

MAINSTREAMING SCALING INITIATIVE CASE STUDIES

Feed the Future (FTF)

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MAINSTREAMING SCALING
A Case Study of Feed the Future (FTF),
the US Government's Global Hunger and Food
Security Initiative: Successes, Challenges, and
Lessons

by

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A Case Study for the Initiative on
Mainstreaming Scaling in Funder Organizations

For the Scaling Community of Practice

www.scalingcommunityofpractice.com

Preface

The [Scaling Community of Practice](#) (CoP) launched an action research initiative on mainstreaming scaling in funder organizations in January 2023. This initiative has three purposes: to inform the CoP members and the wider development community of the current state of support for and operationalization of scaling in a broad range of development funding agencies; to draw lessons for future efforts to mainstream the scaling agenda in the development funding community; and to promote more effective funder support for scaling by stakeholders in developing countries. (For further details about the Mainstreaming Initiative, see the [Concept Note](#) on the COP website).

For the purpose of this initiative, scale is defined as sustainable impact at a significant share of the need, demand, or problem. Scaling is the process of reaching scale. Mainstreaming of scaling is defined as the systematic consideration by the funder of the scaling process in the appraisal of a project, in the decision to fund it, and in the monitoring and evaluation of the project's implementation.

The Mainstreaming Initiative is jointly supported by Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the Scaling Community of Practice (CoP). The study team consists of Richard Kohl (Lead Consultant and Project Co-Leader), Johannes Linn (Co-Chair of the Scaling CoP and Project Co-Leader), Larry Cooley (Co-Chair of the Scaling CoP), and Ezgi Yilmaz (Junior Consultant). MSI staff provide administrative and communications support, in particular Leah Sly and Gaby Montalvo.

The principal component of this research is a set of case studies of the efforts to mainstream scaling by selected funder organizations. These studies explore the extent and manner in which scaling has been mainstreamed, and the major drivers and obstacles. The case studies also aim to derive lessons to be learned from each donor's experience, and, where they exist, their plans and/or recommendations for further strengthening the scaling focus.

The present case study focuses on successes, challenges and lessons in Feed the Future, The US Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative. It was prepared by Julie Howard, Independent Consultant, who served as Chief Scientist, Bureau for Food Security, and Senior Adviser to the USAID Administrator for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education from 2011 to 2014.

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List of Acronyms

CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme
FTF	Feed the Future
GAFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
GFSA	Global Food Security Act
GFSS	Global Food Security Strategy
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USG	United States Government



Executive Summary

This study is part of an action research initiative undertaken by the [Scaling Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#) on mainstreaming scaling in funder organizations. Mainstreaming scaling is defined as the systematic consideration of sustainable outcomes at scale throughout the funding organization, including through mission statements, strategies, operational and administrative policies and practices, and monitoring and evaluation.

The case study's focus is Feed the Future, the United States Government's (USG) global hunger and food security initiative, and the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) experience with mainstreaming scaling of USG agriculture and food security-related programs in its role as Feed the Future coordinator.

Created in response to the devastating global food price crisis of 2007-08, Feed the Future was launched as a "whole of government" Presidential initiative, with contributions from 12 agencies coordinated by USAID. Feed the Future's goals are to reduce the prevalence of poverty and malnutrition by 20 percent within geographic "zones of influence" of selected target countries.

Grounded in the Rome Principles, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and the Accra Agenda for Action, Feed the Future sought to "invest and partner differently" across the USG and with external partners to scale and sustain program outcomes and impacts in target countries. Key elements included support for comprehensive strategies for transforming the food system, investing in country-owned plans, improving donor coordination, leveraging multilateral institutions and the private sector, and delivering on sustained, accountable commitments.

The case study concludes that Feed the Future has achieved substantial success in elevating global food and nutrition security as a USG priority, stabilizing funding, and improving coordination across USG agriculture and food security programs. Feed the Future has reported impressive accomplishments from its inception through 2022 -- including 23.4 million more people above the poverty line, and 3.4 million more children not stunted, in areas where Feed the Future works, more than 1000 innovations developed and deployed, \$6.2 billion in agricultural financing unlocked, and \$28 billion in agricultural sales generated.

The initiative's success in mainstreaming a scaling approach is incomplete, however. It can be argued that Feed the Future has met the initial criteria for mainstreaming in its attention to sustainable outcomes at scale in Feed the Future goals, strategic objectives and its framework for collaboration across agencies and with external partners. There is limited evidence, however, of mainstreaming scaling in Feed the Future (beyond USAID) in operational policies, financing instruments, allocation decisions and time horizon, in administration, and in monitoring and evaluation.

Sustaining the high-level leadership critical to strategic and operational coordination has proved challenging for Feed the Future. And FTF's important achievements are clouded by unanswered questions from the US Government Accountability Office and other analysts about the ability of Feed the Future's current M&E system to fairly attribute the outcomes to whole-of-government FTF efforts.

Feed the Future – like every other food and agriculture organization working today – is finding there is much more work to do to design and implement monitoring and evaluation systems – and more broadly – institutional incentives - to support scaling and transformation objectives across a wide range of actors and contributions.



