

Assessing the US Feed the Future Initiative: A New Approach to Food Security?

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Abstract

In the wake of the 2007-2008 commodity price spikes, G8 leaders at the 2009 L'Aquila Summit in Italy made fighting food insecurity a priority and promised to bring new resources to bear on the problem. The following year, the Obama administration launched the Feed the Future initiative and committed \$3.5 billion over three years to implement it. Feed the Future aims to “sustainably reduce global poverty and hunger” by promoting “inclusive agriculture sector growth” and improved nutrition, particularly among women and children. In its first five years, Feed the Future has clearly succeeded in giving food security and agriculture a more prominent place in US development policy. Data on results are just becoming available, however, and there is strikingly little independent analysis of the program.

While we cannot yet assess the impact on poverty alleviation or improved nutrition, we can assess how Feed the Future

performs against its stated objective of offering a new, more effective approach to food security. The integrated agriculture and nutrition approach emphasizes increased selectivity in aid allocations along with country ownership and capacity building to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative's impacts. We find the initiative has led to an increase in the share of overall US assistance for agriculture and nutrition, and that the Obama administration has increasingly concentrated this aid in selected focus countries. We also find that the initiative is doing a good job of selecting focus countries, based on its stated criteria of having need and the potential for effective partnership. Feed the Future looks weaker, however, on other key elements of aid effectiveness including transparency and country ownership. Finally, we are concerned that pressure to demonstrate results in the short term may undermine efforts to ensure they are sustainable.

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Overview

In the wake of the 2007-2008 commodity price spikes, G8 leaders at the 2009 L'Aquila Summit in Italy made fighting global food insecurity a priority and promised to bring new resources to bear on the problem. The following year, the Obama administration launched the Feed the Future initiative and committed \$3.5 billion in foreign assistance over three years for the initiative's implementation. Feed the Future aims to "sustainably reduce global poverty and hunger" by promoting "inclusive agriculture sector growth and improved nutrition" in developing countries, particularly among women and children. The administration also claimed that the initiative would be a new, more effective approach to delivering aid for food security.

We cannot yet assess the impact on poverty alleviation or improved nutrition because data on these outcomes are just becoming available. But more than five years in, we should be able to analyze whether Feed the Future's approach is likely to be more effective and sustainable than past efforts. Specifically, we explore the following four questions to analyze the initiative's performance:

- Is Feed the Future influencing the allocation of resources across countries and sectors?
- Is Feed the Future focusing its efforts in the right countries?
- Is Feed the Future making progress in applying aid effectiveness principles?
- Where can Feed the Future point to progress at this time?

Our analysis of available data points to a mixed assessment of Feed the Future's efforts. Among other things, Feed the Future emphasizes increased selectivity in aid allocations along with local ownership to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative's impacts. We find that the Obama administration has increasingly concentrated agriculture sector and nutrition aid in selected focus countries. Further, the initiative is selecting focus countries that meet the stated criteria of having significant food security needs and offering opportunities for effective partnership. Feed the Future looks weaker, however, on other key elements of aid effectiveness including transparency and country ownership. Finally, we are concerned that pressure to demonstrate results in the short term may undermine efforts to ensure any impact is sustainable.

Based on our analysis, we offer practical recommendations for Congress and the Administration to strengthen US food security efforts. As priorities, Congress should approve food security legislation to sustain attention to this important issue, and it should designate USAID as the lead so accountability for results is clear. For its part, USAID should enhance the transparency of Feed the Future investments. However, until we have more information about outcomes, the initiative should not expand to new focus countries.

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Introduction

In the poorest countries, 60-70 percent of people live in rural areas, most of them are poor, and many of them are hungry, even those who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.¹ Without sustained attention to agriculture in lower income countries, the world will be unable to achieve the first two Sustainable Development Goals of eliminating extreme poverty and ending hunger. Unfortunately, government attention and resources devoted to addressing global food security have historically tracked food prices, rising with the agricultural price spikes of the 1970s and falling alongside commodity prices in the 1980s. When food prices spiked again in 2007-2008, the leaders of the Group of 8 (G8) industrialized countries again vowed to prioritize fighting rural poverty and food insecurity. At the L'Aquila G8 summit in 2009, President Barack Obama pledged \$3.5 billion over three years in support of a \$20 billion global food security initiative.² In 2010, the Obama administration launched the Feed the Future initiative to implement this commitment.

Five years later, food prices are declining, Feed the Future is under pressure to show results, and commitment to the challenge of improving agricultural productivity and nutrition in poor countries may again be at risk. Given the importance of agriculture to pro-poor growth, we think it is important for Congress to authorize the Feed the Future initiative to guard against that risk. At the same time, it would be premature to significantly expand the program until we have a better sense of the initiative's results and more information on the outcomes of Feed the Future projects, which are just becoming available. We also are concerned that pressure to show results in the short term may undermine efforts to make them sustainable. While those substantive results are what ultimately matter, we also have concerns that Feed the Future is not realizing the full potential of the "new approach" to food security that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) purports to embrace. By analyzing what we know so far about how the administration is implementing Feed the Future, we hope to provide insights on how to make the initiative stronger and more effective going forward.

What is Feed the Future?

The Feed the Future initiative focuses on two priorities in the quest to promote food security: reducing poverty among smallholder farmers and improving the nutritional status of women and children.³ The initiative's specific goals are to reduce by an average of 20 percent in targeted areas:

- the prevalence of extreme poverty; and
- the prevalence of stunting among children under five.

¹ Figures are from the World Bank and represent low and lower middle income countries.

² For a summary of the global context surrounding the initiative's launch, see the Feed the Future guide published in 2010, available here: <http://1.usa.gov/1k5ieOo>, accessed February 22, 2016.

³ This section draws on the description of the initiative's approach included in the Feed the Future guide.

Strategy. The primary path toward the first goal is “inclusive agriculture sector growth” with investments to improve productivity, expand and strengthen market infrastructure and institutions, and increase resilience in “vulnerable rural communities.” The initiative also aims to use public resources to leverage private investments, highlighting a prominent role for public-private partnerships.⁴

As part of the approach to the second broad goal of improving nutrition, Feed the Future “aim[s] to strengthen the links between agriculture and improved nutrition outcomes” and promote “nutrition-sensitive” agriculture. In addition, the program cites gender, climate change, and natural resource management as cross-cutting priorities. Finally, the initiative places a strong emphasis on learning through rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

Institutional structure. While the initiative lacks a single lead coordinator, a deputy coordinator for development sits in the newly-created Bureau for Food Security at USAID and a deputy coordinator for diplomacy at the State Department. Feed the Future was designed as a “whole-of-government” initiative supported by 11 federal agencies with USAID in the operational lead. To promote donor coordination across countries and address funding gaps in bilateral aid, the Obama administration also led the creation of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), housed at the World Bank. This multi-donor trust fund initially raised over \$1 billion, of which \$600 million came from the United States.⁵

Targeting resources. USAID’s budget requests for Feed the Future have totaled roughly \$1 billion annually since fiscal year (FY) 2011.⁶ President Obama’s FY2016 budget request includes \$500 million directed to 19 focus countries as shown in table 1. The budget request also includes \$81 million for aligned agricultural programs in another 10 countries. The balance is for regional programs, research and development, economic resilience, markets and partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation. Some of those funds no doubt also go, directly or indirectly, to support the focus countries. Feed the Future reports only the top line numbers for these allocations, however, so we cannot determine total country figures.

The administration selected the 19 focus countries on the basis of need (hunger and rural poverty), potential for agriculture growth, recipient government commitment, and opportunity for regional collaboration through trade. In these 19 countries, the initiative targets funding to “zones of influence,” sub-national regions where Feed the Future concentrates its operations. There is limited information available on how Feed the Future

⁴ At the 2012 G8 Summit in Chicago, the Obama administration led the launch of the New Alliance to Promote Food Security and Nutrition, which provides a mechanism to pursue these activities in a coordinated fashion. Though a complement to Feed the Future, we leave analysis of the New Alliance to future research.

⁵ Information on GAFSP’s funding is here: <http://bit.ly/1NrSI5Q>, accessed February 22, 2016.

⁶ Disaggregated FY2017 budget request data for Feed the Future became available as this paper was in the process of publication. While this paper reflects FY2016 data, there is little difference between the FY2016 and FY2017 budget request for Feed the Future. Thus all the analysis and conclusions hold for FY2017.

chooses aligned program countries, but it appears that hunger and rural poverty are the primary factors driving selection, as discussed below.⁷ Of the 19 focus countries, 16 countries (indicated in bold in table 1) have also received grants totaling \$600 million from GAFSP.⁸

Table 1: Feed the Future Focus Countries and Aligned Agricultural Programs in FY2016 Budget Request (\$US millions)

Focus Countries						Aligned Agricultural Programs					
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>		<i>Asia</i>		<i>Latin America</i>		<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>		<i>Asia</i>		<i>Other</i>	
Tanzania	62	Bangladesh	50	Guatemala	18	Nigeria	25	Burma	14	Egypt	5
Ethiopia	50	Cambodia	8	Honduras	15	South Sudan	10			Yemen	4
Kenya	42	Nepal	8	Haiti	10	Sierra Leone	6			Georgia	3
Ghana	40	Tajikistan	5			Guinea	6				
Senegal	32					Zimbabwe	4				
Uganda	30					Congo, Dem Republic	4				
Rwanda	28										
Mali	25										
Mozambique	23										
Malawi	16										
Zambia	12										
Liberia	7										
TOTAL \$480.5 million						\$81 million					

Note: The aligned agricultural programs listed here reflect countries included in USAID’s FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification. Countries in bold also received GAFSP funds.

Aid effectiveness principles. The Feed the Future approach aims to follow the Rome principles for sustainable food security, endorsed at the 2009 World Summit on Food Security, which include:

- country ownership;
- strong coordination among national, regional and global stakeholders;
- commitment to a comprehensive approach that promotes inclusive agricultural-led growth and improved nutrition;
- collaboration with multilateral institutions; and
- sustained and accountable delivery of investments.

⁷ A blog from July 2015 briefly discussing the aligned agricultural programs is here: <http://1.usa.gov/1OXex8x>, accessed February 22, 2016.

⁸ The GAFSP Portfolio Implementation Update from May 2015 is available here: <http://bit.ly/1Y8aRTM>, accessed February 22, 2016.

