

Global Food Security Act Reauthorization

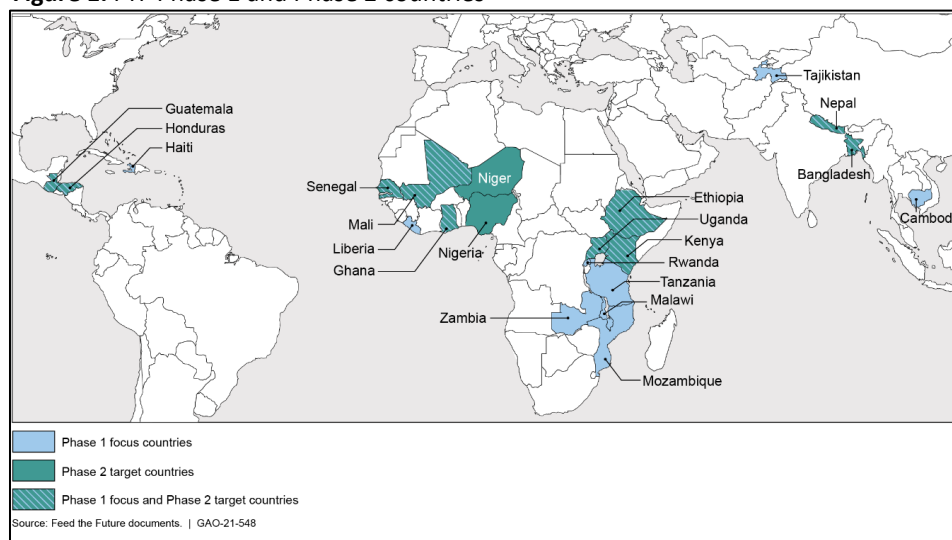
POLICY BRIEF

OVERVIEW

In response to the global food price crisis of 2007-2008, President Obama pledged to provide \$3.5 billion over three years at the G8 Summit in L’Aquila in 2009 to support global agriculture and combat food insecurity, leading to the creation of Feed the Future (FTF) [in 2010](#). FTF has since become a whole-of-government effort, codified by the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) of 2016 and led by USAID’s Bureau for Resilience and Food Security. The 2016 GFSA recognized global food security’s importance for United States (U.S.) national security and economic interests and mandated a whole-of-government approach. FTF currently coordinates with at least 11 U.S. government agencies to achieve cross-sectoral international development goals and align U.S. food and agriculture programs.

To reduce global poverty, hunger and malnutrition, FTF has three objectives: 1) inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led growth; 2) strengthened resilience among people and systems; and 3) a well-nourished population, especially among women and children. FTF has had two phases: phase 1 from 2010 to 2016 in 19 “focus countries” and phase 2, from 2017 to 2021 in 12 “target countries”¹ (**Figure 1**); the next round of target countries is expected to be released in April 2022. Since the initiative started, it is estimated to have helped millions of households live above the poverty line and free from hunger, as well as helped improve the nutritional status of millions of children.

Figure 1. FTF Phase 1 and Phase 2 countries



Source: [U.S. Government Accountability Office \(GAO\), 2021](#)

¹ “Focus” and “target” both mean countries that are main FTF recipient countries. In Phase 1, USAID selected focus countries based on country ownership potential, need and opportunity for reducing food insecurity. In Phase 2, target countries were selected based on 2016 GFSA requirements: potential for agriculture-led growth; government commitment to agricultural investment and policy reform; opportunities for partnerships and regional synergies; level of need; and resource availability.

PRESSING CHALLENGES

Since before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), hunger has been on the rise due to the increased frequency and intensity of conflict, climate variability and economic crises. The **COVID-19** pandemic exacerbated these issues, with nearly [one in three people food insecure](#) in 2020 and 320 million more people food insecure compared to 2019. The pandemic's secondary impacts on food prices, food access and income losses also led to the unaffordability of healthy diets, which is associated with higher levels of moderate or severe food insecurity. Progress towards achieving global nutrition targets also slowed, given diversion of [resources for COVID-19 interventions or lack of funding](#). Estimates of the pandemic's impact on undernutrition indicate [5 to 7 million more children may be stunted and 570,000 to 2.8 million](#) more wasted children. Poverty also increased for the [first time in 20 years](#), and income inequality remains [high and persistent, especially for women](#).

Conflict continues to be the primary driver of acute food insecurity, pushing nearly [100 million people](#) in 23 countries/territories into acute food insecurity in 2020. Conflict leads to displacement, disrupted markets and agricultural production and limited humanitarian access. Humanitarian crises can also create and worsen gender-based violence, leading to reduced agricultural productivity and increased food insecurity in women and girls. In countries with all major drivers of food insecurity – conflict, climate extremes, economic downturns and high income inequality – [hunger increased the most](#). Conflict also has repercussions on global food systems; for example, Ukraine is a key supplier of imported foodstuffs and fertilizers, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to [wheat prices rising 9 to 22% and fertilizer prices rising 13%](#). The war in Ukraine may also impact humanitarian food assistance response; the World Food Programme estimates it has to pay an estimated [\\$71 million more a month](#) for operations compared to 2019 and will have to adjust food allotments given rising food and energy costs, exacerbated by the conflict.