Introduction

This case study examines the evolution of Feed the Future, the United States Government's (USG) global hunger and food security initiative, and the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) experience with mainstreaming¹ scaling in its role as Feed the Future coordinator. A key question is the extent to which scaling has been mainstreamed or institutionalized across the USG agencies that contribute to Feed the Future.

Within USAID programs that form a key component of Feed the Future, there has also been important progress on mainstreaming scaling related to food and agricultural system research and dissemination. USAID's specific experience with mainstreaming scaling within its own research programs will be discussed in a separate case study. This study examines the broader context of Feed the Future as a whole-of-US-government initiative, and the extent to which it provided a framework and drivers for mainstreaming scaling of food and agriculture programs across participating USG agencies.

Feed the Future also put priority on responding to the strategic priorities of target countries, and developed platforms to align investments from donors and private sector investors around these priorities. This represented a very significant 'change in business policies and procedures' at several different levels, which is described below. For the Obama Administration, Feed the Future was the first attempt at marshaling internal USG and external resources to meet a problem of such magnitude that it could not be addressed by the standard incremental project approach. Feed the Future's success has been incomplete, as this case study makes clear, with main challenges including sustaining the leadership critical to strategic and operational coordination, and the difficulty of designing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system – and, more broadly, institutional incentives to support scaling - across such a range of actors and contributions. It is impressive, however, that successive administrations have continued to support Feed the Future, and that aspects of its model were subsequently applied to other development-related initiatives, including [Power Africa](#), [AIM for Climate](#), and the [Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils](#).

“Doing development differently” to achieve scaled, sustained impact on global food security: Feed the Future's vision and goals

Feed the Future was created in response to the devastating global food price crisis of 2007-08, when price spikes doubled the price of major cereals, contributing to widespread food insecurity, episodes of civil unrest, and food aid appeals from 36 countries.² Export restrictions, panic buying and lack of transparency about stocks worsened conditions in the poorest, food-importing countries. The 2007-08 crisis galvanized a global recommitment to long-term investment in agriculture and food systems to reduce poverty and malnutrition, led by the United States.³ At the 2009 L'Aquila G8 Summit, President Obama announced Feed the Future, a Presidential initiative to strengthen global food security, committing \$3.5 billion over three years, and leveraging an additional \$18.5 billion from G8 and G20 partners.

¹ [Cooley and Linn \(2022\)](#) define mainstreaming as “the systematic, organization-wide incorporation of support for sustainable outcomes at scale in the mission and strategy statements of the funding organizations; in their operational policies and guidelines, financing instruments, allocation decisions and time horizons; in their administrative budget, staffing practices and incentives; and in their monitoring and evaluation practices.”

² [U.S. Department of State 2011](#)

³ Because most of the world's poor earn their livelihoods from agriculture and food systems, growth in agriculture is two to four times as effective in raising incomes of the poor than growth in other sectors ([World Bank, 2007](#)).



The Green Revolution beginning in the 1960s provided an important model for Feed the Future's aspirations to agriculture-led, large-scale economic development aimed at freeing smallholder families from poverty and hunger. The Green Revolution was a response to the widespread famine that gripped the Indian subcontinent and led to its increasing dependence on imported food aid. The crisis provided an opening for extensive testing and adoption of new and more productive varieties of wheat and improved rice developed by international scientists, led by Dr. Norman Borlaug,⁴ in collaboration with national research leaders. Combined with chemical fertilizer, irrigation, improved agronomic methods, extension outreach, and an enabling policy environment, these new technologies led to a virtual doubling of cereal production in Asia between 1970 and 1995. As a result, wheat and rice became more affordable for low-income consumers, increasing cereal and calorie availability per person by nearly 30 percent, and leading to important reductions in poverty.⁵

Following the success of the Green Revolution in Asia and Latin America, however, investments in agricultural development by donors and countries languished in the following decades. And, notably, in sub-Saharan Africa, Green Revolution technologies were not widely available or adopted, due in part to the greater heterogeneity of agroecosystems on the African continent, degraded soils, and poor market and transport infrastructure.

Feed the Future was formally launched in 2010, as a "whole of government" initiative, with contributions from 12 agencies coordinated by USAID. The new initiative sought to adapt the Green Revolution model to meet 21st century needs, including "investing and partnering differently" in agriculture and food systems to scale and sustain their outcomes and impacts in target countries. Grounded in the Rome Principles, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and the Accra Agenda for Action,⁶ Feed the Future aimed to strengthen agriculture and food systems by supporting comprehensive strategies, investing in country-owned plans, improving donor coordination, leveraging multilateral institutions, and delivering on sustained, accountable commitments.

The initiative put high priority on partnering closely with the private sector, host countries, and multilateral institutions to strengthen the entire food system,⁷ in contrast to the Green Revolution's primary focus on increasing crop productivity. Feed the Future also elevated nutrition and climate adaptation objectives. Programs concentrated on improving food production, markets, and processing, and on expanding the supply of nutritious, affordable, and safe food, especially for women and children.

⁴ Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his achievements.

⁵ Hazell 2009, Pingali 2015

⁶ OECD n.d., Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action

⁷ Food systems include agricultural production as well as the expanded array of activities, actors and organizations involved in processing, transporting and consuming food (von Braun et al. (2021)).



