

NGO RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE U.S. GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY (GFSS) REFRESH

As world hunger continues to rise for the [seventh straight year](#), the need for sufficient, affordable, and widely accessible nutritious foods for the world's most marginalized people is as urgent as ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic is putting additional stress on global food systems, threatening the lives of those who were already experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity and undernutrition prior to the pandemic. The pandemic is also further taxing farmers already hard-pressed to respond to the intensifying effects of climate change.

Additionally, 2021 is predicted to be another catastrophic year, as the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) estimates that [270 million](#) people will face acute hunger around the world by the end of the year, including [34 million](#) on the brink of famine. [The majority of people](#) currently facing famine-like conditions are women and children living in rural, hard-to-reach areas. Unfortunately, [153 children could die each day](#) from pandemic-related malnutrition alone over the next two years if urgent action is not taken to mitigate this crisis. The wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 will undoubtedly have long-term effects on food security and nutrition, lessening our odds of reaching [the Sustainable Development Goal](#) of a world free of hunger by 2030.

This year, the United States has an opportunity to refresh and update the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) to help the U.S. Government (USG) meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. Starting in 2017, Congress mandated the GFSS to chart the U.S. Government's course to achieve global food security and guide the implementation of the Feed the Future (FTF) initiative. The GFSS presents opportunities for an integrated whole-of-government strategy, with agency-specific implementation plans to drive FTF programming, and builds upon programs and expertise developed in the first phase of FTF (2010-2016). With each refresh of the GFSS and the next phase of FTF, there is a need to recalibrate and reassess whether FTF strategies and programs are appropriately supporting communities in becoming food secure and contributing to the goal of ending hunger. This year also provides the opportunity for the GFSS to lay the course for USG engagement and commitments in global movements at the upcoming U.N. Food Systems and the Nutrition for Growth Summits.

A sustainable pathway to ending hunger starts with commitments from small-holder farmers, communities, countries, and U.S. leadership to catalyze and help mobilize the resources, know-how, research, and innovation to support country leadership and capacity strengthening. The new GFSS should build on lessons learned from the last decade of program implementation and prioritize bringing partnerships and innovation to farmers and communities to target the root causes of hunger and poverty. A successful GFSS refresh should be context-specific, people-centered, forward-looking, and grounded in the reality that in a world that produces enough food to feed everyone, [690 million](#) people still face hunger due to conflict, mass migration related to climate, and poverty. The new GFSS framework will need to incorporate strategies that address how conflict and climate exacerbate hunger.

It is time for a transformative GFSS that takes into account the inextricable linkages between food security and nutrition, and their interconnectivity with other development sectors like climate, while simultaneously

placing resilience and sustainability at its center. The U.S. is well-positioned to help reverse the upwards trajectory of food insecurity and mitigate backsliding on years of historic progress, preserving a legacy of leadership on food security worldwide.

To better understand the role of FTF programs in global food security efforts and the impact of the GFSS, InterAction gathered inputs from FTF implementers and InterAction NGO Members across five policy working groups—Food Security, Nutrition, and Agriculture; Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene; Climate Advocacy; Climate Mainstreaming Working Groups; and the Children and Youth Initiative. The below recommendations come from NGO learning over the last ten years of FTF policy and implementation.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY (2017-2021) AND FEED THE FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

Understanding lessons learned from GFSS and FTF implementation is critical to building an effective and sustainable GFSS framework for the next five years of work. Since its inception in 2011, FTF has refocused and reprioritized USG global food security efforts. This shift has been critical to elevating food security and nutrition within U.S. foreign assistance and fully addressing the root causes of global poverty.

Over the last decade, FTF programs have positively impacted the lives of project participants. FTF implementation has assisted 23.4 million people to live above the poverty line and supported 5.2 million families to live **free from hunger**. Without assistance, many food producers experience food security barriers, such as poverty, which prevent them from accessing the start-up resources that they need to cultivate crops and livestock. FTF programming assists families accessing food for household consumption and building viable value chains, as well as supporting food producers (including farmers, pastoralists, foresters, and fishers) to generate income from their agriculture commodities and businesses.

