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Donors to fund study of aid to emerging nations

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WASHINGTON, June 8 (Reuters) - Multilateral lenders and big donor countries have agreed to fund an aid evaluation task force for the next five to 10 years to study which development projects in emerging market nations are most effective and why, development advocates said on Thursday.

"After many years of spending many billions of dollars we really don't have a lot of very credible, serious, systematic evidence about which interventions work best," Center for Global Development president Nancy Birdsall said from Italy.

Her nongovernmental organization, an African aid watchdog group and the head of a bilateral donors' club met with rich country donor agencies and development banks for two days in Bellagio, Italy, where the pledge was made, she said.

"We have clear commitments of financial support. ... We have some foundations with a clear indication they would like to support some sort of new, independent entity," Birdsall added.

The move comes as Washington-based multilateral lenders talk increasingly of measuring outcomes of their programs and former World Bank economist William Easterly, now in academia, published a book arguing much of the \$2.3 trillion in foreign aid over the last 50 years has been squandered.

"We would very much like to see full participation of developing countries ... to determine where it (aid) works," said Cape Town Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, founder of watchdog agency African Monitor.

Described as an independent secretariat to a board with its own in-house experts, the evaluation group would have five to 10 employees and study aid effectiveness

for up to the next decade.

"Where we see the new entity adding value would be the very important role of advocacy, trying to get people to appreciate the impact of evaluation," said Richard Manning, who chairs the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's assistance committee -- a club of big bilateral donors.

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