Feed the Future's topline population-level goals are to reduce the prevalence of poverty and malnutrition⁸ by 20 percent within geographic "zones of influence" of selected target countries.^{9,10} The imperative to scale outcomes and impact was clear given the magnitude of the challenge: in 2010, one in eight people on the planet – 868 million people – faced hunger, and even more – 1.2 billion – lived in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 per day.¹¹ Strengthening resilience was added as a third objective in 2017, reflecting the increasing prevalence of hunger in fragile countries affected by conflict, climate and other shocks.

Drivers of mainstreaming within the US Government

A Presidential, whole-of-government initiative

The 2009 L'Aquila G8 summit shone a high-level spotlight on the global food price crisis. Multiple US agencies were involved in the diplomatic engagement leading up to the L'Aquila announcement, foreshadowing the creation of Feed the Future as a whole of government initiative. Senior Cabinet-level leaders were personally involved in Feed the Future's development, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who appointed her chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, to lead the process at the Department of State, Tom Vilsack, the Secretary of Agriculture; leaders at USAID (initially acting administrator Alonzo Fulgham, followed by Rajiv Shah); and Gayle Smith, at the National Security Council. These leaders sought to elevate Feed the Future above the individual interests of involved agencies. Three positions were created to facilitate coordination at the highest levels: the Feed the Future Coordinator, represented by the USAID Administrator; the Deputy Coordinator for Diplomacy, from the Department of State, and the Deputy Coordinator for Development, from the USAID Bureau for Food Security.¹²

As a Presidential and whole-of-government initiative, the heads of participating US agencies were directly responsible for their agencies' contributions to Feed the Future. The USAID Administrator, as Feed the Future Coordinator, reported to the White House on progress. The Deputy Coordinator for Development and Assistant to the Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Food Security held the responsibility for interagency planning and day-to-day activities, while the State Department's Special Representative for Global Food Security was the main liaison with US Embassies and international organizations as Deputy Coordinator for Diplomacy. The USAID Administrator and the Secretary of State oversaw the selection of Feed the Future countries and mandated US Ambassadors and USAID Mission Directors to prioritize the initiative as a top foreign policy and development priority for the United States. Both President Obama and Secretary Clinton made multiple visits to Feed the Future countries and programs with USAID Administrator Raj Shah during the initiative's early years.

⁸ Initially defined as a reduction in stunting, the goal and indicators were broadened during the second phase of Feed the Future (beginning in 2017) to reflect new understanding about the nature of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiency.

⁹ Feed the Future target countries have varied over the years. Initially 19 target countries were designated: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Tajikistan, Uganda, Zambia. In Feed the Future's second phase, beginning in 2017, the number of target countries was reduced to 12: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda. In 2021, 20 focus countries were designated for Feed the Future's third phase: Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia.

¹⁰ The criteria used to select initial Feed the Future countries and zones of influence included: prevalence of chronic hunger and poverty in rural communities; potential for rapid and sustainable agricultural-led growth, opportunities for regional synergies through trade; and host government commitment, leadership, governance, political will, and resource availability.

¹¹ United Nations 2012, World Bank 2017

¹² USAID 2016.



USAID's Bureau for Food Security

Prior to 2010, USAID's agriculture and food security programs were managed by the Bureau for Environment, Growth, Agriculture and Trade. The Bureau for Food Security, the first in USAID's history, was created in 2010 to manage the new whole-of-government Feed the Future initiative, as well as traditional agricultural development programs under USAID.^{13,14} In the early days of the initiative, regular interagency meetings were convened by USAID at headquarters and country levels to collaboratively develop Multi-Year Strategies, and country and region-specific policy agendas.¹⁵

The Global Food Security Act and Strategy

Following the launch of Feed the Future, the USAID Administrator and Secretary of State worked to expand and strengthen bipartisan support from Congress to ensure sustained funding and support for the 'whole of government' approach. The effort culminated in the development and passage of bipartisan legislation codifying the US Government's support for investments in agriculture and food system development in low-income countries, the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) of 2016, which was renewed in 2018 and again in 2022. GFSA is authorizing legislation, used to establish or continue federal programs, and is a prerequisite for Congress to appropriate budget authority for the programs. The basic appropriation for USAID-managed Feed the Future programs has remained steady at about \$1 billion/year. Adding contributions from other US agencies, the total Feed the Future allocation from 2010-2013 was estimated at \$7 billion.¹⁶ In recent years, supplemental appropriations to address increased food insecurity during the Covid pandemic and as a result of the Russian war on Ukraine have added hundreds of millions of dollars.¹⁷ The Biden Administration has also committed \$150 million¹⁸ to the [Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils Initiative \(VACS\)](#), launched in 2023 and led by the State Department's Special Envoy for Global Food Security under the umbrella of Feed the Future.

The GFSA required the development of an integrated whole-of-government Global Food Security Strategy (updated every five years), and agency-specific implementation plans, as well as an annual assessment and report on the progress of Feed the Future. These legislative mandates have provided a foundation for ongoing Congressional engagement and oversight of the initiative, and for the development of a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning system.

Drivers of mainstreaming with external partners

Feed the Future also sought to 'work differently' with the country and other external partners to expand the pool of resources and ensure scaled, lasting impact. These efforts focused on aligning programs with country-determined priorities, and promoting platforms that made it easier for funders to work together against a smaller, shared set of country-determined priorities. Several programs were instrumental to improving country and funder program coherence and coordination.