The Feed the Future Initiative is a strong example of the USG's diplomatic engagement. Through its programming, FTF has created ties between the USG and target countries, building local government capacity to address food insecurity. By engaging local governments at large and communities, FTF has helped bring to light the competing challenges target countries face in reaching food security. The partnership between USG, target countries has also laid the foundation for collaboration and mutual learning between local communities, NGOs, governments, the private sector, regional organizations, and FTF officials, which should play a key role in the implementation of the GFSS refresh.

Financial tools and access that are sensitive to context are other valuable components of FTF programming. Income-generating initiatives under FTF bridge the gap between poverty and access to both food and agriculture inputs. Women, in particular, have benefited from FTF's focus on income generation initiatives. Since 2011, FTF has helped **3.7 million women** access farming inputs, and more than **\$630 million** has been invested in women and small businesses owned by women. Empowering women economically enables them to make decisions about what foods are both grown and consumed within households. Households, where women are empowered to make decisions about **food and finances**, are often the **most food-secure households**. Access to financial services and a gender-transformative approach for all programming are critical components of FTF that should be carried over and expanded upon in the next GFSS.

The last decade of FTF implementation has also highlighted several key tensions at the center of the initiative and strategy. First, there is a disconnect between the prioritization of market-based approaches and reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable households. During a focus group discussion, FTF implementers expressed that FTF initiatives involving market systems and value chains focus primarily on individual food producers within communities and often work with farmers with a recognized history of being high-yield producing or cash crop producers that have access to needed agriculture resources.¹ Focusing on high-yield producing farmers can shift the ag-led growth focus away from vulnerable households. In addition to a focus on high producing farmers, the markets that farmers are connected with are typically markets selected by FTF private sector partners, therefore, farmers are encouraged to sell produce in markets that have been selected by private sector partners. Most often, selected markets are outside of farmers' community based-markets or without key links within local food systems or value chains.

Secondly, the multisectoral approaches of GFSS and FTF have encouraged the integration of overlapping sectors, allowing for more collaboration in-country and improved ability to account for the changing and differing contexts across target countries. Multisectoral work helps to break down silos and better pinpoint the key drivers of food insecurity and poverty within communities. Unfortunately, lack of data transparency and the increased challenges at effectively tracking sector impacts within multisectoral programming have made it difficult to see the full scope of impact. While multisectoral programming is beneficial and should be continued, it can be overcomplicated by excessive monitoring evaluation indicators. FTF implementers reported that the number of indicators they are required to track overshadows the actual monitoring of impact of the overall project. The increased number of priorities and initiative indicators has made tracking field data and reporting on the direct and secondary impacts cumbersome.

Thirdly, investments in innovation, agriculture, value-chain, and market research are a cornerstone of FTF. These investments have helped identify and address some of the significant challenges impacting local food production in developing countries, driving productivity gains and strengthening local food systems. However, innovation and technologies can be disconnected from local context, constraints, and realities without adequate investment in local consultation capacity-building, local research, and socially appropriate extension efforts. Obstacles persist in ensuring that communities can adopt and scale up innovations, especially where extension services are unavailable. Limited inclusion of local leaders, farmers' organizations, women, and youth in the research and innovation process can also contribute to this disconnect. Agricultural research and innovations are currently centered at U.S based universities, through FTF Innovation Labs, but more can be done to build partnership with their counterparts in developing countries universities and agricultural research and extension systems. However, even more sustained engagement beyond a project or grant cycle is needed from local experts, researchers, and extension providers (where available) to better design innovative solutions that are both appropriate and accessible to communities implementing FTF initiatives.