These principles are, in turn, rooted in the global effort to promote aid effectiveness as reflected in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.⁹

Why Assess Feed the Future Now?

In its first five years, Feed the Future has clearly succeeded in giving food security and agriculture a more prominent place in US development policy.¹⁰ Along with the Power Africa initiative, the administration views Feed the Future as a critical part of President Obama's legacy and the initiative enjoys substantial support in Congress and the development community. In May 2015, the President's Global Development Council called for an expansion of Feed the Future into "at least three additional countries that are food insecure and experiencing high rates of deforestation."¹¹ Bipartisan legislation introduced in both the House and Senate would codify Feed the Future efforts in law.¹²

While the program has considerable support among key constituencies, information on the impacts of Feed the Future are just becoming available, and there is strikingly little independent analysis of the initiative.¹³ In part, this may be due to the challenge of tracking expenditures associated with the initiative, which we confronted as well. There are Feed the Future annual reports that provide data on selected indicators to track progress in implementing the initiative across all the focus countries. There are also stories about projects in particular countries. But the implementing agencies do not code the detailed project level data to identify activities associated with Feed the Future. Thus, it is impossible to know exactly where the money is going.¹⁴ And the limited information on impacts that Feed the Future provides in the 2015 progress report lacks targets, counterfactuals, or other information to assess Feed the Future's role.

Even without the ability yet to assess the initiative's impact on poverty alleviation and improved nutrition, it seems worthwhile to assess how Feed the Future performs against its

⁹ More information on the aid effectiveness agenda is here: <http://bit.ly/1lyF9in> and here: <http://bit.ly/21V4yHM>, accessed February 22, 2016.

¹⁰ See the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) issued in 2014 at: <http://bit.ly/1NKIWru>, accessed February 22, 2016.

¹¹ President's Global Development Council, 2015, "Global Development Council Report: Modernizing Development," Washington, DC: USAID, p. 4.

¹² The House bill (HR 1567) is here: <http://1.usa.gov/1OC0rXF> and the Senate bill (S 1252) is here: <http://1.usa.gov/1NKJ0HN>.

¹³ A few notable exceptions are: Charles Hanrahan, 2015, "Global Food Security by the Numbers," Chicago, IL: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Connie Veillette, 2015, "Hunger and Whole of Government," Washington, DC: The Lugar Center; Eric Munoz and Emmanuel Tumusiime, 2015, "Promise and Potential: Delivering Inclusive, Sustainable Development for Small-Scale Food Producers through the Feed the Future Initiative," Washington, DC: Oxfam America; and Marian L. Lawson, Randy Schnepf, and Nicolas Cook, 2016, "The Obama Administration's Feed the Future Initiative," Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

¹⁴ Hanrahan op cit., emphasizes the difficulties in assessing Feed the Future due to opaque budget reporting.

stated objective of offering a new approach to food security. Specifically, we explore the following four questions to analyze the initiative's performance:

- Is Feed the Future influencing the allocation of resources across countries and sectors?
- Is Feed the Future focusing its efforts in the right countries?
- Is Feed the Future making progress in applying aid effectiveness principles?
- Where can Feed the Future point to progress at this time?

Before turning to these operational questions, it is useful to examine how agriculture and food security fit within the broader context of development policy. Readers already familiar with these issues might wish to jump right into the analysis of Feed the Future in the subsequent section.

Why Focus on Agriculture and Food Security as Development Priorities?

While growth is the surest way to sustainably alleviate poverty, the typical development path of moving people from low-productivity agriculture to higher productivity manufacturing and services takes time. In the interim, measures to promote the agriculture sector can be a potent anti-poverty tool. The World Bank's 2008 World Development Report presents extensive research showing that growth in the agriculture sector is twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors.¹⁵ Peter Timmer provides extensive analysis of how investments in agricultural development and in linking rural and urban markets can make the growth process more pro-poor.¹⁶ Alan Gelb and Anna Diofasi find suggestive evidence that low agricultural productivity could be one factor making Africa relatively more expensive and therefore less competitive in labor-intensive manufacturing, a potential impediment to economic growth.¹⁷ Food insecurity is a byproduct of poverty, including in rural areas where subsistence farmers often have to buy food to supplement their meager harvests.

As a result, reducing rural poverty and increasing food security are important priorities for the international development community, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals. Addressing these challenges at the global level demands action in a range of trade, investment, and other policy areas briefly summarized in annex 1. At the country level, the most sustainable way to improve food security is to raise people out of poverty. The Feed

¹⁵ World Bank, 2008, "World Development Report: Agriculture for Development," Washington, DC, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ Peter Timmer, 2014, "Food Security and Scarcity: Why Ending Hunger Is So Hard," Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press and Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

¹⁷ Alan Gelb and Anna Diofasi, 2015, "What Determines Purchasing Power Parity Exchange Rates?" Working Paper No. 416, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

the Future initiative seeks to do this by raising the productivity of smallholder farmers, who face a range of challenges. Markets for purchasing inputs as well as those for selling outputs often do not work well. Improved seed varieties and other inputs that could increase yields are frequently unaffordable, or simply unavailable, while credit and other financial services are unavailable. Moreover, roads and infrastructure required to get crops to market may be inadequate, making on-farm investments to improve productivity unprofitable.

Unfortunately, the pressure to show immediate results can encourage pursuit of agricultural investments unlikely to be sustained. For example, a common response to low productivity is to subsidize or facilitate access to improved inputs. This is an attractive option because it can deliver a quick payoff, if corruption or political interference do not distort programs. Over time, however, if the subsidies become too expensive and are eliminated or reduced, fertilizer use and yields often fall. A number of studies find limited input use by smallholder producers in certain parts of the world is the rational economic choice. For example, World Bank research in Nigeria finds that where fertilizer use is low, it is often because applying more fertilizer would not be profitable given generally low yield responses and high transportation costs.¹⁸

Making productivity-enhancing interventions that are sustainable thus requires steps to ensure that markets function well enough to make such investments profitable. As Timmer notes, “Markets, for all of their problems and failures, are at the core of solving the problem of hunger.”¹⁹ The biggest challenges for Feed the Future, then, are to identify key constraints to agricultural sector growth in reform-minded countries and then to sequence and target investments to sustainably overcome them.

Finally, improved nutrition is the second overarching goal of Feed the Future. Raising the incomes of the poor will improve their access to food but will not necessarily improve the quality of the food they consume. Thus a range of advocacy organizations and other stakeholders pushed the Obama administration and other donors to make nutrition a priority and incorporate nutrition goals in the Feed the Future initiative.²⁰ In addition to specific investments targeting improved nutrition through education, training, and micronutrient supplementation, advocates encouraged the administration to make investments in the agriculture sector more “nutrition-sensitive.”

¹⁸ Liverpool-Tasie, L.S.O, B. T. Omonona, A. Sanou and W. Ogunleye, 2015, “Is Increasing Inorganic Fertilizer Use in Sub-Saharan Africa a Profitable Proposition? Evidence from Nigeria,” Policy Research Working Paper No, 7021, Washington, DC: World Bank.

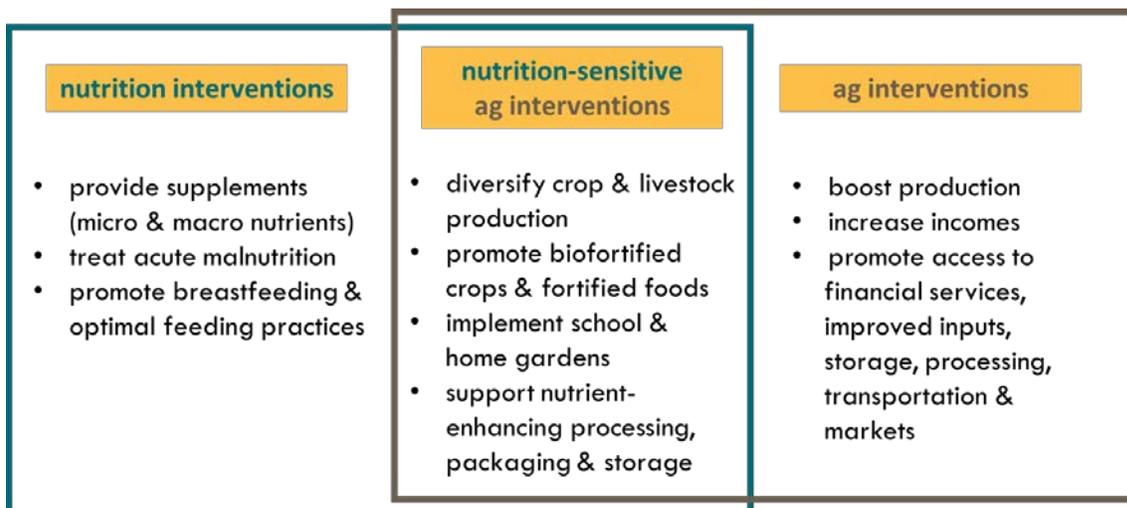
¹⁹ Peter Timmer, 2015, “Food Security Post-2015: What Countries Need to Do So That Regional Collaboration Can Be Effective,” CGD Essay, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

²⁰ Patrick Webb, 2013, “Impact Pathways from Agricultural Research to Improved Nutrition and Health: Literature Analysis and Research Priorities,” Rome, Italy: FAO and Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

We could not agree more that improved nutrition among women and young children is an important development objective, and we welcome Feed the Future’s sharp increase in resources for nutrition activities. But we fear that too much focus on nutrition-sensitive agricultural investments could endanger the necessary though not sufficient goal of raising incomes, or produce results that are not sustainable over time. Figure 1 is not intended to be comprehensive but to illustrate some examples of activities where there could be overlap between agricultural and nutrition investments. As a brief prepared for Feed the Future points out, avoiding harms from agricultural production, such as polluted water, can also be an important link with nutrition.

Some of the activities highlighted in figure 1 create the possibility of tradeoffs, however.²¹ For example, the promotion of home gardens or bio-fortification of staple crops could involve increased costs for farmers or divert scarce resources, including labor. Many studies to date on the potential links between agriculture and nutrition have produced relatively weak evidence, something that Feed the Future’s research agenda can help address (box 1). But Feed the Future planners should take care to ensure that nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions are not at the expense of raising household incomes.