¹³ Following the L'Aquila announcement in 2009, an interagency team headed by the Department of State and USAID collaborated on the operational design of Feed the Future. Prior to the launch of the Bureau for Food Security in 2010, the USAID design team worked from a special Food Security unit attached to the Administrator's office.

¹⁴ In 2017, the Bureau was restructured to become the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, and in 2023 further expanded to become the Bureau for Environment, Resilience and Food Security.

¹⁵ USAID 2016, op cit.

¹⁶ GAO 2013.

¹⁷ USAID 2023.

¹⁸ White House 2023.



Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP)

Feed the Future built on efforts undertaken by the African Union to elevate the importance of long-term investment in agriculture by countries themselves. Through the Maputo Declaration of 2003,¹⁹ African heads of state committed to increase investment in agriculture to 10 percent of national budgets. The African Union-led CAADP, supported by the US, World Bank, and other donor agencies, helped countries develop priorities and investment plans based on evidence, analysis, and input from stakeholders. To be considered as a priority country for Feed the Future, African candidates were required to demonstrate their own budgetary commitment to agriculture and complete the CAADP process. CAADP also served as a model for the selection of Feed the Future countries in other regions. In addition, the Maputo Agreement established a peer review process through which countries reported their budget commitments and progress on policy and program priorities. The Malabo Accord, successor to the Maputo Agreement, further institutionalized and strengthened the biennial peer review process,²⁰ which receives technical and data management assistance from African and external experts under the leadership of the Africa-based research organization Akademiya2063.²¹

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)

GAFSP was launched in April 2010 at the initiative of the Obama Administration, and in response to G20 calls for the World Bank Group to set up a multi-donor trust fund to receive and invest the \$22 billion in pledges made by G8 members at L'Aquila. GAFSP was intended to promote donor coordination and boost resources in support of national and regional plans to strengthen agriculture and food security. As of late 2023 the trust fund had raised \$2.1 billion, with the United States and Germany contributing over half of the total.²² Other donors include Canada, Spain, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, South Korea, Norway, and Ireland.

The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition

The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (New Alliance)^{23,24} was launched by the US and partners in 2012 under the US G8 presidency. While most agriculture and food security programs stemming from the 2008 G8 and G20 agreements were focused on public sector (donor and multilateral agency) funding, the New Alliance sought to leverage significant private sector resources to support African agricultural development plans, and accelerate related policy and regulatory reforms by African governments. New Alliance partners – G8 and African countries, and African and international private sector companies – pledged to achieve sustained and inclusive agricultural growth and raise 50 million Africans out of poverty over 10 years. Feed the Future was the United States' contribution to the New Alliance.

Scaling innovation was also a key focus of the New Alliance, including a major investment by the US in the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa to scale seeds and other technologies,²⁵ and a multi-donor partnership to accelerate the use of digital tools for agricultural extension.²⁶ Participating countries in the New Alliance (Burkina Faso, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania) adopted country cooperation frameworks listing their policy commitments, and companies provided letters of intent identifying intended investments. Annual meetings were held to

¹⁹ African Union 2003.

²⁰ International Food Policy Research Institute n.d.

²¹ Akademiya2063 n.d.

²² World Bank n.d.

²³ USAID n.d.

²⁴ USAID n.d.

²⁵ USAID 2017.

²⁶ Landell Mills 2019.



review policy and investment progress. Initial private sector funding commitments were estimated at \$3 million from the 21 African and 27 multinational companies that signed letters of intent.²⁷

The preceding sections illustrate the Obama Administration's breadth of vision regarding "doing business differently" and addressing global food security challenges in a way that would lead to scaled, sustained impact over time. The approach sought to expand and coordinate USG and external resources to fund programs that responded to country-driven strategies and business development plans.

A full examination of roles, responsibilities, and specific activities related to mainstreaming scaling in each of the external programs described above is beyond the scope of this case study. The remaining sections focus on mainstreaming scaling within Feed the Future, and especially on USAID's role in coordinating Feed the Future programs.

Implementing the vision: Feed the Future's experience with mainstreaming a scaling approach

Targeting

Nineteen initial Feed the Future focus countries were selected based on need (hunger, poverty), potential for agriculture-led growth, commitment of the host country government, and opportunities for partnership and regional economic integration. Selected countries received funding from Feed the Future to refine country-level investment plans (developed through CAADP or a similar process), which provided the basis for determining Feed the Future priority investments.

Within focus countries, funding was concentrated in geographic "zones of influence." Draft Feed the Future country plans were reviewed and approved by the interagency Feed the Future team. In addition to US Feed the Future funding, sixteen of the focus countries also received grants totaling \$600 million from GAFSP by 2016.²⁸

Role of partner agencies and host countries

By 2012, most Feed the Future country plans had been approved and activities were underway. A 2013 GAO report found that USAID's leadership of Feed the Future had resulted in better coordination and integration of partner agencies' knowledge and expertise, in contrast with its findings in 2008 and 2010, which found U.S. agency food security efforts "fragmented and uncoordinated." Key factors included collaboration among partners to develop a strategic approach to food security, tracking interagency food security funding and performance data, and biweekly interagency meetings.²⁹

By 2016, external evaluators noted that the frequency and level of intensive USG interagency coordination had waned. However, coordination remained robust in the Feed the Future components where shared interest was strong, and management and leadership attention continued to energize joint actions.³⁰

Table 1 details the roles of individual agencies within Feed the Future. The initiative's efforts to go beyond sharing information to identify where partner agencies have a comparative advantage, and how it could be utilized to best contribute to the initiative, led to many examples of productive collaboration and integration of effort across agency partners.