Lastly, the context of global food insecurity has shifted. As the GFSS is revised, it is important to remember that the origins of FTF came in response to the food price crisis in 2007-2008, and the GFSS was mandated by the Global Food Security Act to codify initial learning from FTF and capture gains. GFSS and FTF have

¹ InterAction Global Food Security Strategy Local Leaders Consultation (focus group discussion, March 9, 2021).

focused on the approach of ag-led growth, identifying economic development as the key to achieving food security. Now, **food insecurity is on the rise**, and more is understood about the impact of climate and conflict as key drivers of food insecurity. Increased urbanization, conflict, and climate-driven migration make it more difficult for urban and peri-urban communities to cultivate food. There is a need for the GFSS to adjust its focus to be more comprehensive and encompass beyond an agriculture and economic growth initiative.

These key tensions may not be able to be fully resolved, but further investigation is crucial to gain a better understanding of how the GFSS framework can be improved upon and programming can be strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY REFRESH

After ten years of implementing FTF programs that focus on ag-led growth, resilience, and nutrition, key lessons and tensions within the GFSS have become apparent. The below recommendations work to address the key tensions identified above and hope to contribute to a stronger, more impactful, and inclusive GFSS. However, food insecurity and its causes are situational; therefore, community leaders must be consulted in order to develop context-specific solutions. These recommendations were identified in consultation with InterAction Members and food security policy advocates and from focus group discussions and written feedback from food security program implementers.

- Fully incorporate adaptive learning to program design, implementation, and closeout.
- Encourage food producers to utilize local, community based-markets in addition to allowing private sector investors to promote and prioritize the use of external global value chain markets.
- Promote locally appropriate and nutritional crop cultivation to expand agriculture initiatives beyond ag-led growth and improve the balance between local food production, diet availability, and export or cash crop production.
- Establish tracking mechanisms for sector outcomes and their related funding streams to support greater multisectoral learning and improve collaboration and program design.
- Agriculture research and innovation need to partner with and strengthen host country research institutions and be more inclusive of Historically Black Universities and Tribal Colleges in the U.S.
- Improve investments in research beyond Innovation Labs.

FULLY INCORPORATE CONTEXT FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING TO PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND CLOSEOUT.

Recognizing that food security is impacted by the strength of the whole food system from cultivation to consumption. The GFSS project framework should support project initiatives that are transformational and socially appropriate for each community. Food security programming is needed in both urban and peri-urban settings as well as rural communities. Therefore, the GFSS framework must be comprehensive and flexible to allow integration and project ideas ranging from animal husbandry, natural resource management, value chain development, research, and water and sanitation.

Food insecurity and the barriers that contribute to hunger are driven by global trends, like climate change and conflict, but manifest differently in different development and humanitarian contexts and regions of

the world. The GFSS should prioritize learning from previous development initiatives as well as allow for flexibility so that initiatives can be specific to each food insecurity context.

Flexibility is also critical throughout the life of a project. Given the often cyclical nature of food insecurity and malnutrition and the uncertainty of climate and conflict impacts, causes of hunger have the potential to change, and new causes of hunger can be identified. To ensure that programs remain effective and continue to reach communities, it is imperative to promote learning and adapting throughout program implementation. Local teams need the flexibility and adaptability to alter projects and timelines to best meet the community's needs. The ability to adapt and alter projects while implementing demonstrates that the projects are community focused not indicator-focused.

Additionally, project initiatives should include close-out periods that allow for program teams to conclude the implementation of a project and allow for time to transition projects to full community ownership strategically. Having a transition period enhances sustainability and ensures that communities are able to own and carry out projective initiatives.

ENCOURAGE FOOD PRODUCERS TO UTILIZE LOCAL, COMMUNITY-BASED MARKETS IN ADDITION TO ALLOWING PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTORS TO PROMOTE AND PRIORITIZE THE USE OF EXTERNAL GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN MARKETS.

When determining how to mitigate hunger best and improve nutrition, community location and the unique food insecurity context must be taken into consideration. GFSS framework should place more focus on strengthening local community based-markets and supporting community members to access diverse, nutritious, affordable locally grown foods. Supporting community based-markets and promoting affordable locally grown crops can improve nutritional access for vulnerable communities and enhance the sustainability of community food security and resilience.