Figure 1: Examples of Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Interventions



Is Feed the Future Influencing Aid Allocation?

Increased foreign assistance for agriculture and food security began under President George W. Bush, as food prices started rising rapidly in 2007-2008. After a pause during the period in which the global recession depressed commodity prices, US commitments for agriculture

²¹ Anna Herforth and Jody Harris, 2014, Understanding and Applying Primary Pathways and Principles, Brief #1, Improving Nutrition through Agriculture Technical Brief Series, Arlington, VA: USAID/Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) Project.

and nutrition in developing countries rose sharply again in 2010, the first year of the Feed the Future initiative. But then total US commitments for the agriculture sector and basic nutrition plateaued (excluding the volatile flows to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq), as shown in figure 2. In these years, aid to agriculture actually fell back to 2008-2009 levels while nutrition funding increased. As Larry Nowels explains, the administration was trying to increase resources at a time when the overall federal budget was under extreme pressure.²² In that context, the Obama administration was relatively successful in protecting Feed the Future from the budget axe.

It is difficult to precisely track Feed the Future spending, however, because it is not coded as such in the detailed reporting on US aid flows. The figures we report here are from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Creditor Reporting System, and they reflect commitments of US assistance to the agricultural sector and basic nutrition.²³ The closest we can come to approximating the country-specific portion of the Feed the Future budget is to attribute to the initiative all of the aid in these two sectors that goes to the focus countries. Table 1 shows the allocation of funds across the focus countries, as well as the aligned countries, from the administration's FY2016 budget request for Feed the Future.

Since Feed the Future specifically targets its activities to "zones of influence" within countries, our estimates are likely to be high. From conversations with USAID staff in the Bureau for Food Security, we are reasonably confident that most of the agriculture sector aid in focus countries is part of Feed the Future. By contrast, we are probably overstating the initiative's role by including all aid reported in the basic nutrition category, even in focus countries. USAID reports the other half of the Feed the Future budget only for broad, functional categories, and we have no way of tracking that funding in more detail.

Allocation of Feed the Future Aid across Countries

Overall, the share of total US aid going to the agricultural sector and basic nutrition (not including most food aid) increased from under 3 percent prior to the 2007-2008 price spikes to over 5 percent during and after the food price spikes (figure 2). Moreover, the Obama administration made considerable progress in prioritizing countries by shifting funds within agriculture towards Feed the Future focus countries. The share of total US aid for agriculture and basic nutrition allocated to the 19 focus countries increased sharply and now comprises roughly half of total US assistance in these sectors, as shown in figure 3.²⁴ As of 2013 in

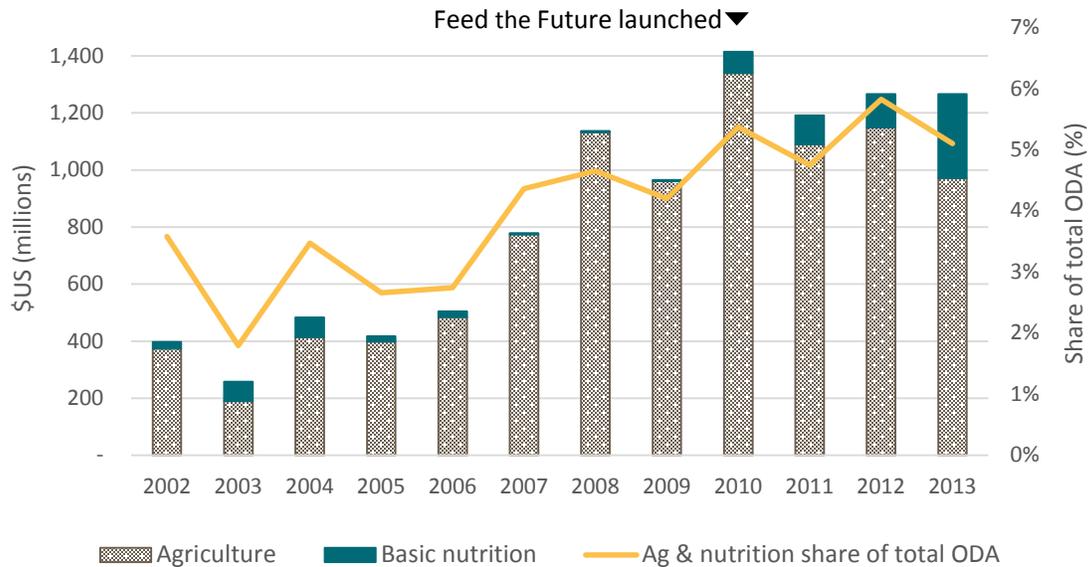
²² Larry Nowels, 2011, "Feed the Future: Navigating Through the U.S. Budget Tsunami," Global Agricultural and Development Initiative Issue Brief Series, Chicago, IL: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

²³ While we generally exclude food aid, the basic nutrition category includes McGovern-Dole food aid in support of school lunch programs.

²⁴ We do not include the aligned agricultural programs in the figures because the reference to these programs first appeared in FY2013 and the list changes from year to year, so it is difficult to consistently track trends in aid to these countries.

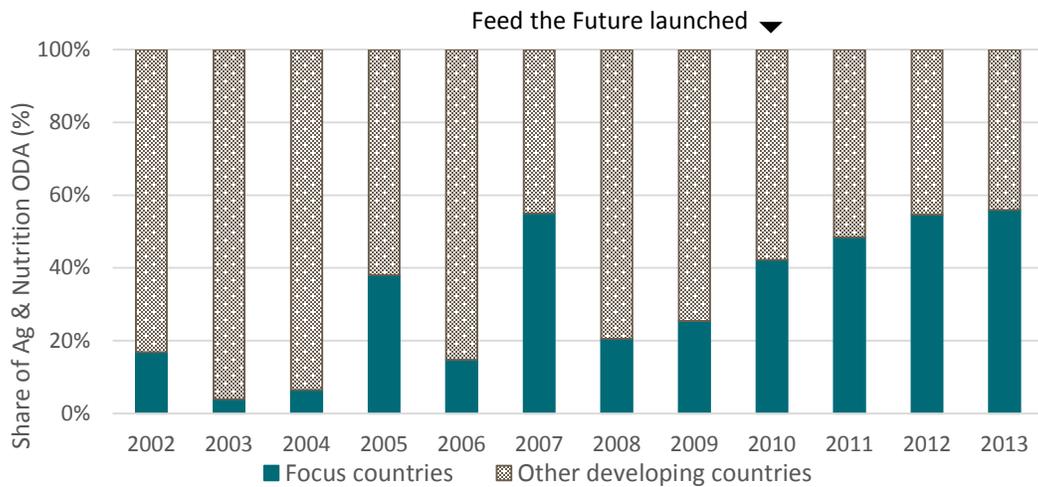
these 19 focus countries, the United States accounted for 40 percent of total foreign assistance for agriculture and basic nutrition from all Development Assistance Committee donors.

Figure 2: Total US ODA to Agriculture and Basic Nutrition to all Countries, 2002-2013



Note: Data represent commitments. Figure excludes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.
Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

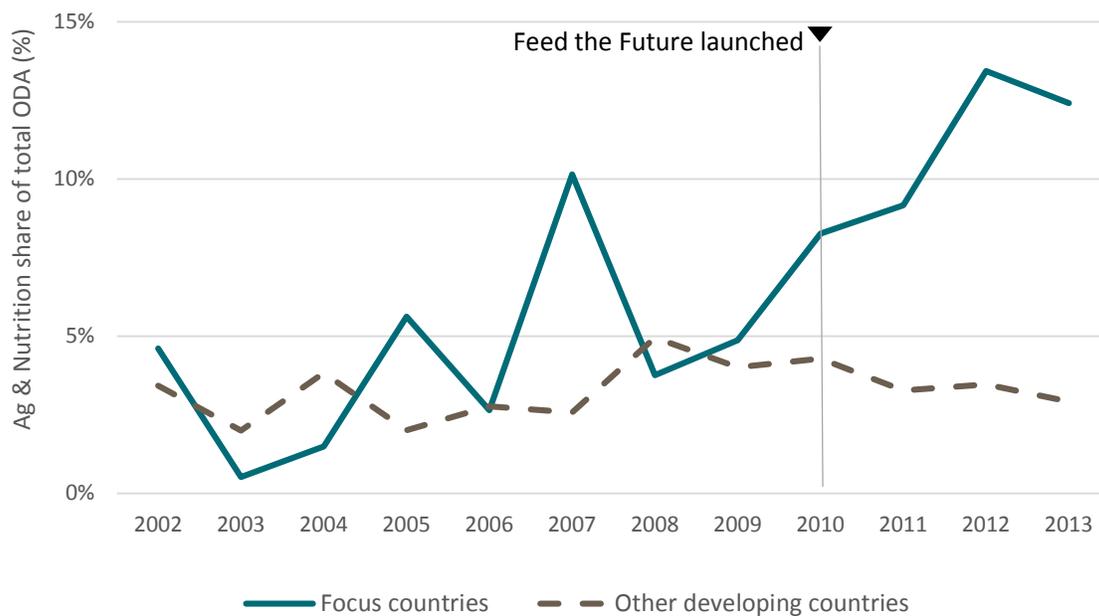
Figure 3: Allocation of Agriculture and Nutrition ODA by Country Group, 2002-2013



Note: Data represent commitments. Figure excludes all emergency and nonemergency food aid, as well as food aid and agriculture and nutrition assistance to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. The spike in 2007 is due to volatility in commitments to other countries.
Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

As depicted in figure 4, the share of overall sector-allocable aid directed to agriculture and nutrition in the focus countries also increased sharply. By contrast, the average share of aid for agriculture and basic nutrition to other developing countries declined slightly after 2008. Thus, the administration has been successful in targeting US assistance in these sectors to selected focus countries. That makes the selection process crucial, as we discuss below.

Figure 4: Agriculture and Nutrition as a Share of Total US ODA by Country Group, 2002-2013



Note: Data represent commitments. Figure excludes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.
Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

Allocation of Feed the Future Aid across Functions

As shown in table 2, the FY2016 budget request includes roughly \$500 million for non-country specific activities, in addition to nearly \$600 million requested for specific countries. Some of those funds no doubt also go, directly or indirectly, to support the focus countries or the aligned program countries. Feed the Future reports only the top line numbers for those allocations, however, so we cannot know total country-level allocations.

