



# NGO RECOMMENDATIONS & LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE U.S. GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY REFRESH

Summary Report

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# Introduction

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As world hunger rises for the **seventh straight year**, the need for sufficient, affordable, and widely accessible nutritious foods for the world's most marginalized people is more urgent than 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.

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 wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 will have long-term effects on food security and nutrition, lessening our odds of **reaching 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) authorized by the Global Food Security Act (P.L. 114-195, P.L.115-266) to help the U.S. Government (USG) meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. The first iteration of the GFSS, lasting from 2017 to 2021, charted the USG's course to address global food insecurity and malnutrition and guide the implementation of the Feed the Future (FTF) initiative. Through the GFSS Refresh, the United States can help reverse the upward trajectory of food insecurity and mitigate backsliding on years of historic progress, preserving a legacy of leadership on food security worldwide.

The new GFSS should build on lessons learned from the last decade of program implementation and prioritize leveraging partnerships and innovation for farmers and communities to target the root causes of hunger and poverty.



Photo by Momo Mustafa

# Lessons Learned from the Global Food Security Strategy (2017-2021) & Feed the Future Implementation

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## Feed the Future Impacts

Understanding lessons learned from GFSS and FTF implementation is critical to building an effective and sustainable GFSS framework for the next five years.

- ▶ 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 implementation has lifted 23.4 million 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 prevents them from accessing the start-up resources that they need to cultivate crops and livestock.
- ▶ **FTF programming assists families with accessing food for household consumption, building viable value chains, and supporting food producers** (including farmers, pastoralists, foresters, and fishers) to generate income from their agriculture commodities and businesses.
- ▶ **The multisectoral approaches of GFSS and FTF have also 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, malnutrition, and poverty within communities.
- ▶ Through its programming, **FTF has created ties between the USG and target countries,** building local government capacity to address food insecurity. The partnership between USG and target countries has laid the foundation for collaboration and mutual learning between local communities, NGOs, governments, the private sector, regional organizations, and FTF officials.
- ▶ **Income-generating initiatives under FTF bridge the gap between poverty and access to food and agriculture inputs,** particularly for women. 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.

## Key Tensions for the GFSS Refresh

The last decade of FTF implementation has also highlighted several key tensions at the center of the initiative and strategy.

- ▶ **There is a disconnect between the prioritization of market-based approaches and reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable households.** An ag-led growth strategy centered only on high yield producing farmers, for instance, shifts focus away from vulnerable households. The GFSS must adapt to better target places where markets still stubbornly refuse to “work for the poor.”

- ▶ **Tracking the impact of multisectoral approaches is difficult.** Unfortunately, the 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.
- ▶ **Investments in innovation and technologies can be disconnected from local contexts, constraints, and realities.** Adequate investment in local consultation capacity-building, local research, and culturally-sensitive extension efforts are needed. Obstacles persist in ensuring that communities can adopt and scale up innovations, especially where extension services are unavailable.
- ▶ **The context of global food insecurity has shifted.** While food insecurity and malnutrition **continue to rise**, more is understood about the impact of climate and conflict as key drivers of food insecurity. Increased urbanization, conflict, and climate-driven migration also undermine food systems making land and rural communities into “contested spaces,” threatening the rights of the most vulnerable and making 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 encompassing, beyond an agriculture and economic growth initiative.

## Recommendations for the Global Food Security Strategy Refresh

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The below recommendations work to address the key tensions identified above and contribute to a stronger, more impactful, and inclusive GFSS. However, food insecurity and its causes are situational—community leaders must be consulted to develop context-specific solutions.



**Fully incorporate adaptive learning to program design, implementation, and closeout.** 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.



**Encourage food producers to utilize local, community-based markets and allow private sector investors to promote and prioritize the use of external global value chain markets.** When determining how to best mitigate hunger and improve nutrition, community location and the unique food insecurity context must be taken into consideration. The GFSS framework should support strengthening local community-based markets and helping community members access diverse, nutritious, and affordable locally grown foods. These activities improve nutritional access for vulnerable communities and enhance the sustainability of community food security and resilience.