Current market system initiatives under FTF identify high-yield food producers and link them to elevated value chain markets and private sector investors. Private sector investors connect farmers with more advanced food processors that have access to value chain markets and independent buyers. As farmers become connected to buyers outside of the community based-market and shift their commodities to elevated markets, farmers stop selling produce in local markets. This shift benefits the high-yield food producer and private investors, but can distort local community markets and leave small-holder farmers without access to necessary agricultural inputs or commodities at a reasonable price. The more food items are shifted to value chain markets, the less food there is available in local markets. Less food in local markets causes price spikes, making food less affordable and less accessible to community members. This can create food insecurity within communities that did not previously experience it.

Increased investments to small-holder farmers and local food producers have the ability to help stabilize local markets and support community members in their ability to access food at affordable rates. Stable markets with controlled food prices can help increase disposable income held by individual households and make more money available to cover other expenses such as safe water and sanitation services, school fees, and transportation to and from markets. This also increases the potential for money to be invested in home gardens and productive food activities.

Supporting food producers to develop community-level food processing facilities and safety nets such as community food storages, seed banks, and financial lending schemes, is an opportunity to establish local food system networks that contribute to food and nutrition security stabilization and resilience within communities. Investing in community-level food processing supports the development and collaboration with local farmers' organizations and community leaders that are essential to ensuring food security and improving nutrition and resilience for all community members, including farmers that are not high yield producers.

PROMOTE LOCALLY APPROPRIATE AND NUTRITIONAL CROP CULTIVATION TO EXPAND AGRICULTURE INITIATIVES BEYOND AG-LED GROWTH AND IMPROVE THE BALANCE BETWEEN LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION, DIET AVAILABILITY, AND EXPORT OR CASH CROP PRODUCTION.

Inherently, FTF promotes initiatives that encourage ag-led growth, which have a tendency to prioritize agriculture and income generation strategies. However, the strong focus on income within agriculture projects can place an unbalanced emphasis on selling crops for income generation, such as cashew, shea, and cassava. That emphasis encourages farmers to sell crops, however, farmers are not as equally encouraged to cultivate crops for diverse household nutritional consumption.

It is important to understand that many small-share farmers have limited land access and are therefore forced to **make decisions about which crops they should cultivate—cash or subsistence**, creating a false dichotomy for farmers and food producers within FTF between cultivating crops solely for household consumption or for income generation.² As farmers opt to grow cash crops, fewer subsistence crops are available in community-based markets, and household consumption of indigenous nutritious crops decreases. Furthermore, cash crops are typically not sold in community-based markets due to their high-value cost in larger markets.

With an increased focus on cash crops such as cashew, shea, and cocoa, there has been a drastic **increase in exporting** raw cashew, shea, and cocoa nuts to food processors outside of grower countries. West Africa grows **80% of African cashews**; only 5% of those cashews are processed within Africa, exporting the remaining 75% to foreign processing companies. **Exporting local commodities disincentivizes** domestic producers to process raw agricultural commodities within national value chains, as local processors are not able to offer the same **purchasing price** that foreign processing supports. Once countries no longer have the incentive to process commodities in countries, food producers have **less control to negotiate** prices for their crops. Similarly, there is the potential for cassava farmers in Asia to experience a similar hardship with relation to cassava, cassava was once a **poor man's crop in Asia**, but increased encouragement to export and focus on income generation could make cassava inaccessible for low-income households.

By balancing community-centered economic growth and stable local market development through subsistence crop production, FTF market system initiatives can help advance a community's food security. FTF programs need to demonstrate to food producers that nutritious indigenous crops have economic value and that food cultivated needs to be equally balanced between consumption and income generation.