With an allocation of nearly \$150 million, the largest single budget line item is research and development for developing country agriculture, which is notable given the underinvestment

in this area.²⁵ As part of the research agenda, USAID created 24 “innovation labs” that bring together researchers from international institutions and partner countries under the leadership of US universities. Among other things, these labs are developing new technologies and methods to combat pests and livestock diseases, make crops more resilient in the face of climate change, and help farmers sustainably increase productivity.²⁶

The administration also requests around \$100 million each for nutrition (from the Global Health account); regional programs, such as support for harmonizing regulatory standards and practices; and economic resilience, including to help non-focus countries reduce their dependence on US food aid.²⁷ The request also includes \$42 million for “markets, partnerships, and innovation” to support public-private partnerships and \$18 million for monitoring and evaluation.²⁸ It is impossible to assess these functional activities, however, because no more detailed data are available.

Table 2: Feed the Future Allocations by Function, FY2016 Budget Request (\$US millions)

Focus countries	480.5
Aligned agricultural programs	81.3
Nutrition	101
Regional programs	96.8
Research and development	146.4
Economic resilience	109
Monitoring and evaluation	18
Strategic partners	4
Markets, partnerships, and innovation	42
TOTAL	\$ 1,079 million

Source: FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification.

²⁵ Public agricultural spending on research and development in low and middle income countries in 2008 was around 0.5 percent of GDP versus 3 percent in high income countries; see the ASTI Global Assessment of Agricultural R&D Spending at <http://bit.ly/1J06hju>, accessed February 22, 2016.

²⁶ A factsheet on the innovation labs published in October 2015 is here: <http://1.usa.gov/1meXwNC>, accessed December 18, 2015.

²⁷ These figures are drawn from the FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification - Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

²⁸ While this figure is shy of the 3 percent of program dollars called for by USAID’s overall evaluation strategy, sources at the Bureau of Food Security tell us that far more comes from mission budgets. Bureau personnel estimate that the total for monitoring and evaluation since the initiative began likely exceeds the 3 percent threshold.

Related Food Security Funding and the Whole of Government Approach

Feed the Future purports to be a whole of government initiative with contributions from ten government departments or agencies, in addition to USAID. Overall, it is hard to know what this means or whether this effort goes beyond getting agencies to simply identify activities and funding that are related to agriculture or nutrition in focus countries, with little or no coordination. With two deputies and no overall coordinator, it is not clear who is responsible for coordinating, or which agency is accountable for the initiative's performance. USAID might have this role technically, but it does not have the clout to sway a large, domestically-focused department like the US Department of Agriculture (USDA); and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) operates under its own rules.²⁹

The 2015 Feed the Future progress report identifies around \$1 billion in “related food security funding” from Treasury (in its role as interlocutor with the multi-donor GAFSP trust fund at the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development), MCC, USDA, Peace Corps, and the US African Development Foundation. The report also lists the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the US Trade Representative, the Departments of State and Commerce, and the US Geological Survey as contributing to the initiative, but without specifying any budget allocation for their contributions.

After the dedicated Feed the Future budget, MCC funding was the next largest source of related funding in fiscal years 2013 and 2014 and its potential contributions in support of agricultural development are important. MCC compacts often finance rural roads, irrigation systems, or other infrastructure that improve the functioning of markets and contribute to agricultural productivity. The 2015 progress report points to an irrigation project in Senegal, rural roads in the Philippines, and a community-based health and nutrition project in Indonesia as examples of MCC's contribution to supporting Feed the Future. In Feed the Future focus countries that have received an MCC compact, 33 percent of total compact investments have been directed toward agriculture.³⁰ By comparison, when all MCC countries and compacts are considered, 18 percent of funding is devoted to agricultural investments, perhaps indicating that Feed the Future investments are relatively well-aligned with country priorities.³¹

USDA is an important partner because of its role in capacity-building, training, and agricultural research and development – separate from the \$150 million research strategy coordinated by USAID with direct Feed the Future funding. USDA also collects and disseminates data on agricultural markets and trade, and supports extension and other

²⁹ Veillette op cit. concludes that the potential for Feed the Future to harness resources and expertise across multiple government agencies remains “largely untapped.”

³⁰ This figure is based on the authors' calculations for MCC compact investments in Tanzania, Senegal, Mali, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Honduras, and Ghana (Compact I and II).

³¹ Sarah Rose and Frank Wiebe, 2014, “An Overview of the Millennium Challenge Corporation,” MCC Monitor Analysis, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, p.6.

services. It is in a somewhat different position, however, since international efforts comprise a relatively small share of the Department's programming. Moreover, the needs of domestic agriculture are of primary interest for USDA's core constituencies in the private sector and in Congress. Moreover, the bulk of the financial contribution from USDA that appears in the 2015 progress report is traditional, in-kind food aid. In recent years, USDA has spent around \$300 million on the Food for Progress and the McGovern-Dole school feeding programs.

In addition to USDA's role in nonemergency food aid, USAID includes another roughly \$300 million in nonemergency food aid for which it is responsible under Food for Peace Title II. Including total expenditures for USDA and USAID food aid programs in the tally of food security related funding is debatable, however. These programs often involve the distribution or sale of donated food from the United States in developing countries. Thus the funds reported as supporting food security are actually the costs of procuring, processing, and shipping US commodities to developing countries. While there are no doubt good projects supported by this funding, the amount that finally makes it to the poor is a fraction of the \$600 million reported by Feed the Future.³² To their credit, the Obama administration and members of Congress have repeatedly, if so far unsuccessfully, tried to reform food aid to make it more flexible and efficient. Still, including the full cost of unreformed food aid as a part of government efforts to promote food security through agricultural development seems inconsistent at best.³³

Is Feed the Future Targeting the Right Countries?

As we have shown, Feed the Future led to a modest increase in US aid commitments for the agriculture sector and nutrition, and a more significant reorientation of that assistance towards focus countries. That selectivity should be a key factor in the initiative's success – if it is selecting the right countries. Feed the Future has broad criteria for selecting its focus countries, but there is no public list of specific indicators used to operationalize those criteria. Nor is there a formal selection process as with the MCC's eligibility test, which we view as the right decision to ensure important flexibility for Feed the Future. The FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification also lists several criteria that are somewhat more specific:

³² For an overview see Kimberly Ann Elliott and William McKitterick, 2014, "Food Aid for the 21st Century: Saving More Money, Time, and Lives," CGD Brief, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

³³ We think it would be logical to combine authorizing legislation for Feed the Future with legislation to reform food aid, as some in Congress favor. We are well aware, however, of the stiff opposition to food aid reform from farm groups and the maritime industry, which benefits from cargo preference requirements (see Elliott and McKitterick op cit.).

- prevalence of chronic hunger and poverty in rural communities;
- potential for rapid and sustainable agricultural-led growth;
- host government commitment to country investment plans; and
- opportunities for regional synergies through trade.³⁴

For our analysis, we focused on low and lower middle income countries as the universe of potential focus countries (see annex 2). The World Bank has recent data on per capita income for all 71 of these countries and estimates of rural poverty for all but seven. The Global Hunger Index, which combines data on the prevalence of undernourishment, underweight children, and mortality in children younger than five, is available for all but seven of these countries (different from those missing rural poverty data).

When it comes to growth potential and host government commitment, the 2010 Feed the Future guide mentions political stability and the quality of governance as indicators of opportunities for partnership. We use measures of political stability and regulatory quality from the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) as proxies. It is not clear what indicators policymakers might have used to assess the agricultural growth potential in candidate countries, so we have not attempted to operationalize this criterion. Nor do USAID and its partners explain how they identify opportunities for regional synergies, but a number of countries clustered in southeastern Africa that have been working on regional integration are included in the program.³⁵ Finally, in addition to country investment plans, the Feed the Future guide notes the commitment of a country’s own resources as important for the sustainability of US investments. Data are available on government spending on agriculture as a share of total government spending for most of the countries in our analysis. We also include an indicator for allocation and management of resources for rural development from the new Brookings Institution project, Ending Rural Hunger.

As shown in table 3, the focus countries are poorer on average than other countries in the sample and they are more vulnerable to food insecurity according to the Global Hunger Index.³⁶ The countries with aligned agricultural programs are less poor overall but are more likely to have above average levels of rural poverty. There is little difference in the measure of political stability between focus countries and others, though the aligned countries are far less stable. Importantly, we think, focus countries tend to have higher regulatory quality. Focus countries also devote a higher share of government expenditures to agriculture, and they score higher on allocating and managing resources for rural development.

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, 2015, “Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs – Fiscal Year 2016,” Washington, DC, p. 16; USAID, 2010, “Feed the Future Guide,” Washington, DC; the broader criteria are described on Feed the Future’s website at: <http://1.usa.gov/1bcqXCC>, accessed December 18, 2015.

³⁵ See the map on pp. 19-20 of the 2014 Feed the Future progress report.

³⁶ Annex 2 shows all available information for the 71 countries in our sample.