²⁷ USAID n.d., op cit.

²⁸ Elliot and Dunning 2016

²⁹ GAO 2013 op cit.

³⁰ USAID 2016 op cit.



For example, the State Department's Deputy Coordinator for Diplomacy and US Ambassadors played pivotal roles in elevating the priority of policy reform and budget commitments related to agriculture and food security at the country level. The National Security Council (NSC) and State Department ensured that key G8, G20 and United Nations meetings and other international fora focused on critical agriculture and food security issues. NSC and State officials used Feed the Future interagency meetings to gather input from USAID and other agencies to inform the strategic approach at the diplomatic level.



Table 1: U.S. Agency Roles in Implementing Feed the Future

Agency	Role in Feed the Future
USAID	lead agency that coordinates, implements, and assesses Feed the Future programming at country and regional levels; directly programs agriculture, nutrition, and development food aid funding; and contributes to GAFSP
Department of State (State)	uses diplomatic means to improve coordination and increase global resources from other donors for agricultural investment, advances policy reforms that strengthen the effectiveness of agricultural investment, strengthen national frameworks for adoption of agricultural biotechnology, and partners with relevant UN agencies and other international organizations in pursuing the FTF agenda.
Department of Agriculture (USDA)	supports agricultural research and extension, data and economic analysis, market information and statistics, and country capacity building.
Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC)	supports country-led requests for agriculture and food security-related investments through MCC compacts including irrigation, roads, ports and post-harvest infrastructure, farmer training, agriculture finance, property rights, and land policy and nutrition.
Department of Treasury	coordinates multilateral support for food security including contributions to the GAFSP, promotes monitoring and evaluation of projects, leverages funding through a GAFSP private sector lending window, uses influence to align multilateral development bank efforts with U.S. food security priorities, and oversees other multilateral development bank funding for agriculture.
Peace Corps	Builds local capacity among individuals, groups and communities to promote sustainable agricultural development, better nutrition and stronger resilience
U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF)	provides seed capital and local technical assistance directly to small and medium agricultural enterprises to improve productivity, strengthen resilience and increase incomes for smallholder farmers
International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)	supports U.S. private sector investments in some Feed the Future countries through insurance, debt financing, and support to private equity funds.
Department of Commerce	promotes trade and investment on behalf of the U.S. private sector. Provides weather and climate forecasting and guidance to some countries to mitigate weather shocks and stresses through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
U.S. Trade Representative (USTR)	advances work on trade and investment policy, including trade facilitation and other efforts to reduce barriers to efficient markets
U.S. Geological Service	provides scientific and technical expertise for remotely-sensed and seasonal forecast-derived products on crop performance indices. Also provides expertise on integrated approaches for sustainable water resources and management to increase resilience to drought.
Inter-American Foundation	directly invests in community-led grassroots development across Latin America and the Caribbean. Awards small grants to civil society organizations that promote economic prosperity, reduce food insecurity, and build resilience to natural disasters.

Sources: GAO 2013 and USAID n.d.



At the country level, USDA mobilized expertise to work with national agricultural data in focus countries through the National Agriculture Statistics Service, contributed research expertise through the Agricultural Research Service, and provided support through the Foreign Agricultural Service related to trade-related objectives.³¹ Under Feed the Future in Bangladesh, Haiti, and Guatemala, for the first time USAID and USDA conducted joint assessments resulting in the development of an integrated approach featuring layering of preexisting programs³² in target areas and joint governance by the two agencies. Under Feed the Future, Millennium Challenge Corporation's infrastructure work benefited from capacity development provided by USAID. Peace Corps received Feed the Future funding to place volunteers in communities within the zone of influence to support Feed the Future program objectives.³³

A follow-up report by GAO in 2022 noted continuing progress in coordinating agency efforts, but also identified specific areas for improvement. These included greater efforts at the country level to include representatives of agencies without in-country personnel in planning meetings, and establishing a mechanism to ensure that all relevant agencies can access information about each other's current and planned spending to facilitate leveraging of program resources.³⁴

In addition to fostering integration among activities of US partner agencies, at the country level Feed the Future leadership tried to identify duplication, overlap and fragmentation of food security assistance provided by the host countries and other bilateral and multilateral donors. For example, USAID/Bangladesh met monthly or quarterly with the host government and donors to review activities and developed plans to address any issues and improve complementarity.³⁵

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems play a pivotal role in determining program impact and progress in mainstreaming. Feed the Future invested substantial resources in developing and refining its M&E system (see Box 1) over time and producing annual reports. Despite these efforts and the large amount of data collected, Feed the Future M&E has been strongly criticized by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) and other analysts, as discussed in the next section. With regard to scaling, a critically important issue is that none of the M&E indicators deal with scaling (see also next section), nor was the concept of scaling well defined in the context of the GFSS. As a result, although scaling is implicit in the overall goals of Feed the Future, the M&E system did not provide pragmatic tools for assessing progress on scaling over time.