² InterAction Global Food Security Strategy Consultation (focus group discussion, March 9, 2021)

Market and ag-led growth initiatives within FTF could be better used to prioritize and strengthen local community-based cooperatives and the production of indigenous subsistence crops that have strong nutritional value. Community cooperatives provide opportunities for food producers to collectively gain access to food processing, storage, and sale; and support farmers in setting and controlling fair prices for agriculture commodities. Additionally, community cooperatives are more likely to increase economic opportunities for [women and other marginalized groups](#). By partnering with community cooperative groups, stronger connections between farmers and markets and processing of raw food commodities can be developed, and FTF initiatives can be more encompassing of low-yield and vulnerable food producers in order to make programming more inclusive and effective.

ESTABLISH COMPREHENSIVE TRACKING MECHANISMS FOR SECTOR OUTCOMES AND THEIR RELATED FUNDING STREAMS TO SUPPORT GREATER MULTISECTORAL LEARNING AND IMPROVE COLLABORATION AND PROGRAM DESIGN.

Food security is influenced by many factors. To fully understand the state of food security in a community or country, there is a need to look beyond agriculture production and yields and understand the multisectoral impact of related development sectors and for projects to transparently disaggregate data and cross-sectoral learning.

In a recent [GAO report](#) on climate mitigation and adaptation from July 2020, GAO discovered that allocated climate mitigation and adaptation funding was often put toward food security programming that incorporated conservations on agricultural practices with no additional programming directly related to climate adaptation and mitigation. GAO reported that despite the connections between agriculture and climate, taking climate direct funding and shifting the funding to agriculture programming is not a proper use of climate adaptation and mitigation funding. To increase the transparency of project funding and impact, there needed to be both direct and indirect funding for climate adaptation and mitigation programming. [USAID responded](#) to better track and report on funding and related data, in hopes of enabling the agency to have a better understanding of program impact.

As the GFSS is reevaluated, USAID should adopt a similar protocol for multisectoral programming, particularly for nutrition; resilience; and water security, sanitation, and hygiene programs. Increasing transparency on how FTF is implementing and accounting for multisectoral programming will increase the ability for implementers and policymakers to examine, learn, and improve upon programming while maintaining flexibility and adaptability of program implementation.

Consistent data transparency and multisectoral impact accountability built into the GFSS are also needed to improve cohesion across all U.S. global food security programs and implementers. With collaborative and complementary programming, layering, and sequencing across development and humanitarian response, initiatives become more effective. Understanding how different programs work in conjunction with or in addition to offers opportunities to learn and adapt programming that is comprehensive in its approach supported by different sectors working toward improved food security and nutrition.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION NEEDS TO PARTNER WITH AND STRENGTHEN HOST COUNTRY RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND BE MORE INCLUSIVE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES AND TRIBAL COLLEGES IN THE U.S.

U.S. agricultural research efforts, including those conducted at Innovation Labs have provided valuable contributions to FTF programming. More than 70 U.S. universities and colleges are involved with research at [24 Innovation Labs](#). While the Innovation Labs have provided valuable contributions to FTF countries, the GFSS could do more to encourage practical and inclusive research through partnership with local institutions. Partnering with local institutions can assist with community-level development and innovation to examine food systems in and between rural, peri-urban, and urban environments to improve program effectiveness and resilience.

Partnering with host country universities promotes capacity to develop and places in-country innovators and students at the forefront of technology development and collaboration. Involving countries in their own innovation increases the likelihood of communities adopting FTF innovation lab technologies.

Furthermore, host country university students and scientists have familiarity with barriers that contribute to local food insecurity. Understanding local perspectives of barriers provides valuable insight that can be used to influence technology development that is appropriate for a variety of different local communities. More collaboration with youth groups and host country grassroots leaders is a means to expand FTF impact and build more impactful capacity, especially through local research and extension services.

In addition to connecting host country university students to Innovation Labs, Innovation Labs within the U.S should also be expanded. With more than [70 U.S universities](#) currently contributing to FTF Innovation Labs, only a handful have participation from faculty located at a Historically Black College, and none have representation from Indigenous or Tribal colleges. FTF Innovation Labs need to promote equity and inclusion both abroad and domestically, especially through capacity-building and resources.