Table 2: Possible Indicators for Feed the Future Country Selection

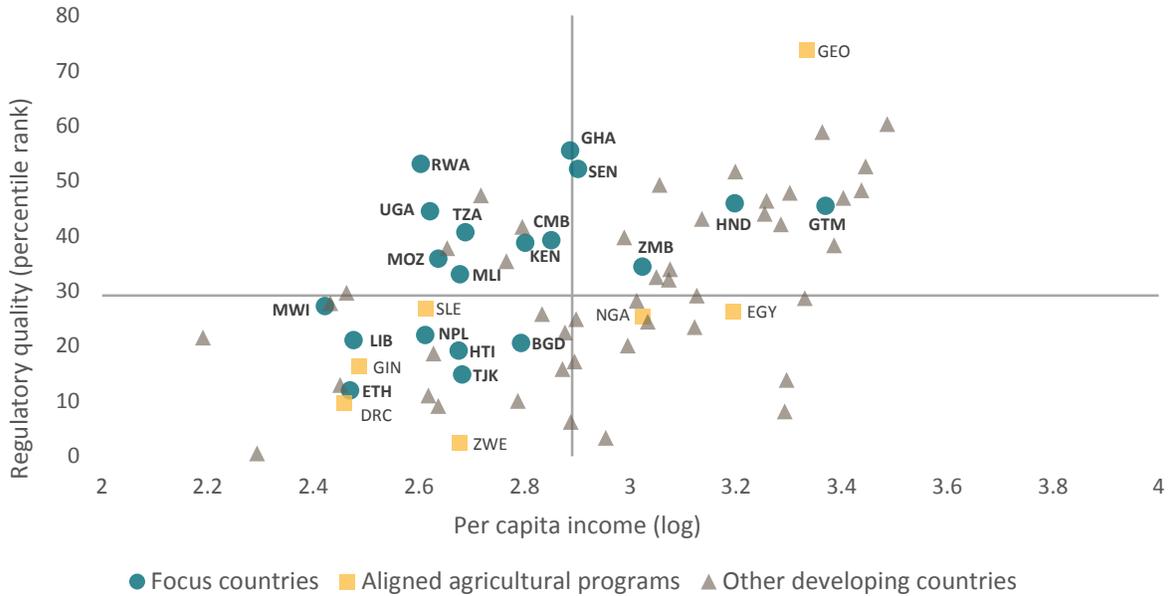
Indicator	Median value for LICs & LMICs*	Share of countries above the median (of total with data)		
		Focus countries	Aligned agricultural programs	Other countries
Per capita income 2013	\$770	21%	43%	64%
Rural poverty rate 2010-2014	50%	47%	71%	47%
Global Hunger Index** 2009-2013 average	16	63%	33%	43%
Political stability 2013 percentile rank	28	53%	29%	51%
Regulatory quality 2013 percentile rank	29	63%	14%	49%
Agriculture as a share of total spending – Most recent 3 year average	4%	67%	43%	43%
Allocation and management of resources for rural development*** 3 year score (1-6)	3.7	68%	43%	42%

Note: See annex 2 for the notes and sources.

Overall, these indicators show that Feed the Future is generally doing well at focusing on countries that are both in need and offer relatively better opportunities for partnership. Figure 5 shows a scatter plot of all low and lower middle income countries indicating how they compare on per capita income (in logs) and regulatory quality.³⁷ The lines represent the medians for each variable. Overall, the plot shows the expected positive relationship between per capita income and regulatory quality, with most countries falling in the upper right and lower left quadrants. Notably, however, more of the Feed the Future focus countries fall in the upper left quadrant, indicating countries with better than average regulatory quality, given their level of income. As shown in figure 6, higher amounts of US agricultural aid (on a per capita basis) also tend to go to the countries in the upper left quadrant.

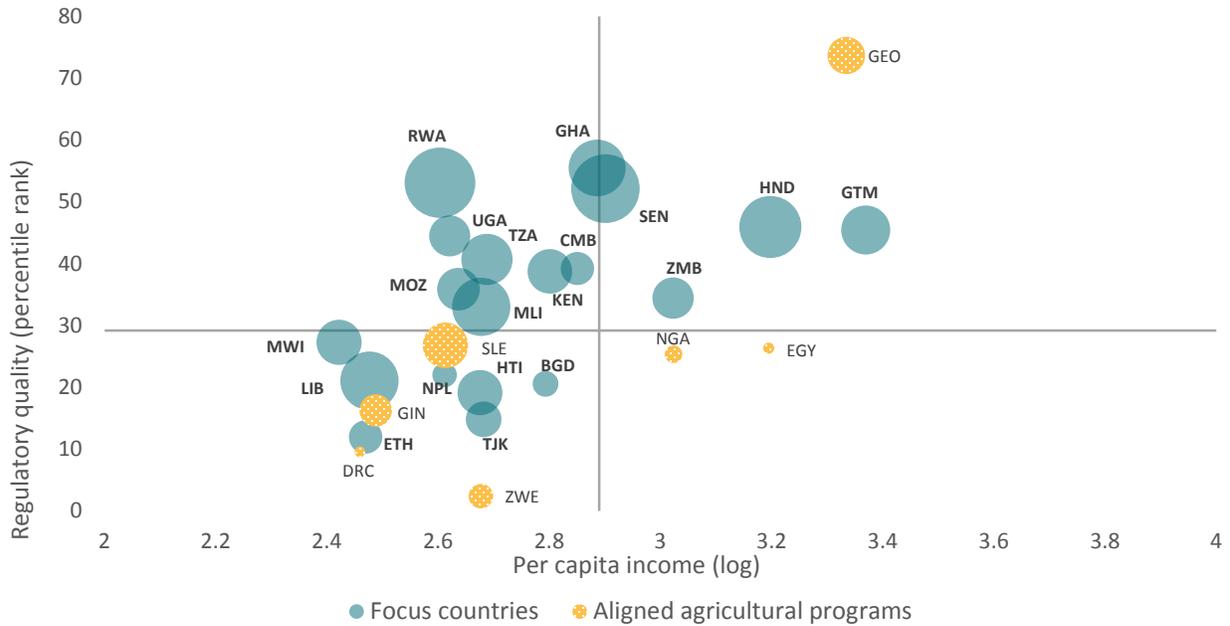
³⁷ This indicator is from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, which defines regulatory quality as capturing "perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development." This seemed to us to be the most relevant governance indicator for our purposes.

Figure 5: Per Capita Income versus Regulatory Quality by Country Group



Note: Countries excluded for lack of data, conflict or sanctions: North Korea, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen; as well as small island states.
Sources: See annex 2.

Figure 6: Per Capita Income versus Regulatory Quality Proportional to the FY2016 Budget Request for Focus Countries and Aligned Agricultural Program Countries



Note: Bubble size is relative to the FY2016 budget request for agriculture programs per capita for each recipient country.
Sources: See annex 2.

Is Feed the Future Living Up to Aid Effectiveness Principles?

The Obama administration hails the Feed the Future initiative as embodying a new approach to global hunger and food security. As part of the L'Aquila pledge, the United States and other donors promised to act consistently with the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness and the Rome principles, which emphasize country ownership, donor coordination, multilateral approaches, and sustained and substantial commitments. Despite this rhetorical commitment, several measures of aid quality suggest that the United States is not doing much better with Feed the Future than with its overall ODA portfolio.

In a 2013 assessment of agricultural aid quality, the United States fell in the bottom quintile.³⁸ It did reasonably well on measures of transparency and learning, but quite poorly on measures of efficiency—partly because relatively more US aid remains tied than in many other countries. In that analysis, US aid also performed poorly on measures of reducing the burden in recipient countries and fostering institutions in those countries. We find that Feed the Future is still underperforming on aid quality indicators in similar areas.

With respect to country ownership, the picture is mixed. There is evidence that the administration is doing relatively well in aligning its strategies with those of recipient countries, but less well in delivering aid in ways that strengthen local capacity. Feed the Future bases its multi-year investment strategies on country investment plans. And the initiative underscored the importance of strong country plans when it dropped Nicaragua as a focus country in 2012.³⁹

Yet, Feed the Future, like US foreign assistance in general, channels very little assistance through recipient governments (table 4). Recognizing that there are challenges involved in channeling aid this way, and that it is not always appropriate to do so, it is nevertheless striking that just 1 percent of aid in the focus countries is channeled through recipient governments. An Oxfam America analysis of six country case studies concludes similarly that the initiative is doing reasonably well at aligning its activities with recipient government priorities but that it is missing opportunities to deliver aid in ways that further strengthen country ownership and build local capacity.⁴⁰

³⁸ Edward Collins and Kimberly Elliott, 2013, "Revisiting the Quality of Agricultural Official Development Assistance," CGD Brief, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

³⁹ USAID, 2012, "Feed the Future Progress Report: 2012," Washington, DC, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Oxfam America, 2015, *op cit.*, pp. 22-25.

Table 3: How the United States Delivers Feed the Future Aid, FY2013

US commitments, 2013 \$US (millions)	All developing countries	Focus countries	Other developing countries
Total ODA	28,248	5,750	22,498
Channeled through recipient governments	1,685	62	1,623
Share	6%	1%	7%
Total Ag & Nutrition ODA	1,440	708	732
Channeled through recipient governments	39	4	35
Share	3%	1%	5%
Channeled through INGOs	23	17	20
Share (%)	2%	2%	3%
Channeled through multilateral organizations	162	112	83
Share	11%	16%	11%
Amount tied	539	269	270
Share	37%	38%	37%

Note: All US commitments are for 2013, as reported in the OECD Creditor Reporting System; International NGOs (INGOs) and multilateral organizations as defined in the OECD Creditor Reporting System.

Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

The Obama administration put forth USAID Forward reforms, in part, to address this gap and partner directly with more local organizations. Evidence points to relatively more progress in channeling funds through local organizations and institutions, including for agriculture and nutrition, in focus countries. In FY2014, USAID obligated a quarter of the Agency's locally-directed funding to programming in Feed the Future countries, slightly more than those countries' share of total US ODA (see table 5).⁴¹ When only agriculture and nutrition aid are considered, USAID spent roughly half of all program funds to local entities in focus countries, a total of 6 percent of this aid. Thus, the focus countries are receiving an outsized share of local funding to civil society and private sector organizations for agriculture and nutrition efforts. Still, the overall amounts remain relatively small, though some of the contracts with US-based implementing partners no doubt involve subcontracting with local partners on the ground in focus countries. We have no way of knowing, however, how much

⁴¹ 'Locally-directed funding' denotes all USAID Mission-level program obligations directed to a local entity including partner governments, local civil society and non-governmental organizations, and local private sector actors.

funding ultimately goes through local organizations as this subcontracting data is not systematically collected and made publicly available.

Table 4: USAID Spending on Agriculture and Nutrition to Local Entities, FY2014

	All developing countries	Focus countries	Other developing countries
Total USAID aid to all local entities	\$1,382,857,434	\$320,987,392	\$1,061,870,042
Share		23%	77%
Ag-Nut USAID aid to all local entities	\$86,949,178	\$42,642,467	\$44,306,712
Share		49%	51%
Ag-Nut USAID aid to recipient gov'ts	\$33,342,720	\$4,341,627	\$29,001,093
Share		13%	87%
Ag-Nut USAID aid to local civil society	\$45,728,715	\$32,774,289	\$12,954,426
Share		72%	28%
Ag-Nut USAID aid to local private sector	\$7,877,743	\$5,526,551	\$2,351,192
Share		70%	30%

Note: The data presented on aid to recipient governments in this table are from 2014, figures in table 4 are from 2013.

