

Promise and Potential

Exploring sustainable impact of Feed the Future

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Five years after its launch, how is Feed the Future performing, and what are the prospects that it will contribute to a future free from hunger?

The launch of the Feed the Future initiative (FtF) in 2010 brought agriculture back to the center of the US development agenda. Since then, USAID has reported on progress achieved, including having reached nearly seven million people with improved farming practices.

To better understand whether this effort will lead to lasting, positive impacts to right the wrong of hunger, Oxfam America examined FtF activities in six countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Senegal and Tanzania. **The case studies were based on a purposeful analysis of key issues related to inclusiveness, empowerment, aid effectiveness, and sustainability – themes instrumental in the sustainability and impact of Feed the Future activities.**

The research points to substantial, real, and important improvements in the way the US government, especially the US Agency for International Development (USAID), delivers assistance. FtF has made significant efforts to adhere to principles of aid effectiveness, an essential step in promoting strong country ownership of US-supported programs as well as durable, lasting partnerships with governments and citizens. The initiative is also making substantial efforts to integrate women's empowerment and natural resource management across FtF activities. Mainstreaming these key issues is helping to focus US agriculture assistance.

At the same time, **continued efforts are needed to refine and strengthen FtF to ensure current US investments contribute to long-term improvements in food security**, especially for small-scale producers.

Oxfam makes the following recommendations:

To ensure **inclusive participation** in FtF projects, it is important to avoid an overreliance on market-led investment approaches as uniformly appropriate for addressing rural poverty and food insecurity. Investments for agricultural production should take better account of significant variations in agricultural resources and potential between and within farming communities. This requires:

- **Effectively coordinating agricultural production activities with other programs** for rural income generation and safety nets;
- **Ensuring that access to fair and flexible credit is a complimentary activity** in interventions;
- **Developing standard mechanisms for beneficiary input and feedback** through the project lifespan;
- **Implementing strategies that can increase women's participation in interventions**, including in particular trainings and technologies that are responsive to gender roles.



Feed the Future is working to build skills and knowledge for increased economic participation of small-scale producers, as well as strengthening the capacity of institutional actors, both critical aspects of **empowerment**. But investment is also needed in capacity building initiatives that raise awareness about the rights citizens hold and corresponding government responsibilities. This requires:

- **Strengthening the capacity of project-based groups** so that, through specific trainings emphasizing, among other things rights and leadership, they are empowered as active citizens;
- **Focusing on supporting women** by more effectively using metrics and tools such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index to generate evidence that informs programmatic actions as well as necessary policy measures.

While Feed the Future is putting into practice key principles to ensure **responsive and effective aid**, Oxfam's research found limited engagement in design and implementation of interventions by local stakeholders, particularly those at the sub-national level. Aid that is responsive to local needs requires:

- **Deepening consultation and cooperation with local leaders**, especially with district and ward extension officers including information sharing and joint work;
- **Including representative organizations of small-scale producers and civil society organizations** in consultation processes about investments that affect them; and
- **Providing a larger part of aid in the form of direct budget support** to local institutions and development agents.

In prioritizing **environmental sustainability**, Feed the Future investments emphasize efficient use of resources, including agrochemical inputs, delivered through private sector channels. This approach misses the opportunity to teach farmers important alternatives, including agro-ecological approaches that emphasize farmer knowledge and mimic natural processes, focusing on ecological and social, in addition to economic, sustainability. While continuing to promote sustainable production practices in ways that also enable beneficiaries to **adapt to climate change**, investments should:

- **Focus on low-external input approaches, conservation agriculture and agro-ecological practices, including the use of organic inputs**, as viable means of promoting environmentally sustainable productivity increases;
- **Provide farmers with information and tools, including weather information, they need** in order to prepare for and adapt to changes induced by climate change.

Feed the Future holds the promise and potential to help households and communities permanently escape hunger. These recommendations, if adopted, can build upon FtF's early progress and help refine implementation strategies to strengthen its outcomes over the longer term. **Time, sustained dedication of resources, and unwavering support and focus by the Administration and Congress are needed to turn that promise into reality.**



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