IMPROVE INVESTMENTS IN RESEARCH BEYOND INNOVATION LABS.

Research, innovation, and effective dissemination of technologies, and adoption of those technologies, are critical to helping small-scale farmers and communities adapt to the impacts of climate change and better plan for future challenges to agriculture production and resilience. Collaborative global agriculture research systems, like CGIAR, are critical in developing and adapting specific tools for agriculture in developing economies; however, public funding for international agricultural research has been stagnant. Locally relevant technological solutions are scaled by CGIAR through partnerships in capacity development, innovation, and policy to drive global transformation and impact.

The U.S. should support local institutions to develop collaborative agricultural research through CGIAR, the largest international agricultural research system in the world. CGIAR predominantly works in developing economies and is funded by many countries and donor entities, including USAID, under the authority of the Global Food Security Act. The system also directly partners with at least 17 Innovation Labs, tapping into the expertise of the U.S. university community. More investment and potentially more resources are needed to commit to knowledge management that works across the USG, other donors, and across the existing networks of CGIAR and other institutions. Research and learning should also leverage and integrate, where appropriate, research findings and practices of other sectors, including water, sanitation, and hygiene; education; and gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY

While re-evaluating the GFSS, it is critical to also think through the connection between overarching strategy objectives and program implementation. It is crucial to consider how strategy shifts will be implemented from the initial design in order to effectively tackle potential barriers and isolate assumptions. These recommendations were identified in consultation with InterAction Members and food security policy advocates and from focus group discussions and written feedback from food security program implementers.

- Sustainably expand the list of FTF target countries to include a larger and more diverse set of countries, better articulate the difference between target and aligned country distinctions, and improve transparency and coordination of FTF countries with other RFS priority countries.
- Increase collaboration with a diverse group of domestic and international stakeholders to ensure initiatives and programs are context-specific and locally appropriate.
- Strengthen the bridge between humanitarian, development, and resilience programming, and improve layering of USG global food security can complement sector programs
- Better align and coordinate across sectors and at a programmatic level to enhance the impact of U.S global food security programs.

SUSTAINABLY EXPAND THE LIST OF FEED THE FUTURE TARGET COUNTRIES TO INCLUDE A LARGER AND MORE DIVERSE SET OF COUNTRIES, BETTER ARTICULATE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TARGET AND ALIGNED COUNTRY DISTINCTIONS, AND IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY AND COORDINATION OF FTF COUNTRIES WITH OTHER RFS PRIORITY COUNTRIES.

Initially, FTF programs were focused on 19 countries. However, in 2017 and despite continued resourcing, this number was reduced to [12 countries](#), and 35 countries were designated as aligned countries. The number of target countries should be reevaluated and increased, with thoughtful transitions in programming to support this expansion. An expansion of target countries will better reflect the scope of the existing work of FTF, improve data transparency on program impact, and help to scale up the impact of programs to more vulnerable communities and countries. Increasing the number of countries involved in FTF programming should be done in consultation with local communities and partner governments and be aligned with learnings from FTF implementation.

Beyond the expansion of the reach of FTF, the designation of target and aligned countries should be consistently defined and strategically aligned with other sectors in USAID's Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS). There are priority country designations for other RFS sectors like WASH, nutrition, and resilience; however, the degree of strategic coordination for countries that have multiple sector designations is unclear. In addition, further clarity is needed on how money is being spent within focused and aligned countries, as well as how a target or an aligned designation is determined. For example, Ethiopia is a FTF Target, a Resilience Focus Country, a Global Water Strategy Priority, and a Nutrition Priority Country, but it's not clear what this convergence of resources means for Ethiopia and how USAID is leveraging the sectoral overlap. Better coordination, publicly available mapping, and transparency of impact data are needed for a truly multisectoral approach and to achieve the best outcomes.

INCREASE COLLABORATION WITH A DIVERSE GROUP OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS ARE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC, LOCALLY OWNED, AND APPROPRIATE.