Source: USAID Forward Data, 2014.

Part of the USAID Forward procurement reform was to untie most contracts as of 2012, meaning they would no longer be restricted to US-based bidders.⁴² As of 2013, however, the most recent available data from the OECD Creditor Reporting System showed that US agencies were still reporting that more than a third of agricultural and nutrition aid was tied, compared to around one-fifth of all US aid.⁴³ And agricultural and nutrition aid to focus countries was just as likely to be tied as aid to non-focus countries. Note that we have generally excluded traditional food aid from the data in table 4, so that does not explain these results.⁴⁴ The data is from 2013, however, just one year after the procurement reform

⁴² "USAID now free to buy goods from companies in poor countries," *The Guardian*, February 6, 2012.

⁴³ Calculated from data in the OECD Creditor Reporting System.

⁴⁴ The exception is a small amount of McGovern-Dole aid for school lunch programs that is reported in the Basic Nutrition category.

was announced. The figures may be lower today, but, unfortunately, more recent data were not available at the time of writing.⁴⁵

Finally, the Feed the Future initiative can claim progress in using multilateral channels, though the future of those efforts remains uncertain. Overall, we find that US agriculture and nutrition aid in Feed the Future focus countries is somewhat more likely to be channeled through multilateral institutions than aid to other countries (table 4). More importantly, however, the United States and other donors created the GAFSP in 2010 to coordinate activities and fill in financing gaps related to their L'Aquila pledges (see box 2). GAFSP uses selection criteria that are similar to Feed the Future's in determining where it will invest, and it emphasizes rigorous monitoring and evaluation. It uses a committee of technical experts to select among projects that recipient countries themselves propose, which is an interesting model.

As of December 2014, GAFSP had allocated \$1.02 billion to 39 projects in 30 countries over six rounds of calls for proposals. Thus, it has committed all but around \$300 million of the money paid in by donors, though it has disbursed far less.⁴⁶ Around \$600 million of the total grants so far have gone to 16 Feed the Future focus countries, indicating some success in leveraging commitments from other donors. Despite the overlap in countries receiving funds from both initiatives and similarities in approaches, there is very little information about coordination of efforts between Feed the Future and GAFSP. For 2016, the administration requested an additional \$43 million for GAFSP.⁴⁷ Congress requires that the US contribution be no more than a third of the total trust fund, however, so other donors will have to step up before the United States can increase its commitment.

Thus, with regard to aid effectiveness principles, Feed the Future seems to be more principle than practice. Early signals promised Feed the Future leadership on critical areas like transparency, country ownership, and multilateralism. There has been progress in some areas, such as aligning investment strategies with country plans and using GAFSP for multilateral coordination. But evidence in other areas points to an initiative that is still largely operating through traditional development channels.

Where Can Feed the Future Claim Progress?

After five years of Feed the Future implementation, the initiative is just beginning to report on progress towards its core objectives. Until recently, Feed the Future reported progress in

⁴⁵ Preliminary transactions level data from the foreign assistance dashboard at foreignassistance.gov, indicate that by 2014 only food aid remained tied. But we are unsure whether this data is complete or consistent with the data in the OECD Creditor Reporting System.

⁴⁶ See the GAFSP Portfolio Implementation Update from May 2015 available here: <http://bit.ly/1Y8aRTM>, accessed February 22, 2016.

⁴⁷ See p. 14 of Appendix 2 of the Congressional Budget Justification here, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238221.pdf>, accessed December 18, 2015.

implementation of the initiative with data on programmatic inputs and outputs since 2011. While this is useful information, these are not the “results” that matter. In 2015, the initiative began to report on progress towards the ultimate objectives of reducing poverty and improving nutrition in a few countries where new surveys are available. This is important, but we would urge caution in interpreting early results. The administration is not yet providing enough information of the right type to be able to attribute many of these results to Feed the Future interventions.

What Feed the Future Can Reliably Claim

First and foremost, the Feed the Future initiative has led to increased US investments in nutrition and more targeted investments in the agriculture sector. Second, Feed the Future annually reports on the progress it is making in implementing the initiative, albeit only for selected indicators. Those reports show rapid progress in reaching new rural households with interventions, increasing the value of incremental agricultural sales, offering agricultural and rural loans to households, and building capacity in clinics to manage undernutrition in target areas.⁴⁸ Indeed the latest Feed the Future progress report offers data from 2011-2014 on 13 key indicators (5 classified as outcomes and 8 as outputs). And 7 of the 13 are disaggregated by sex.

But of the 37 indicators included in the results framework that are collected annually, it is not clear why USAID chose to focus on these 13.⁴⁹ And some of the claimed outcomes, such as the number of farmers or hectares of land with improved technologies, are still intermediate outcomes that tell us nothing about the effectiveness with which farmers are using the improved inputs and whether that is translating to the initiative’s overall goal of poverty reduction. Finally, with so much focus on reporting early and often about the progress in *implementing* the initiative, there is a risk that it increases the pressure to disburse quickly and in ways that may not produce sustainable results. For example, for 2014, Feed the Future reports that nearly 7 million farmers applied “improved technologies or management practices as a result of U.S. Government assistance,” but only 1,300 received “long-term agricultural sector productivity.” Are the millions of others that are using improved inputs or management practices because of subsidies likely to have these practices sustained? And how likely are they to continue using improved practices once the project ends?

Third, Feed the Future is putting a great deal of effort into monitoring and evaluating its activities, though the resources that we can observe are below USAID’s overall target of 3

⁴⁸ USAID, 2015, “2015 Results Summary – Achieving Impact: Leadership, Partnership to Feed the Future,” Washington, DC, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁹ Feed the Future’s Results Framework includes 53 indicators (outputs, outcomes, and impacts): 37 are collected annually, the remaining 16 are collected through household surveys at baseline, mid-term and end-line. More information is available at: <http://1.usa.gov/21UQPkh>, accessed December 9, 2015.

percent of program dollars. This figure is only for monitoring and evaluation centrally managed by the Bureau for Food Security, however. Other funding for monitoring and evaluation comes from mission budgets, but there are no figures for those activities. Still, as shown in table 6, Feed the Future’s commitment to monitoring and evaluation is growing, and it is well above the average 1.1 percent that USAID devotes to monitoring and evaluation across all of its programs.

Table 5: Feed the Future Allocations for Monitoring and Evaluation, FY2011-2016

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Headquarters M&E budget	14 million	15 million	15 million	15 million	19 million	18 million
FTF budget	1.06 billion	1.25 billion	1.09 billion	1.15 billion	1.10 billion	1.08 billion
Share	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%	1.7%	1.7%

Source: U.S. State Department, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations.

Finally, Feed the Future can claim some progress in mainstreaming gender as a cross-cutting priority. By emphasizing gender equality and women’s empowerment across all investments, it is clear that Feed the Future recognizes the importance of women’s role in agriculture. Table 7 indicates whether gender is a “significant” or “principal” objective for agriculture and nutrition projects, as reported to the OECD’s Creditor Reporting System.⁵⁰ That data suggest that a larger proportion of agriculture and nutrition projects, as well as funds committed, in focus countries have a gender objective, compared to projects in other low and lower middle income countries.

Feed the Future’s emphasis on gender is also reflected in its monitoring and evaluation plan.⁵¹ To quantitatively measure changes in women’s involvement in various domains of the agriculture sector, USAID pioneered the creation of the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). Developed in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, this multidimensional index is the first of its kind to directly measure women’s empowerment in agriculture. WEAI is composed of two sub-indexes: the first measures how empowered

⁵⁰ Climate change and natural resource management represent additional cross-cutting priorities for Feed the Future. Due to incomplete data in the OECD Creditor Reporting System, we are unable to complete comparable analyses.

⁵¹ Feed the Future, 2014, “Measuring the Gender Impact of Feed the Future,” *M&E Guidance Series*, available at: <http://1.usa.gov/1MjH9nW>, accessed February 22, 2016.

women are within five domains (production, resources, income, leadership, and time use), and the other measures gender equality in empowerment within the household.⁵²

Table 6: Gender Objectives of Agriculture and Nutrition Projects, FY2013

		No gender objective		Gender as a principal or significant objective	
		Total	Share (%)	Total	Share (%)
Projects	Focus countries	1036	76%	333	24%
	Other countries	1182	86%	198	14%
Commitments \$US (millions)	Focus countries	\$ 412.23	58%	\$ 295.91	42%
	Other countries	\$ 486.96	67%	\$ 244.84	33%

Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

Further, ongoing impact evaluations include a gender focus, aimed at understanding if and how projects are impacting women’s participation at various stages of the agriculture value chain. Feed the Future has set a high standard for reporting on gender with some indicators disaggregated by sex to help track how progress achieved by women compares to men. Gender is well integrated into Feed the Future’s monitoring and evaluation system, highlighting the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge base on how gender equality and women’s empowerment might lead to reductions in poverty and undernutrition.

Impact Feed the Future Cannot Yet Show

While Feed the Future is providing substantial information on input and output indicators, information on the actual impact of the initiative’s activities is just becoming available. The preliminary impact level data reported in the 2015 Progress Report are insufficient to justify some of the claims made about Feed the Future’s core results. There is undoubtedly pressure to demonstrate results from this flagship initiative, but good evaluations that demonstrate causal impact take time. Feed the Future promises to begin publishing more data from performance reviews, impact evaluations, and cost-effectiveness studies in 2016, which should provide a wealth of data that can undergird a more complete assessment of the initiative’s activities.

⁵² Information on the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index is here: <http://1.usa.gov/1l63Xyn>, accessed February 22, 2016.

Until then, there are limits to what the initiative can reliably claim about its impacts. There are two significant challenges in interpreting the preliminary impact data showcased in the 2015 Progress Report: questionable attribution and lack of a counterfactual. As discussed earlier, Feed the Future activities primarily occur in “zones of influence” within focus countries. While the initiative reports reductions in poverty in three focus countries and reduced stunting in six, none involves an impact evaluation demonstrating Feed the Future’s role.⁵³ The reported impact data only map to the “zones of influence” for three cases: reductions in stunting prevalence in Cambodia and increasing incomes in Honduras and Bangladesh. In the other cases, results are based on national trends or rely on data from regions that may encompass but do not exactly match the Feed the Future “zone of influence.”⁵⁴ In those cases, there is no way to know what role Feed the Future might have played. Attribution will always be difficult, and we do not mean to suggest that Feed the Future should not get some credit for these results. But data that cannot be traced to Feed the Future’s activities are not adequate for a robust assessment of the initiative’s performance.

