and began producing its own HIV and malaria test kits; South Africa's treasury allocated emergency funds to plug part of the PEPFAR

⁶³U.S. Department of State, "Empowering Resilience in Mozambique under the America First Global Health Strategy," December 15, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/empowering-resilience-in-mozambique-under-the-america-first-global-health-strategy>; "US Commits up to US\$1.8 Billion in New Health Cooperation MoU with Mozambique, Signed in Washington," Club of Mozambique, December 15, 2025, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/us-commits-up-to-us1-8-billion-in-new-health-cooperation-mou-with-mozambique-signed-in-washington/>.

⁶⁴Clinton Health Access Initiative, "HIV Market Impact Memo," June 2026, <https://www.clintonhealthaccess.org/report/hiv-market-impact-memo-june-2026/>.

⁶⁵"The State of Global Health Funding: August 2025," Think Global Health, August 2025, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/state-global-health-funding-august-2025>.

⁶⁶Kerry Cullinan, "Global Fund Raises \$11.4 Billion, Including \$4.6 Billion from United States," Health Policy Watch, November 21, 2025, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/global-fund-raises-11-4-billion-including-4-6-billion-from-us/>.

⁶⁷Kerry Cullinan and Elaine Ruth Fletcher, "Gavi Seeks Support amid Global Vaccination Backsliding," Health Policy Watch, June 25, 2025, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/gavi-seeks-support-amid-global-vaccination-backsliding/>.

⁶⁸Gates Foundation, "Bill Gates to Give Away Virtually All His Wealth through the Gates Foundation over the Next 20 Years," May 8, 2025, <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/media-center/press-releases/2025/05/25th-anniversary-announcement>.

⁶⁹Yinka Adegoke, "China Won't 'Replace' USAID in Africa," Semafor, March 3, 2025, <https://www.semafor.com/article/03/03/2025/china-wont-replace-usaid-in-africa>.

gap; Ethiopia's parliament introduced a payroll tax to fund HIV medicines; Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Uganda announced increases in domestic health investment.⁷⁰ The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, whose director-general Jean Kaseya admitted he first thought news of the freeze "was a joke," has turned the crisis into an argument: external health assistance to Africa was on course to fall from \$81 billion to roughly \$25 billion annually, he warned, and the answer had to be ownership. "Africa cannot continue outsourcing its health security," Kaseya said in launching a continental health-financing strategy built on domestic revenue, solidarity levies, and diaspora finance. "This strategy is not about aid—it's about ownership."⁷¹

The rhetoric of self-reliance, however, collides with fiscal reality. A quarter-century after African leaders pledged in the Abuja Declaration to devote fifteen percent of national budgets to health, only three countries meet the target, and thirty-two African states now spend more on external debt service than on health care.⁷² Kaseya's own metaphor for the moment was hardly triumphal: "It's like you are a child. You had a wealthy father... Then you have to survive."⁷³

The Reckoning over Aid

The cuts have also reopened, under the worst possible conditions, one of development economics' oldest arguments. Critics of aid supplied a ready-made vocabulary for the administration's case. The Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo, in her 2009 book *Dead Aid*, had called for phasing out assistance she blamed for dependence and institutional atrophy; the Nobel laureate Angus Deaton had argued that large aid flows corrode the contract between governments and citizens.⁷⁴ Rubio's farewell essay echoed it, indicting a "charity-based model" that bred dependency.⁷⁵

Yet the empirical record of health aid, specifically, cuts against the sweeping version of the critique. PEPFAR countries saw all-cause mortality fall twenty percent below expected levels; the programs dismantled in 2025 were, by the accounting of the *Lancet* evaluation, among the most cost-effective

⁷⁰Ebere Okereke, "Africa after USAID: Who Will Pay the Health Bill?," Chatham House, October 16, 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/10/africa-after-usaid-who-will-pay-health-bill>; "Executive Director of UNAIDS Winnie Byanyima's Statement at the Opening of ICASA," December 4, 2025, <https://ghana.un.org/en/306554-executive-director-unaid-winnie-byanyimas-statement-opening-icasa>.

⁷¹Emanuel, "The Head of Africa CDC"; Africa CDC, "Africa CDC Unveils Strategic Plan to Transform Health Financing and Advance Self-Reliance," April 11, 2025, <https://africacdc.org/news-item/africa-cdc-unveils-strategic-plan-to-transform-health-financing-and-advance-self-reliance/>.

⁷²Africa CDC, "Africa's Health Financing in a New Era," April 3, 2025, <https://africacdc.org/news-item/africas-health-financing-in-a-new-era-april-2025/>; Stefan Anderson, "African Leaders Declare End of Aid Era at Nairobi World Health Summit," Health Policy Watch, April 29, 2026, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/african-leaders-declare-end-of-aid-era-at-nairobi-world-health-summit/>.

⁷³Emanuel, "The Head of Africa CDC."