FTF programming should incorporate more local and diverse groups in program design and implementation. Utilizing and incorporating feedback from women, local leaders, local businesses, cooperatives, and youth groups can improve understanding of the contributing factors to hunger and what communities need in order to eradicate food insecurity. Incorporating those perspectives will strengthen FTF programming. By developing a GFSS that supports the transition of USAID programming to **locally owned and implemented initiatives**, project initiatives will also be more likely to be owned and sustained by communities post-USAID implementation.

By designing projects with local ownership at the forefront demonstrates that FTF is a tool that enables people and countries to develop themselves. For the sustainability and longevity of project initiatives and to ensure local ownership of such initiatives, increasing collaboration with government extension agencies for FTF initiatives is essential to ensure **local ownership**. Utilizing extension officers brings local perspective and relatability to project designs—key factors for community adoption.

In addition to involving local perspective in design and establishing frameworks that support local communities in adopting FTF initiatives, there is a need to understand that some local partners do not have the capacity to meet all the administrative requirements needed for USAID contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. A partner's inability to fulfill the administrative requirements set by USAID does not mean that the partner is an inferior partner; however, it merely demonstrates that USAID primary requirements are not always inclusive, encouraging of diversity, or supportive of the capacity building needed to foster sustainable, locally-led development.

FTF programming should better utilize local resources and infrastructure within FTF programming. Partnering with existing youth-led and youth-serving organizations to implement programs, collaborating with community-based cooperatives, shop owners, welders, carpenters, and mechanics, and placing women as lead implementers of community-based projects when implementing FTF programs can help reinforce and help sustain existing structures and networks. At a community level, religious leaders are often seen as the most trustworthy community leaders. Involving and engaging with religious leaders early in project development and as champions/community messengers can also improve implementation and adoption.

Beyond the improvement of implementation, partnering with local leaders and community-based agencies creates opportunities for creative initiatives that understand the clear link between land and resource rights and how to develop stronger community stewardship, conservation awareness, and daily climate actions and behaviors that promote and protect land tenure and equitable natural resource management. Supporting communities to have a stronger understanding of climate-smart and natural resource management incentives strengthens land tenure for sustainable agriculture practices, which increases resilience of small-scale farmers.

The type of agreement and scale of outreach on new projects also has an impact on the diversity of stakeholders engaged in FTF. Many FTF initiatives are contracted to implementers and the private sector;

the use of contracts rather than cooperative agreements can prevent smaller NGOs and implementers from leading on FTF programming. Cooperative agreements can increase the diversity of FTF implementers. Small, medium-sized, and minority-owned businesses and organizations bring unique perspectives and skillsets that can strengthen FTF programming. Furthermore, there is a demand among the global community to increase the diversity and inclusion within international development. Diversity and inclusion start with domestic recognition and action in order for it to be reflected internationally.

STRENGTHEN THE BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT, AND RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING AND IMPROVE LAYERING OF USG GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AND COMPLEMENTARY SECTOR PROGRAMS.

Since the GFSS was first written, USAID has undergone a reorganization or “transformation” process, which, among other changes, integrated the former Office of Food for Peace into a new Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and linked this Bureau with two others, including the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS), into a new family of bureaus led by an Associate Administrator for Relief, Response, and Resilience (R3). This transformation provides an opportunity for clearer and more constructive coordination between BHA and RFS on food and nutrition security and related sectors, such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); protection; and financing. Improved coordination between the two bureaus is an opportunity to both mitigate hunger and prevent vulnerable households from slipping between food secure and insecure status in a longer-term, more sustainable way.

Food insecurity is most **prevalent in vulnerable communities** that are faced with exacerbating stresses such as irregular rain patterns, pest invasions, conflicts, and natural disasters, which strain their coping mechanisms. Violent conflict also plays a significant role in food and nutrition insecurity, especially in protracted conflicts that have moved beyond humanitarian response alone. It is essential to understand the vicious cycle: conflict leads to market disruptions, which causes food scarcity, which creates further conflict, and so the cycle continues. More than half of all food-insecure people live in **countries affected by conflict**. Breaking the conflict-food insecurity cycle is essential to addressing hunger and malnutrition and supporting households to become food secure while working towards longer-term stabilization goals of affected communities.