Another challenge is that the Feed the Future reporting does not provide a counterfactual for poverty and stunting against which we can assess recent trends. In other words, we do not know from the progress report whether focus countries were already experiencing similar downward trends in these dimensions prior to Feed the Future. The Feed the Future website states, “trends in childhood stunting reductions each year have doubled, from 2 percent per year in 2010 when the initiative’s activities began to ramp up to 4 percent per year, on average across five Feed the Future countries where data is available.”⁵⁵ However, these averages hide large variations across countries, and progress appears to have accelerated in some countries but not others.⁵⁶

We commend Feed the Future for putting in place data systems and infrastructure that will allow it to conduct credible impact evaluations around its programs. We also recognize that solid impact evaluations take time, and we look forward to seeing the more robust evidence that Feed the Future plans to release over the next year. But the initiative should be careful about overselling preliminary results that do not have clear baselines, targets, counterfactuals, or other evidence that outcomes and impact are related to US government activities.

⁵³ The reported impact data on the prevalence of poverty and stunting are from Demographic and Health Surveys and national household surveys. For more information see the 2015 Progress Report, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁴ Data on stunting in Ethiopia and Ghana represent national trends, and data on stunting in Bangladesh and Kenya and poverty in Uganda are from regions that may encompass but do not exactly match the Feed the Future “zones of influence.”

⁵⁵ Feed the Future, “Behind the Impact Data in Feed the Future’s New Report: 6 Questions,” July 28, 2015, available at: <http://1.usa.gov/1HYGVHQ>.

⁵⁶ Reported data from Demographic and Health Surveys show that Cambodia and Kenya experienced a more rapid decline in stunting, compared to Ethiopia and Bangladesh, for example. There is not enough information to assess the trend in Ghana before and after Feed the Future.

Policy Recommendations for Feed the Future

Over the past five years, Feed the Future has brought a development spotlight back to agriculture and nutrition. The Obama-led initiative has garnered bipartisan congressional backing in both chambers while also drawing support from civil society and private sector actors. The initiative appears to be doing well in focusing Feed the Future funds in countries that demonstrate need and offer an opportunity to effectively tackle food security challenges. But the new approach that the administration promised is falling short in key areas.

Based on the analysis above and with an aim of seeing Feed the Future achieve sustained development impact, we offer the following practical recommendations to Congress and the Administration for the initiative moving forward.

Recommendations for Congress:

- **Congress should authorize Feed the Future.** Feed the Future has garnered a broad coalition of support and highlighted the value of agriculture and nutrition investments for the reduction of poverty. Authorizing legislation would help to ensure that investments in developing-country agriculture are sustained. Attention to agriculture often fades when food prices decline; Congressional authorization for the initiative would help prevent that. Congressional legislation should designate USAID as the lead agency in implementing and coordinating Feed the Future and not push for a whole of government approach that undermines accountability for the initiative's performance.
- **Congress should use authorizing legislation to encourage more support for institution building in recipient country partners.** Congress should use authorizing legislation as a vehicle to give USAID and the other federal agencies implementing Feed the Future more latitude to use locally-directed funding. To realize its promise of being transformative and sustainable – rather than just a business-as-usual approach – Feed the Future must do a better job of partnering with local entities to prioritize resource allocations, and to design and implement its activities. Metrics that monitor these activities should be included in the initiative's reporting.
- **Congress should authorize continuation of GAFSP.** GAFSP is an important multilateral component of Feed the Future, supporting US efforts to leverage increased resources from other donors for food security and agriculture development programs. Additionally, GAFSP and Feed the Future should be transparent on efforts to better coordinate activities in the 16 countries in which they both operate.

Recommendations for the Administration:

- **Feed the Future should not expand to new focus countries at this time.** For now, the initiative should focus on credibly assessing impact and demonstrating which types of interventions work under what circumstances. However, should the Administration or Congress elect to expand the number of focus countries, we urge USAID to resist pressure to select countries for political or other reasons not soundly rooted in the criteria of high need and high governance capacity, as reflected in figure 5.
- **Feed the Future should explain what it is doing to sustain results once interventions end.** Given limited resources and the expectation that Feed the Future's budget is unlikely to grow, any expansion of the initiative into new countries would require plans for sustaining progress with diminished resources in current focus countries. Feed the Future should report explicitly on what it is doing to ensure the results of its interventions are sustainable. Feed the Future should also better explain how it is incorporating the use of domestic and private resources into program operations with the understanding that Feed the Future activities will not continue in perpetuity in every country.
- **USAID should enhance transparency of Feed the Future investments and their results.** To paraphrase a colleague of ours, you cannot monitor what you do not track and you cannot evaluate impact without a counterfactual. It is currently impossible to connect expenditures for specific activities to Feed the Future, at least from the outside. Feed the Future should be more transparent in providing detailed information on where investments are allocated and for what purpose by specifically identifying Feed the Future activities in the data it reports to the OECD Creditor Reporting System. In addition, not all of the baseline surveys or cost-benefit analyses for projects in focus countries are readily available, which makes genuine progress difficult to assess. USAID should make this information easy to find on its website, or via links from its website, and should do the same for all of the progress reports and impact evaluations as they become available over the next year. And, when reporting on impacts, Feed the Future should be very clear about the counterfactual that shows how the initiative is making a difference.

Taken together, these recommendations would contribute to making Feed the Future a genuinely new approach to food security and poverty alleviation. By passing global food security legislation, Congress would underscore the US commitment to reducing poverty and childhood stunting around the world. Without a sustained commitment to agricultural development and improved nutrition in poorer countries from the United States, the world will not be able to achieve the global goals of ending hunger and extreme poverty.

Box 1: Evidence on Agriculture’s Potential to Improve Nutrition

An increased focus on nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs underscores the need to understand the multiple and often inter-related pathways along which agriculture can improve nutrition, including as a source of food and income, and through its effect on food prices, women’s empowerment, women’s time, as well as women’s health and nutritional status.⁵⁷ At the household-level, these pathways can be categorized into three primary routes:

1. food production;
2. income from agriculture; and
3. women’s empowerment, including control over resources.⁵⁸

However, the connections between agriculture and nutrition also extend beyond the household to include the entire food system from input supply to production to processing and marketing.⁵⁹

Multiple systematic reviews of existing research have concluded that there is weak evidence to support a direct relationship between agriculture interventions and improved nutritional status. However, researchers also note that this conclusion could be the result of weak research methodologies, including small sample sizes and absence of counterfactual groups, rather than just the weakness of programs and their lack of impact.⁶⁰

By investing in nutrition-sensitive agriculture activities with the objective to reduce malnutrition, Feed the Future’s research agenda offers tremendous potential to contribute to the evidence base on what works in leveraging agriculture to achieve improved nutrition. There are concerns, however, that the program may be missing out on the opportunity. A landscape analysis focused on the design of Feed the Future projects identified several weaknesses, such as the failure to include nutrition indicators to track improvements in certain cases. In others, indicators to measure intermediate steps that could plausibly link agriculture and nutrition, such as quantities of value chain crops sold and consumed, were missing.⁶¹

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⁵⁷ Marie Ruel and Harold Alderman, 2013, “Nutrition-Sensitive Interventions and Programmes: How Can They Help to Accelerate Progress in Improving Maternal and Child Nutrition?” *The Lancet* no. 382: 536–551.

⁵⁸ Anna Herforth and Jody Harris, 2014, “Understanding and Applying Primary Pathways and Principles,” *Improving Nutrition through Agriculture Technical Brief Series No. 1*, Arlington, VA: USAID / Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING).

⁵⁹ Lidan Du, Victor Pinga, Alyssa Klein and Heather Danton, 2015, “Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition Impact through the Feed the Future Initiative,” *Advances in Food and Nutrition Research*, vol. 74.

⁶⁰ Eduardo Masset, Lawrence Haddad, Alex Cornelius and Jairo Isaza-Castro, 2011, “A Systematic Review of Agricultural Interventions that Aim to Improve Nutritional Status of Children,” London, UK: University of London; Anna Herforth, Andrew Jones and Per Pinstrup-Andersen, 2012, “Prioritizing Nutrition in Agriculture and Rural Development: Guiding Principles for Operational Investments,” *Health, Nutrition, and Population Discussion Paper*, Washington, DC: World Bank; Ruel and Alderman op cit.

⁶¹ Du et al. op cit.

Box 2: The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program

Background: Established in 2010, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) is a multi-donor trust fund, with the World Bank as trustee. The Fund gives donors a vehicle to coordinate their efforts to develop agriculture in lower income countries, consistent with the Rome principles. GAFSP focuses on five areas: raising agricultural productivity (over 50 percent of the portfolio); linking farmers to markets; reducing risk and vulnerability; improving non-farm rural livelihoods; and providing technical assistance and support for capacity development. GAFSP emphasizes its transparent selection process, close alignment with countries' agriculture priorities, and commitment to external evaluation.

The Treasury Department oversees the US contributions to GAFSP as part of its management of relations with the multilateral development banks. As of August 2015, the United States had fulfilled its \$600 million commitment to the fund. Collectively the fund's 11 donors have contributed \$1.38 billion of the total \$1.5 billion pledged.⁶² The United States is the largest donor to the public sector window, while the Netherlands is the largest contributor to the private sector window.

Public sector window: GAFSP invests in national and regional programs that emerge from extensive consultation processes, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). Only countries eligible for the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) can receive GAFSP financing. Using criteria that are similar to those of the Feed the Future initiative, an independent panel of experts selects countries and projects based on evidence of strong agriculture strategies; an environment that supports investments; national commitment to increasing agricultural investments; and whether the country has access to alternate sources of financing. While hard rules do not exist, this Technical Advisory Committee makes its selections in a transparent manner.