Extreme climatic and weather events pushed an estimated [16 million people](#) into food crises in 15 countries in 2020, while nearly [half the global population](#) is highly vulnerable to **climate change**, according to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. Vulnerability to climatic hazards is particularly high in locations with poverty, governance issues, conflict and climate-sensitive livelihoods, such as small-scale farmers, who produce [one third](#) of the world's food. Impoverished women also face [higher risks and burdens](#) from the impacts of climate change. Long-term impacts of climate change may include declines in agricultural production and higher food prices, changing patterns of agricultural pests and diseases, reduced labor productivity given increases in heat-related mortality, [reduced nutrient content](#) in key food crops given increased concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, etc. These impacts can have deleterious consequences on food systems; food security; health, including malnutrition; and livelihoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FTF continues to draw on lessons learned since its creation in 2010. Its refreshed Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS), mandated by the GFSA of 2016 and published October 2021, includes five new or elevated priority areas of emphasis and action given the rapidly shifting global context: 1) equity and inclusion; 2) climate change adaptation and mitigation; 3) countering COVID's long-term impacts; 4) working across the food system; and 5) integrating conflict mitigation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion. As Congress begins its GFSA reauthorization efforts, we urge the U.S. government to recommit to addressing the root causes of poverty, hunger and malnutrition and build on its past successes, as promised at the [UN Food Systems Summit](#) and [Nutrition for Growth Summit](#) of 2021. To meet the refreshed GFSS' goal to reduce poverty and hunger by 20 percent, and address the pressing

issues of climate change in a context of [global income inequality](#), CRS makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Strengthen investments in small-scale farmers, particularly women small-scale farmers.** FTF should strengthen support to small-scale farmers to increase their agricultural productivity by supporting access to land and inputs, as well as participation in markets. Inclusive training and capacity enhancement approaches should focus on scaling climate smart agricultural techniques, on-farm diversification of cropping and agroforestry systems. It should also address norms in extension and advisory services as well as market actors to address constraints that women farmers and youth may face in agriculture. Market system initiatives should help to strengthen the role of the local private sector and expand economic opportunities for men, women and youth in agriculture at the local level and increase income and improve nutrition outcomes.
- 2. Increase investment in natural resource management.** FTF should prioritize investments to support farmers living on and deriving livelihoods from marginal lands, looking at nature based solutions that increase agricultural yields for increasing food security and supporting nutrition and are essential for climate change adaptation, sequester carbon in soils, and preserve biodiversity. Approximately 25% of the total land area across the globe is degraded and 3.2 billion people are affected by land degradation. Given the scale of the crisis and urgency of the problem, support should be at a systems level, enhancing coordination among multiple actors – from local communities to national governments – working at different scales to develop context specific responses. CRS has successfully implemented four models for land restoration: drylands greening, watershed restoration, water smart agriculture, and multi-story agroforestry. Where these models have been deployed, impacts have been rapid and consequential for farmer income, community food security, water availability, and for reducing conflict over local natural resources and thus contributing to better governance of natural resources. For example, CRS’ Taadoud project in Sudan uses natural resource management as an entry point for building the necessary institutions for negotiating and managing natural resource issues to help prevent conflict.
- 3. Enhance transparency of FTF target and aligned country selection processes.** The 2016 GFSA requires that the GFSS establishes selection criteria for target countries, communities, regions and intended participants. The refreshed GFSS does include six criteria, but it is unclear how they will be captured or measured and what the selection process entails, as the GFSS notes that a target country may not meet all criteria. Further, neither the 2016 GFSA nor the GFSS provide insight on how “aligned” Feed the Future countries are selected or the amount of investments they receive. With increasingly high levels of acute food insecurity around the world – [45 million people in 43 countries](#) faced IPC 4 or higher levels of acute food insecurity in 2021 – there is also the opportunity to expand FTF target countries to include fragile and conflict-affected states. Poverty, hunger, malnutrition and conflict are linked – low income levels are associated with higher likelihood of conflict, while conflict can lead to hunger and malnutrition, or hunger can lead to violence. As such, there is an opportunity for FTF to reduce global poverty and help stop the cycle of conflict, hunger and malnutrition.