**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.** Many small-share farmers have limited land access and are therefore **forced to decide** 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. As farmers opt to grow cash-crops, fewer subsistence crops are available in community-based markets, and household consumption of indigenous, nutritious crops decreases.



**Establish tracking mechanisms for sector outcomes and their related funding streams to support greater multisectoral learning and improve collaboration and program design.** To fully understand the state of food security and nutrition 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. 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 others offers opportunities to learn and adapt programming that is comprehensive in its approach supported by different sectors working towards improved food security and nutrition.



**Agriculture research and innovation need to partner with and strengthen host country research institutions and be more inclusive of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges in the U.S.** American agricultural research efforts, including those conducted at FTF Innovation Labs, have provided valuable contributions to programming. The GFSS could do more to encourage practical and inclusive research through partnerships 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. In addition to connecting host country university students to Innovation Labs, Innovation Labs within the U.S. should also be expanded. Currently, only a handful of FTF Innovation Labs have participation from faculty located at HBCUs, 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.

## Recommendations for Successful Implementation of the Global Food Security Strategy

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While re-evaluating the GFSS, the connection between overarching strategic objectives and program implementation is crucial to effectively tackling potential barriers and isolating assumptions.



**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 USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) priority countries.** Initially, FTF programs were focused in 19 countries. However, in 2017, this number was reduced to **12 countries** despite continued resourcing, and 35 countries were designated as aligned countries. The number of target countries should be re-evaluated



and increased, with thoughtful and locally-led 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. 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.



**Increase collaboration with a diverse group of domestic and international stakeholders to ensure initiatives and programs are context-specific and locally 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 and malnutrition. 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.



**Strengthen the bridge between humanitarian, development, and resilience programming and improve USG global food security layering to complement sector programs.** Food security and agriculture programs in humanitarian and conflict-affected contexts require both special analysis and consultation with those most affected. Transformative USG policies and programs should be nimble enough to reach across sectors and contexts and complement multilateral finance investments and institutions. 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. Without this coordination and a shared commitment to reaching the most vulnerable long-term solutions remain out of reach. Improved coordination across USAID bureaus and programs is critical to both mitigate hunger and malnutrition and prevent vulnerable households from slipping between a food secure and insecure status in a longer-term, more sustainable way.



**Better align and coordinate across sectors and at a programmatic level to enhance the impact of U.S. global food security programs.** 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. For FTF to increase its effectiveness and impact, the USG must prioritize a multisectoral approach to programming and partnership, improving coherence across USG agencies and related sector leads. 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.

## Programs in Action

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The following pages feature InterAction Member NGOs implementing food security and agricultural programs around the world.



## PROJECT Titukulane Resilience Food Security Activity

### ORGANIZATION

CARE

### DATES

2019 – 2024

### COUNTRY

Malawi

### DONOR

USAID

*Titukulane’s Chief of Party, Nivo Ranaivoarivro (left) handing PPE and hand washing buckets to Mango District Council Chairperson (center) and District Commissioner at Titukulane, 2020.*

Titukulane Resilience Food Security Activity supports the implementation of the National Resilience Strategy in Malawi in two districts that have been heavily impacted by climate change. The Titukulane activity was originally focused on supporting low-income, chronically vulnerable, and food-insecure households in accessing improved agriculture technology, agriculture inputs, and market access post-harvest, but during the harvest of the first maize crops, COVID-19 forced the project to adapt. In response, the Titukulane activity developed an adaptive management plan to repurpose project activities and resources to meet the immediate emergency risk management needs of the beneficiaries. At the district level, Titukulane worked with the District Civil Protection Committee (DCPC) to help design locally-influenced responses to COVID-19 implementing awareness campaigns; training of health workers in COVID-19 case management; and procurement and delivery of non-food items and WASH equipment.