Private sector window: Private sector firms and financial institutions operating in IDA countries are eligible to receive loans, credit guarantees, or equity investments. This window, managed by the International Finance Corporation, became operational in 2012 and seeks to leverage private investments that align with countries' national food security and agricultural plans. As of December 2014, \$81.7 million in GAFSP funds had been allocated to 18 investment projects.⁶³

Monitoring and Evaluation: Rigorous monitoring and evaluation is a key part of the GAFSP approach. Baseline data are collected for all projects and recipients report on a set of core indicators every six months. For CAADP countries, this process also feeds into the Mutual Accountability Framework review process. Despite the fact that 16 GAFSP recipients are also Feed the Future focus countries, there is only limited coordination of the two monitoring efforts. The World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) group is tasked with conducting impact evaluations of approximately 30 percent of GAFSP's portfolio. All remaining projects will be evaluated using rapid non-experimental methods.

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⁶² The public sector window donors are *Australia*, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Canada*, Germany, Ireland, South Korea, Spain, *United Kingdom*, and *United States*. Donors to the private sector window are the countries in italics plus Japan and the Netherlands. More information is here: <http://bit.ly/1NrSl5O>, accessed February 22, 2015.

⁶³ The GAFSP Portfolio Implementation Update from May 2015 is available here: <http://bit.ly/1Y8aRTM>, accessed February 22, 2016.

Annex 1: Do's and Don'ts for Various Dimensions of Food Security

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS \ TIME FRAME	SHORT-RUN	LONG-RUN
GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY (MACRO)	<p><i>Do</i> develop and disseminate better information on global stocks.</p> <p><i>Do</i> make food aid more flexible and responsive, eg by avoiding in-kind and tied aid and encouraging World Food Program to use futures markets so that buying on spot markets is minimized and budgets stretch as far as possible.</p> <p><i>Don't</i> adopt beggar-thy-neighbor policies, eg export restrictions that worsen price spikes, reduce local incentives to expand production, and subsidize rich and poor alike.</p>	<p><i>Do</i> invest in innovation and productivity-enhancing activities, especially for major staple crops.</p> <p><i>Do</i> invest in reducing waste.</p> <p><i>Do</i> use pull mechanisms, eg advance market commitments, to enhance the effectiveness of donor contributions.</p> <p><i>Do</i> complete the Doha Round and don't use trade and production-distorting subsidies to encourage production.</p> <p><i>Don't</i> subsidize biofuels that compete with food or encourage deforestation.</p>
HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY (MICRO)	<p><i>Do</i> create safety net mechanisms, such as conditional cash transfers, that are targeted to the poor and near-poor, especially mothers and young children, and can be ramped up as necessary in a crisis.</p> <p><i>Don't</i> provide untargeted subsidies or tax cuts that help rich and poor.</p>	<p><i>Do</i> strengthen markets, so farmers have incentives to improve productivity, by investing in transportation, storage infrastructure, risk management tools, and access to credit.</p> <p><i>Do</i> invest in minor staple crops important for smallholders, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.</p>

Source: Adapted from Kimberly Ann Elliott, "The G20 and Global Food Security," a note prepared for the French presidency, 2011, unpublished.

Annex 2: Proxy Indicators for Need, Partnership Potential, and Recipient Government Commitment

COUNTRY	PER CAPITA INCOME (2013)	RURAL POVERTY RATE* (2010-2014)	GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX (2014)	POLITICAL STABILITY (2013 percentile rank)	REGUALTORY QUALITY (2013 percentile rank)	AG AS % OF TOTAL SPENDING (most recent 3 yr average)	ALLOCATION & MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (3 yr score)
FOCUS COUNTRIES							
Bangladesh	621	35.2	19.1	7.6	20.6	8.8	3.8
Cambodia	709	23.2	16.1	40.3	39.2		2.7
Ethiopia	295	30.4	24.4	8.1	12.0	8.7	3.6
Ghana	769	37.9	7.8	47.4	55.5	3.2	3.7
Guatemala	2,341	71.4	15.6	23.7	45.5	2.3	3.4
Haiti	473	74.9	23.0	25.1	19.1		3.9
Honduras	1,577	67.1	6.0	30.3	45.9		4.1
Kenya	632	49.1	16.5	13.7	38.8	3.2	3.8
Liberia	299	67.7	16.8	31.3	21.1	8.0	2.9
Malawi	264	56.6	13.6	38.9	27.3	14.5	
Mali	476	50.6	13.0	6.6	33.0	6.1	3.8
Mozambique	433	56.9	20.5	37.4	35.9	2.9	4.9
Nepal	409	27.4	16.4	14.2	22.0	8.0	3.9
Rwanda	401	48.7	15.6	43.6	53.1	7.4	3.9
Senegal	796	57.1	14.4	43.1	52.2	8.6	4.1
Tajikistan	481	49.2	16.4	14.7	14.8		4.4
Tanzania	487	33.3	17.3	41.2	40.7	4.5	4.4
Uganda	418	22.4	17.0	19.9	44.5	3.6	4.7
Zambia	1,054	77.9	23.2	60.7	34.4	5.7	3.8
COUNTRIES WITH ALIGNED AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS							
Congo, Dem. Rep.	288	64.9	NA	2.4	9.6	3.4	3.5
Egypt, Arab Rep.	1,567	32.3	<5	7.1	26.3	1.2	3.3
Georgia	2,160	21.8	NA	30.8	73.7	1.6	3.8
Guinea	307	64.7	14.3	11.4	16.3	7.0	4.4

Nigeria	1,056	52.8	14.7	3.8	25.4	2.3	3.8
Sierra Leone	410	66.1	22.5	40.8	26.8	6.5	3.8
Zimbabwe	475	84.3	16.5	24.2	2.4	7.7	1.6
OTHER LOW AND LOWER MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES							
Afghanistan	415	38.3	NA	1.4	11.0	4.4	2.6
Armenia	2,310	33.6	5	49.8	58.9		4.8
Benin	583	39.1	11.2	57.8	35.4	5.7	4.1
Bhutan	1,977	16.7	NA	70.1	13.9	10.5	
Bolivia	1,323	61.3	9.9	36.5	23.4	1.3	4.4
Burkina Faso	522	52.8	19.9	21.8	47.4	10.0	4.2
Burundi	155	68.9	35.6	9.5	21.5	6.1	3.6
Cabo Verde	2,739	44.3	NA	70.6	48.3	2.7	
Cameroon	989	55.0	12.6	28.4	20.1	6.3	2.8
Central African Republic	283	69.4	21.5	3.3	12.9	3.6	2.9
Chad	744	52.5	24.9	15.2	15.8	6.2	2.8
Comoros	613	48.7	29.5	38.4	10.0		
Congo, Rep.	1,961	74.8	18.1	29.9	8.1	14.1	4.6
Cote d'Ivoire	1,079	54.2	15.7	17.1	24.4	4.1	3.6
Djibouti	1,183	NA	19.5	42.2	32.1	3.7	
El Salvador	3,063	43.2	6.2	45.0	60.3	1.9	4.3
Eritrea	197	NA	33.8	20.4	0.5	5.1	3.5
Gambia, The	450	73.9	13.6	44.5	37.8	5.6	3.4
Guinea-Bissau	433	75.6	13.7	18.5	9.1	0.8	3.5
Guyana	1,336	NA	6.5	31.8	29.2		
India	1,190	25.7	17.8	12.3	34.0	8.1	3.6
Indonesia	1,810	15.2	10.3	28.9	46.4	2.5	3.6
Kosovo	2,788	31.1	NA	18.0	52.6		
Kyrgyz Republic	625	40.2	5	19.4	41.6	3.5	3.6
Lao PDR	752	28.6	20.1	49.3	22.5		2.7
Lesotho	974	61.2	13.1	58.3	39.7	1.8	3.9

Madagascar	271	81.5	21.9	23.2	27.8	12.1	3.1
Mauritania	681	59.4	11.9	17.5	25.8	4.4	4.1
Moldova	1,136	24.2	10.8	45.5	49.3		3.6
Mongolia	1,796	42.6	9.6	64.0	44.0	2.0	3.5
Morocco	2,531	14.4	5	29.4	46.9	1.1	
Nicaragua	1,367	63.3	9.6	37.9	43.1		3.8
Niger	291	55.2	21.1	10.0	29.7	9.4	3.5
Pakistan	790	27.0	19.1	0.9	24.9	2.8	3.7
Papua New Guinea	1,121	41.6	NA	28.0	32.5	1.5	
Paraguay	1,929	42.4	8.8	24.6	42.1		2.7
Philippines	1,581	NA	13.1	16.6	51.7	4.9	3.8
Sri Lanka	2,004	7.6	15.1	26.1	47.8	5.3	4.7
Sudan	771	NA	26.0	2.8	6.2	3.0	4.0
Swaziland	2,430	73.1	16.5	32.2	38.3	2.1	3.7
Timor-Leste	784	51.5	29.8	34.1	17.2		3.3
Togo	424	73.4	13.9	32.7	18.7	6.7	3.2
Ukraine	2,138	NA	5	21.3	28.7	3.0	4.1
Uzbekistan	899	NA	5	26.5	3.3		2.9
Vietnam	1,029	24.5	7.5	55.9	28.2	4.3	3.2

Notes: The number of observations from 2010-2014 varies between countries, some have only one year of data. *Countries excluded for lack of data, conflict or sanctions include North Korea, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, as well as small island states. **The Global Hunger Index is composed of undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality. The index is calculated on a 100-point scale, and scores can be interpreted as follows: < 10.0 = low hunger; 10.0 to 19.9 = moderate hunger; 20.0 to 34.9 = serious hunger; 35.0 to 49.9 = alarming, and > 50.0 = extremely alarming. ***Allocation and management of resources for rural development is a score on a scale of 1-6. 6 = For 3 years, the national development plan (or PRSP) and budget document emphasize the important role that the agricultural and rural development sector must play in poverty reduction and economic growth; sector policy/policies are consistent with that analysis and advocate an appropriate approach for reducing rural poverty and promoting broad-based growth. 0 = For 3 years, the national development plan (or PRSP, where there is one) and budget document give little emphasis to agriculture and rural development; and the sector policy/policies are not appropriate as a basis for reducing rural poverty and promoting broad-based growth.

Sources: Per capita income (2013) and rural poverty rate (2010-2014): World Bank; Global Hunger Index (2014): IFPRI; Political stability (2013) and Regulatory quality (2013): World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators; Agriculture spending - Africa (2011-13): ReSAKSS; Others (2008-10 or closest available): SPEED; Allocation and Management of Resources for Rural Development: IFAD Rural Sector Performance Assessments via Brookings 2015 Ending Rural Hunger Database