Currently, as crisis-affected populations move from humanitarian response to resilience, there is often no clear handoff or shared agenda between humanitarian and resilience programming. The Food for Peace Title II non-emergency funded programs, which can be partially funded with community development funds from the Development Assistance account, is an exception to this. Critically, these programs reach the most vulnerable populations. Their dual emergency and development mandate has demonstrated the value of layering and sequencing complementary programs. However, even Food for Peace programming could do more to coordinate with other sectors that they leverage in their work, such as WASH, conservation, and protection. Without consistent emphasis and shared priorities, including reaching the most vulnerable across the full spectrum of USG food security and nutrition programs, as well as supportive sector actions in both humanitarian response and development assistance, long-term solutions remain out of reach.

Food security and agricultural programs in humanitarian and conflict-affected contexts require both special analysis and consultation with those most affected, as well as transformative USG policies and bilateral aid programs that are nimble enough to reach across sectors and contexts and complement multilateral

finance investments and institutions. There must be a coherent and fit-for-purpose integrated response that builds off of humanitarian investments and provides a clear path to development in all settings. More effort to operationalize consultative processes across sectors of communities, marginalized populations, and the “how” of free and prior consent, for instance, may assist USAID to focus on what works in certain contexts.

BETTER ALIGN AND COORDINATE ACROSS SECTORS AND AT A PROGRAMMATIC LEVEL TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF U.S GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS.

Beyond challenges of implementation across development and humanitarian programming, successful implementation of the GFSS is influenced by a multitude of factors, including climate shocks, water scarcity, natural resource management, gender dynamics and infrastructure, and market stability. Research from FTF Innovation Labs demonstrates that multisectoral programming across nutrition, agriculture, and WASH is crucial for establishing food security. For FTF to be effective and impactful, the USG must prioritize a multisectoral approach to implementation both in terms of programming and actors, and improve coherence across USG agencies and related sector leads that are implementing FTF programming. In addition to USG agencies, there needs to be more multisectoral collaboration across host country governments, local producer organizations, and extension agencies, where those services exist and are capable of partnership. This can improve the sustainability of impact on communities and address root causes of food insecurity in a context-specific manner.

The GFSS must also include more robust incorporation of resilience, climate, water, and WASH systems, and food linkages, including around conflict and environmental destabilization, but also to ensure the security of rainfed farmers (many of whom are women and constitute a larger majority than those reliant on irrigated systems). This includes funding technologies like early warning systems for droughts and floods, as well as climate information and advisory services and climate-smart agriculture that build farm-level resilience to water insecurity. As a result, food security; agrarian; aquaculture and fishing livelihoods; and related economies are at risk from water insecurity intensified by climate change, climatic variability, and extreme weather events like floods and droughts.

All USAID bureaus and USG agencies implementing U.S. global food security programs should design projects that both work collaboratively and complementary to other programming, including layering and sequencing across development and humanitarian responses. Related USAID and USG strategies across sectors should be aligned, and implementation relationships should be built-in and responsive to each other. In the coming months and years, several strategies related to GFSS will also be updated or refreshed, including:

- [The U.S. Global Water Strategy](#)
- [USAID CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2012-2018](#)
- [USAID Food Assistance and Food Security Strategy 2016-2025](#)
- [USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014-2025](#)
- [United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#)
- [Children in Adversity Strategy](#)
- [USAID’s Disability Policy](#)



Beyond improved collaboration among state actors, USG agencies implementing U.S. global food security programs should design projects that collaborate with, leverage, and complement other programming, including layering and sequencing across development and humanitarian responses. Similar to the [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting](#) model that USAID promotes; Feed the Future programs should approach programming and implementation from a cross-sectoral approach where each sector is equally valued and promoted as a key pillar of sustainable food systems and food security.

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ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.