³¹ USAID 2016 op cit.

³²These programs included agricultural development programming through USAID's BFS, USAID's Food for Peace and USDA Food for Progress, the McGovern-Dole Food for Education programs, among others.

³³ USAID 2016 op cit.

³⁴ GAO 2022.

³⁵ USAID 2016 op cit.



Box 1: M&E in Feed the Future

In consultation with partner agencies, USAID developed a set of 53 indicators to track the progress of the initiative and its projects, issue public reports, and support decision making and performance-based management. The **FTF Indicator Handbook** provides definitions for indicators and guidance on methodologies for collecting data. The indicators are classified as project, zone of influence, or national indicators, depending on where data are collected. At the project level, partner agencies or implementing partners annually collect and submit data on project outputs and outcomes, e.g., number of individuals participating in a given Feed the Future food security program. In the zone of influence, USAID collects data through periodic surveys of population samples. These data are used to track impacts and outcomes in the areas where Feed the Future operates, e.g., on targeted crop yields. At the national level, USAID tracks country-level data from national governments or international organizations, such as the World Bank or UN, e.g., exports of targeted agricultural commodities.

FTF indicators can be output, outcome, or impact indicators, depending on what is being measured.

Output: Measures tangible and intended products or consequences of a project, such as the number of individuals trained.

Outcome: Measures short-term results of project activities or results at the zone of influence level, such as the yield of agricultural commodities.

Impact: Measures medium- to long-term effects produced by a portfolio of policies and projects that intend to change the development situation of the population in a country or an area within a country, such as the prevalence of poverty.

Agencies, country missions, or implementing partners are required to report on any and all indicators to which they contribute results. For target countries, almost all zone of influence and national-level indicators measuring impacts are considered applicable and are required. According to the handbook, FTF should therefore be able to aggregate data for individual indicators across the areas where FTF works to understand its overall results. In addition to the performance monitoring data, FTF has other sources of information to draw on, including impact or performance evaluations from its projects.

USAID publishes two annual reports on FTF progress, the **Strategy Implementation Report**, required by Congress, and the **FTF Progress Snapshot** report. The Strategy Implementation Report provides information on FTF programs, priorities, and future plans; describes agencies, stakeholders, and country involvement in FTF, and outlines budget data and FTF-wide data on some project indicators.

Source: **GAO 2021**



Challenges to increased effectiveness and mainstreaming in Feed the Future

Limits to coordination

Although coordination and alignment of resources for food security programs managed by individual USG agencies has improved, country-level program and resource integration remains limited. This has posed difficulties for tracking outcomes and impacts of resource investments across whole of government partners. In practice, the majority of Congressionally appropriated funds for food security and agricultural development are managed by USAID.³⁶ While partner USG agencies collaborate in Feed the Future, their contributions are mainly in the form of separate programs funded through their customary agency appropriations and under the jurisdiction of various Congressional committees. This patchwork process complicates shared oversight and accountability in the whole of government Feed the Future.

Lack of FTF-wide performance goals and indicators

In a 2021 report, GAO sharply criticized Feed the Future's M&E system,³⁷ noting that USAID and partner agencies are limited in their ability to monitor the initiative's progress because they have not set FTF-wide performance goals, and only a few of the FTF-wide indicators can be linked to goals and measurable targets, hallmarks of successful performance indicators.³⁸ For example, some of the outcomes noted in FTF annual reports, such as the number of farmers or hectares of land with improved technologies, are intermediate outcomes that say 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.³⁹

The key problem is that although FTF has established strategic objectives and an overarching goal, it lacks measurable performance goals⁴⁰ to meaningfully monitor the progress of FTF projects and activities towards achieving them.

In response to the GAO findings, USAID provided several reasons why it cannot determine the contribution of FTF projects to reductions in poverty and stunting in its zones of influence, including lack of data, related efforts of other organizations in the same area that make it difficult to discern the unique impact of FTF, and external factors such as gender inequality, drought, and civil unrest. FTF data is therefore used to monitor trends – whether a country is on track to reach its poverty or stunting target. However, GAO noted that without ties to FTF projects, the data do not demonstrate FTF performance.

USAID also responded that it is more appropriate to monitor results at the project and country levels to see if they are meeting targets or achieving certain results, e.g., benefitting vulnerable groups like

³⁶Veillette 2015 outlines the funding process. Congress provides funding for Feed the Future through the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations bill. Congress does not specify a funding level for Feed the Future as a whole, but allocates funds for bilateral food security and agricultural development activities (implemented by USAID, MCC, Peace Corps, and other agencies) and for multilateral food security accounts. Since 2010, Congress has allocated nearly \$1 billion annually to food security and agricultural development activities under SFOPS appropriations. The Administration then determines whether or how to allocate these appropriations within the FTF framework.

³⁷GAO states that USAID has not sufficiently addressed its recommendations. In May 2023, the US Controller General wrote to Administrator Power to draw attention to two high priority open recommendations from GAO, including the recommendation on performance indicators (GAO 2023).