## PROJECT Strengthening Resilience and Self-Reliance in Nepal

### ORGANIZATION

Save the Children

### DATES

2014 – 2020

### COUNTRY

Nepal

### DONOR

USAID, Food for Peace

*Photo credit: Save the Children.*

Save the Children and partners implemented the Sustainable Actions for Resilience and Food Security (Sabal) activity to improve the resilience and food security of approximately 160,000 households in Nepal through agriculture activities, livelihood diversification, nutrition, and disaster risk reduction. Throughout the immediate response and recovery following the 2015 earthquake, Sabal provided integrated support to strengthen local governance, market-responsive livelihoods, financial services, and social capital. By involving participating communities and key stakeholders in the design and implementation of solutions to local problems, Sabal has helped lay the foundation for improved resilience and long-term self-reliance. Findings show that over the life of the activity, Sabal has enabled 107,206 farmers to participate in community-based savings and credit plans, established 99 community-based early warning systems, and supported the implementation of 115 community disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plans. Sabal also trained 30,145 mothers with children in the first 1,000 days and reached 132,116 children under five to improve their health and nutrition.



## PROJECT USAID Growth, Enterprise, Employment & Livelihoods (GEEL)

### ORGANIZATION

RTI

### DATES

2015 – 2021

### COUNTRY

Somalia

### DONOR

USAID

*Asma Rashid, a USAID/Somalia GEEL partner, is the owner of Askar Farm in Hargeisa, Somaliland. She operates greenhouses and supplies vegetables in and around the city. Photo credit: USAID/Somalia GEEL project.*

Despite significant progress in agriculture production through the **GEEL project**, economic gains in Somalia are regularly threatened by recurrent shocks and stresses such as drought. Food insecurity and cases of malnutrition have grown due to the compounded effects of drought and higher food prices. To increase resilience to threats such as cyclical drought, GEEL works with farmers, entrepreneurs, and agro-pastoralists to introduce several layers of private sector-led solutions that help producers reduce their losses. For example, GEEL has partnered with the private sector to transform 200 new hectares for commercial fodder production to replace higher-cost feed imports during droughts, creating approximately 300 new jobs in fodder processing. GEEL also developed an innovative camel leasing model for private sector dairy companies to lease animals from pastoralists during a drought to protect commercial milk supplies and the profits of both the herders and dairy companies.



## PROJECT Self Reliant Epicenters in Africa

### ORGANIZATION

The Hunger Project

### DATES

1997 – Present

### COUNTRY

Nine countries in Africa

### DONOR

Individual philanthropy and European governments

*Photo credit: The Hunger Project of the Boulkon Epicenter in Burkina Faso.*

The Epicenter Strategy unites 5,000 to 15,000 people in a cluster of villages to create an “epicenter,” or a dynamic center where communities are mobilized for action to meet their basic needs. There are 122 epicenters (of which 55 have achieved self-reliance) serving 2 million people across Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia. The strategy builds a path to sustainable self-reliance through four phases over about eight years. Communities construct and manage their own infrastructure for primary health, adult literacy, WASH, pre-school, agricultural training, microfinance, food processing, and storage at a “one-stop” campus. Epicenters have seen a 23% decrease in child marriage, a 33% reduction in moderate to severe hunger, a 42% increase in female-owned small businesses, and a 23% decrease in poverty. Keys to self-reliance include transforming mindsets from “we can’t” to “we can,” building solidarity across villages; democratic practices; and community-led monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), ensuring equal community leadership by women and men.





## PROJECT Nobo Jatra

### ORGANIZATION

World Vision

### DATES

2015 – Present

### COUNTRY

Bangladesh

### DONOR

USAID

Lead farmer Sobita Sarder, 34 (in blue and red sari), gives a tour of her organic, climate-smart farm to other women farmers. Photo credit: Jon Warren/World Vision.