4. **Commit to sharing country graduation data.** In alignment with [GAO recommendations](#), annual graduation scorecard assessment data should be shared with USAID Missions and FTF partners and should also be shared with the host country government and local organizations. These data are valuable for Missions, FTF partners and host country governments to track target country progress towards graduation from FTF assistance and for evidence based decision-making on what types of assistance are appropriate to the context.
5. **Improve flexibility of and coordination between U.S. government-funded emergency and non-emergency programs to bridge the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to prevent food crises.** Increasing and compounding crises put households and communities at risk of reduced resiliency to shocks and stressors. Including crisis modifiers as part of the awarding process or cost modifications during the life of the program could help enable flexibility of FTF activities when emergencies occur. CRS' FTF Livelihoods for Resilience – Oromia (LRO) provided one-time, direct cash transfer to offset the secondary economic impacts of COVID-19 on households. The cash transfers helped households meet their basic needs, increase income and protect their household assets. However, given the shift to cash transfers, LRO was unable to complete some planned activities; as such, cost modifications or crisis modifiers should build on, not detract from, planned development activities.

The GFSA reauthorization should also encourage further sequencing, layering and integrating across emergency and development programs to help vulnerable households graduate from extreme poverty. CRS has direct experience bridging the nexus with its Joint Emergency Operation Program (JEOP), a Title II Food for Peace emergency program that is layered with the FTF LRO activity and CRS' Development Food Security Activity (DFSA). CRS enhances the reach and return on investment of these three overlapping programs by [sharing resources and creating linkages](#) within the same geographic zone to layer and sequence services that will facilitate graduation of clients from the Government of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme. From this experience, we have learned that FTF programming can and should complement and build off of emergency activities, building resilience to shocks and stressors in a global context with increasing climate variability and conflict. Expanding the next round of target countries to include some fragile and conflict-affected states (Recommendation 2) could be another step to bridging the nexus.

6. **Strengthen commitments to localization by increasing funding to local organizations and defining 'local entities.'** With Administrator Samantha Power's recent [commitments to locally led development](#), a forthcoming USAID Local Capacity Development Policy, and the USAID [New Partnerships Initiative](#), there is an opportunity for FTF to invest in strengthening local capacity and to increase funding to local organizations, including local private sector entities. The USG should also consider how procurement processes can align with these localization goals, by ensuring award sizes, proposal timelines and compliance/risk sharing approaches are reasonable for a diverse range of local actors to bid for, design, implement and evaluate FTF programming. Organizational capacity building should accompany these efforts with a focus on promoting equity within organizations and programming; for example, capturing the needs of both men and women as part of programmatic responses to take into account the entire community's needs. Tools, such as CRS' [Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument \(HOCAI\)](#), can be adapted for these purposes.

In addition, for the integrity of these efforts, there is an opportunity for the GFSA reauthorization to further define local entity with narrower and more honest governance, accountability and ownership requirements. To ensure an organization is truly majority controlled by citizens or lawful permanent residents of such country, the definition of local entity should include ‘accountable to the nation and community they serve, as demonstrated by 90% or more local board of directors or its equivalent.’

- 7. Invest in strengthening host country governance² capacities and linkages at all levels** (e.g., community, national, and regional) to align with the updated GFSS’s emphasis on empowering individuals and their communities in the design, implementation, execution, and ownership of development activities. By improving target country governance processes, FTF can help improve commitment to fighting hunger, malnutrition, and poverty while building resilience; strengthen government capacity to function in inclusive, transparent and accountable ways that are responsive a population’s priorities; strengthen public and private partnerships; and strengthen technical and institutional capacity, coordination and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning for multi-sectoral programming. For example, CRS’ Nawiri DFSA in Kenya worked with two counties’ government to assess and strengthen their local nutrition governance capacities. From these assessments, county governments improved their understanding and capacity for nutrition budget tracking and became vocal champions for multisectoral nutrition issues. Further, the 2016 GFSA calls upon enhancing local capacity and supporting and aligning with country-owned agriculture, nutrition, and food security policy and investment plans. There is additional opportunity for the GFSA reauthorization to support program alignment with country-owned National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions to combat the effects of climate change.
- 8. Increase investments in social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable households and communities** to reduce vulnerability to threats and crises, such as extreme weather events because of climate change or conflict. Possible social protection mechanisms could include cash transfers or vouchers for commodities or services, complemented by additional programming, such as graduation programs, to help participants diversify their assets, minimize negative coping strategies and support local economies. “Cash plus” programming is one approach. In CRS’ FTF Nigeria Livelihoods Project, implemented from 2013 to 2018, cash transfers were distributed to the poorest households to assist them with meeting immediate nutritional needs, recovering assets lost or sold during emergencies and providing the skills or tools necessary to engage in income-generating activities. A World Bank evaluation found at project endline, 57% of women who received cash transfers plus the bundle of FTF project activities engaged in off-farm livelihood activities (e.g., rice processing or cake making), compared with 14% of women at baseline.

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² Governance: the network of actors whose purpose is to improve outcomes (e.g., for nutrition, food security, climate-smart agriculture, etc.) through processes and mechanisms for convening, agenda setting, decision-making, implementation, and accountability. Based on nutrition governance definition by [Friel et al](#)