³⁸GAO 2021.

³⁹USAID 2016 op cit.

⁴⁰ According to guidance from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, a performance goal is a measurable and quantifiable statement of the level of performance to accomplish within a given time frame (GAO 2021).



women. But without FTF-wide performance goals that establish linkages between performance data and strategic objectives, the FTF Interagency cannot determine how project or zone of influence-level data align with and support FTF strategic objectives and overarching goals.⁴¹ GAO offered several strategies and concrete examples for remedying the identified challenges, including disaggregating goals for distinct target populations, redefining the scope of a goal to focus on a narrower range of activities, and selecting a mix of outcome goals over which the initiative has varying levels of control. In summary, "...the FTF interagency partners could support realistic goals by narrowing the scope of FTF's performance monitoring framework to what can be meaningfully monitored across the initiative."⁴²

Feed the Future's focus on systems is not reflected in M&E reporting

Feed the Future has been a global leader in recognizing the importance of systemic change to encourage agriculture sector growth that also addresses nutrition, adaptation to climate change and environmental sustainability. While FTF programming supports system-level activities, FTF indicators and reporting requirements are more narrowly focused on outputs. The M&E system thus distorts the incentive system for FTF leaders and implementing partners. Tracking and assessing change at the systems level often requires longer timelines and unique tools and approaches, presenting a disconnect between the objective of effecting longer-term, multi-faceted systemic change, and incentives to produce shorter-term, output-heavy results.

Key process indicators important for scaling and sustainability are missing from Feed the Future's M&E system

Feed the Future's focus on reporting outputs may have increased the pressure to disburse resources quickly, in ways that might not be sustainable. For example, the 2014 Feed the Future annual report stated that nearly 7 million farmers applied "improved technologies or management practices as a result of U.S. Government assistance," but whether the farmers are continuing to use improved technologies after the project/subsidies ended is unmonitored.⁴³ Further, M&E indicators do not measure efforts to ensure sustainability of program results once projects end or countries phase out, including efforts to incorporate domestic and private resources into FTF programming to ensure a stable transition.⁴⁴ Other missing M&E areas include the quality of partnerships, and flexibility to respond to local conditions and extend the scope and sustainability of Feed the Future efforts.

It is widely acknowledged that coordination of related food and agriculture programs by different USG agencies has significantly improved under Feed the Future. However, current M&E metrics do not capture the scale of this increased engagement, or its effect on the initiative's outcomes and impact. Concentrating resources in defined geographic zones of influence has been another hallmark of Feed the Future's approach. However, efforts to ensure effective, synergistic collaboration among separately-designed but complementary programs operating in geographic proximity are often ad hoc and not systematically encouraged or tracked – whether funded by USAID or other agency or external partners. Flexibility to adapt programs in response to early results or to accommodate a role for complementary partners appears to be increasing,⁴⁵ but remains limited.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ USAID 2016 op cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ USAID 2018.



Country ownership and capacity

Feed the Future has done well in aligning its plans with country-driven investment plans in recipient countries. However, implementing the programs in ways that strengthen local ownership and capacity to ensure sustainability and scale has been more challenging.⁴⁶

The immense productivity, climate, environment and health pressures that today confront food and agriculture systems are forcing them to change in significant ways and to keep adapting over time. Local people, institutions, and organizations are often best placed to understand complex local conditions and lead these adaptation efforts, but maintaining funding and policy support for strengthening local institutional capacity—enabling them to plan and take effective action while learning from their experiences—has been difficult in Feed the Future and across all USG programs. The most critical step will be programming a much greater share of resources directly through local public and private sector organizations. Although progress on this front has been very slow over the decades, USAID Administrator Power has put a high priority on increasing direct funding to local organizations as part of a renewed push for localization.⁴⁷

Conclusions and lessons

Feed the Future is today recognized as a global leader on food security and food systems transformation. From its inception through 2022, Feed the Future accomplishments include:

- 23.4 million more people above the poverty line after seven years in areas where Feed the Future works
- 1000+ innovations developed and deployed
- 5.2 million more families not hungry after seven years in areas where Feed the Future works
- 3.4 million more children not stunted after 7 years in areas where Feed the Future works
- \$6.2 billion in agricultural financing for food security unlocked (2011-2022)
- \$28 billion generated in agricultural sales to help farmers (2011-2022)

Source: USAID n.d.

Despite these important impacts, Feed the Future's goal of mainstreaming scaling through a whole-of-government approach has been only partially realized.

Successes

Most successful has been the continued elevation of attention and increased funding for global food and agricultural development across US government agencies and the US Congress spanning three US Presidencies. This is an important mark of high-level institutionalization, since Feed the Future was launched as a Presidential initiative closely tied to President Barack Obama.

Feed the Future also created a new culture of productive collaboration and alignment of effort across US agencies working on food security and food systems transformation, whose efforts were previously fragmented. The Feed the Future "whole of government" approach has proved durable and flexible enough to allow its evolution from the initial charge, responding to the 2007-08 global food price crisis,

⁴⁶ Elliot and Dunning 2016, op cit.

⁴⁷ USAID 2023.



to an initiative that today focuses whole of government attention on strengthening resilience, including adaptation to accelerating climate and political shocks, and on food systems transformation.