The **Nobo Jatra** project is a food security program implemented by World Vision with the goal to “improve gender equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable communities,” which includes teaching and empowering farmers with climate-smart farming techniques, sustainable production methods, and increased access to markets. Many farmers in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh have experienced an increase in cyclones, tidal waves, floods, and droughts due to climate change. Changes in climate have made it more challenging for farmers to access arable land to cultivate crops. Using a Lead Farmer method of instruction, a “lead” farmer teaches 150 pupil farmers climate-smart farming techniques. Through the use of **climate-smart farming techniques**, farmers have experienced increases in their harvest yields, and most importantly, have incorporated additional vegetables into daily diets for improved nutrition.



## PROJECT Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion (PRIME)

### ORGANIZATION

Mercy Corps

### DATES

2012 – 2019

### COUNTRY

Ethiopia (Somali, Afar, and Oromia Regions)

### DONOR

USAID

Farah Farhiyo, a member of a petty trade and livestock marketing cooperative in Gode, Somail Region, Ethiopia, brings the goats home at the end of the day, 2014. Photo credit: Kelly Lynch.

Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion (PRIME) was a USAID-led Feed the Future program designed to help pastoralists increase their resilience to economic and climate shocks by strengthening markets. Resilience may be understood as the ability to maintain or improve wellbeing in the face of unanticipated crises. The program took place in three regions of Ethiopia from 2012 to 2019, withstanding two prolonged droughts. Overall, households targeted by PRIME reported higher than average food security after the drought in comparison to non-PRIME households. PRIME-targeted households showed only a 4% decline in food security compared to a 30% decline in non-PRIME households. The program’s emphasis on improving local market systems marked a departure from traditional programming that often relies on the direct distribution of goods to needy households. By providing programs with flexible funding and focusing on a range of sectoral needs, PRIME made long-term improvements to not just market systems but also ecological and livelihoods systems. This program helped communities build capacity and rely less on coping mechanisms.



Photo credit: Georgina Goodwin.

## PROJECT Supporting Seed Systems for Development

### ORGANIZATION

Catholic Relief Services

### DATES

2018 – 2023

### COUNTRY

Global

### DONOR

USAID, FTF

The Feed the Future Global Supporting Seed Systems for Development activity (S34D) is a five-year Leader with Associates (LWA) award, funded by Feed the Future through the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) and by USAID through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). S34D was created to enhance farmers' access to a full range of seed choices and options to maximize their responsive decision-making and planning for production. Catholic Relief Services and its partners implement S34D in target trade corridors to promote resilient, nutritious, productive, and profitable seed systems. S34D seeks to improve the functioning of formal and informal seed systems and emergency, humanitarian aid, and resilience seed programming in Feed the Future target and aligned countries with economic growth, resilience, and emergency seed security programs. The project has generated a lot of research, and learning finds that flexible regulatory approaches and practices play a central role in building bridges between formal and informal seed systems, guaranteeing quality seed in the market, and encouraging market entry for high-quality traditional and farmer-preferred varieties, all of which are factors that mitigate food insecurity.



Photo credit: Morgan Arnold for Lutheran World Relief.

## PROJECT Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice in Honduras

### ORGANIZATION

Corus International  
(Lutheran World Relief)

### DATES

2013 – 2016

### COUNTRY

Western Honduras

### DONOR

USAID, FTF

The Gender in Agriculture from Policy to Practice (GAPP) project is a pilot project focusing on Gender in Agriculture in nine municipalities of the department of Lempira in western Honduras. It was funded by USAID with LWR as its partner. The objective was to test a methodology that integrates women's leadership building with training for men to increase women's access to resources for agricultural production. The project served over 2,500 women and 420 men and facilitated connections between key actors—including municipal governments, Municipal Women's Networks (RMMs), and rural credit banks—with a goal of having a gender-focused impact on policies in both public and private spheres. Network leaders, together with the Municipal Offices on Women (OMMs), helped women approach rural credit banks to gain access to credit for their projects. The Project helped to reestablish the leadership of the OMMs and took them beyond just denouncing violence to having a more active role in implementing existing gender equity and equality laws.



Find the full “NGO Recommendations and Lessons learned for the GFSS-Refresh” [here](#).

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*Cover photo by Chaideer Mahyuddin.*

## 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. Visit [InterAction.org](https://www.interaction.org).