⁷⁴Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009); Angus Deaton, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁷⁵Rubio, "Making Foreign Aid Great Again."

life-saving instruments ever operated, at a cost to Americans of roughly seventeen cents a day.⁷⁶ And African health leaders themselves had already charted a different exit from dependence. The Lusaka Agenda, agreed in December 2023, set out a managed transition toward country-led priorities and domestic financing; the experience of Gavi's "graduation" processes showed that successful transitions take five to ten years of planned co-financing.⁷⁷ What happened in 2025 compressed transition into weeks, without plans, data, or bridge funding. Almost no one had defended the old system as it stood; the scholarly plea, as the title of one commentary put it, was to "reimagine aid, don't destroy it."⁷⁸ The epidemiologist Salim Abdool Karim, whose South African research institute received its stop-work order five days after the inauguration, drew the lesson that now shapes planning across the continent: "never take donor funding for granted. And certainly, never ... be as heavily reliant on a single donor again."⁷⁹

What replaced the old system remains, as of this writing, a work in progress. The America First Global Health Strategy, released in September 2025, promises bilateral five-year compacts with seventy-one countries—the first signed with Kenya in December 2025, committing \$1.6 billion over five years against Kenya's pledge to raise its own health spending by \$850 million, with money routed away from NGOs and toward the government itself. "We're not doing this anymore," Rubio said of the old implementing-partner model at the signing.⁸⁰ The strategy promises full funding of "frontline" commodities and health workers in 2026 and "rapid decrease" thereafter, and integration of PEPFAR and malaria programs into consolidated platforms; by mid-2026, thirty-four memoranda had been signed, including Mozambique's.⁸¹ Whether these compacts become a durable, leaner partnership or a managed exit is unresolved—and a further cliff looms, as 120 CDC-administered HIV agreements serving 8.7 million patients, with Mozambique among the three most exposed countries, expire in late 2026 with no successor system yet in place. One CDC official described the prospect as "a second global health woodchipper."⁸²

⁷⁶Jennifer Kates et al., "Assessing PEPFAR's Impact: Analysis of Mortality in PEPFAR Countries," KFF, September 27, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/assessing-pepfars-impact-analysis-of-mortality-in-pepfar-countries/>; Cavalcanti et al., "Evaluating the Impact of Two Decades of USAID Interventions."

⁷⁷Future of Global Health Initiatives, "The Lusaka Agenda," December 12, 2023, <https://futureofghis.org/final-outputs/lusaka-agenda/>; Health Policy and Planning and PLOS Medicine literature on Gavi graduation, e.g., "Middle-Income Countries Graduating from Health Aid: Transforming Daunting Challenges into Smooth Transitions," *PLOS Medicine* 16, no. 6 (2019), <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002837>.

⁷⁸"Reimagine Aid, Don't Destroy It," *Studies in Comparative International Development* (2025), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12116-025-09475-1>.

⁷⁹Salim Abdool Karim, "Transforming Adversity into Opportunity for the AIDS Response," *Spotlight*, November 26, 2025, <https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2025/11/26/salim-abdool-karim-transforming-adversity-into-opportunity-for-the-aids-response/>.

⁸⁰Simon Lewis, "US Signs Pact with Kenya under New 'America First' Global Health Strategy," Reuters, December 4, 2025, <https://www.aol.com/articles/us-signs-pact-kenya-under-160114058.html>.

⁸¹Gabrielle Emanuel and Fatma Tanis, "State Department Unveils 'America First' Global Health Strategy," NPR, September 19, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/09/19/g-s1-89438/global-health-strategy-jeremy-lewin>; Hannah Johnson, "Global Health Update: July 29, 2026," George W. Bush Institute, July 29, 2026, <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/global-health-update-july-29-2026>.

⁸²Lauren Kent, "Millions Who Rely on US-Funded HIV/AIDS Programs Face Uncertainty as Financial Cliff Looms," CNN, July 10, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/10/africa/cdc-pepfar-hiv-aids-program-cliff-intl>.

Conclusion

Eighteen months after the stop-work orders, the ledger of the American withdrawal from global health can be provisionally drawn. On one side: an overdue conversation about sovereignty and sustainability, a handful of countries taxing themselves for health in ways they had deferred for decades, and a new bilateral architecture that, whatever its motives, has at least re-established a floor of predictability for countries like Mozambique. On the other: hundreds of thousands of deaths that models say have already occurred and millions more projected; a generation of prevention programs—for adolescent girls, for key populations, for children born to mothers with HIV—dismantled at the moment they were bending epidemic curves; and a demonstration, visible to every finance ministry on the continent, that a quarter-century of partnership can be revoked by executive order in an afternoon.

Mozambique distills the lesson. The country's HIV program was, by clinical measures, a success story of the aid era—treatment coverage above ninety percent of those diagnosed, pediatric coverage nearly universal in flagship provinces. It was also a structure in which the state had been quietly hollowed out of its own health system, with delivery, logistics, and data delegated to foreign-funded intermediaries. When the funding stopped, the structure did not bend; it broke, and children like Paciência Maherepa fell through it. The task now facing Mozambique and its neighbors—building health systems sturdy enough that no election in a distant country can empty their clinics—was always the right goal. The tragedy of 2025 is that the countries of sub-Saharan Africa were forced to begin that work in freefall, financed by austerity, and counting their dead as they went.

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