Attention from the President and agency leaders during the first years of Feed the Future clearly helped position food and agriculture system development as a top national security priority. The leaders of USAID's closest agency partners in Feed the Future, the State Department and USDA, were critical to shifting the siloed culture within their own, much larger, agencies, to fully participate in standing up Feed the Future as an interagency initiative and winning support from Congress. The State Department was especially important in working with USAID to align Feed the Future with host country, bilateral and multilateral donor strategies. US Ambassadors amplified the priority of food security and related policy reform with host country presidents and finance ministers, while in Washington, the State Department ensured a continuing focus on food security at UN, G-8, G-20 and other regional meetings.

Continuing efforts by President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and Administrator Shah to engage bipartisan members of Congress on Feed the Future resulted in key members' support for funding and eventually to the passage of the Global Food Security Act, providing a framework for ongoing Congressional engagement and funding beyond the Obama Administration.

These and other lessons from Feed the Future's experiment in an integrated whole of government approach that also engages many external public and private partners have informed the development of subsequent efforts like Power Africa,⁴⁸ the [Agriculture Innovation Mission \(AIM\) for Climate](#) initiative led by USDA, and the State Department-led Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils.

Importantly, Feed the Future's close partnership with the African Union, African leaders and African private sector and civil society leaders through Feed the Future and the New Alliance, and Feed the Future's reliance on CAADP and country-driven, evidence-based priorities and policy reform, sets the stage for more intensive efforts on localization in the future. These will build on Feed the Future's success in elevating the importance of strengthening local systems, especially value chain and market systems, and on collaborating directly with private sector actors to facilitate inclusive agriculture-led growth.⁴⁹

Challenges

The GFSA's requirement that partner agencies submit a multi-year implementation plan and regular progress reports represents institutionalization of agency coordination only at a very general level. Feed the Future's experience illustrates the great difficulty of mainstreaming scaling by cobbling together separate programs across a set of agency actors, each functioning under different expectations, funding levels, and operational guidelines set by Congress. Coordination hurdles in the early years of the initiative were overcome through energetic and consistent high-level political and technical leadership. In Washington and at the country level, busy USAID Mission Directors, Ambassadors and agency and bureau leaders were directed to invest substantial time and resources to develop and implement an integrated Feed the Future portfolio.

With the passage of time, change in political leadership and frequent turnover in key positions, high-level momentum and steady leadership to bolster Feed the Future as a critical whole of government initiative and as a key priority for USAID has waned, although funding has continued. Indicators of Feed the Future's reduced stature include the recent relaunch of the original Bureau for Food Security, which was created to lead Feed the Future, as the expanded Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security. New initiatives have arisen to meet evolving food system challenges – including AIM for Climate, and Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils – and have generated new political

⁴⁸ USAID 2016 op cit.

⁴⁹ Ibid.



support and funding of their own. These initiatives are loosely aligned with Feed the Future but bypass its institutional framework and reporting system.

In the Cooley and Linn (2022) definition of mainstreaming, it can be argued that Feed the Future successfully met the initial criteria –“the systematic, organization-wide incorporation of support for sustainable outcomes at scale in the mission and strategy statements of the funding organizations” through the development of Feed the Future’s overall objectives and framework for cross-agency collaboration. There is limited evidence, however, of mainstreaming in the partner agencies (beyond USAID) for the other aspects of mainstreaming – “...in their operational policies and guidelines, financing instruments, allocation decisions and time horizons; in their administrative budget, staffing practices and incentives; and in their monitoring and evaluation practices.”

The difficulties presented in the day-to-day wrangling of diverse partner efforts toward operationalizing the common strategy and set of objectives, and of finding the right indicators and approaches to measure the factors most important to scaling and sustainability, are laid bare in the GAO and other external assessments of the Feed the Future M&E system, discussed in the preceding section. So, while Feed the Future programs are obviously generating outputs, outcomes, and impacts, given the current M&E system it is not possible to discern the contribution that the collaborative, FTF-wide effort is making to meeting the overall objectives. And it is not possible to track the impact that changing the way that agencies work together in clustered geographic areas has had on reaching these objectives.

One issue here is the absence of FTF-wide measurable performance indicators that are clearly linked to the overarching goal. But another challenge is that, in the absence of a more detailed, binding operational agreement among the agencies, and most likely a much clearer process for allocating and tracking FTF funding, it is very difficult for USAID to compel the kind of detailed data collection requirements that it demands from implementing partners for USAID-funded programs.

Finally, finding the right indicators and approaches to measure the factors most important for scaling and sustainability is a major challenge for effective mainstreaming because they constitute core management incentives. Feed the Future has revised its indicators over the years to try to better address some aspects, including measuring direct and indirect beneficiaries over a longer time period, but more work remains. For scaling in food systems, changing how we model and measure systemic change is very important. This is a critical challenge beyond Feed the Future -- all major food and agriculture programs are at the beginning stages of developing new approaches to measuring system transformation. These will include breaking down the analytical silos separating key sectors affected by climate and food issues, embracing multi-disciplinary approaches to assess social and political as well as economic impacts of potential changes, and – as a new standard practice – illuminating and valuing the positive and negative externalities affecting the environment, health, and livelihoods embodied in current systems and proposed alternatives.

