

Global Food Security Act reauthorization: Responding to new and lingering challenges

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US global food security efforts must be strengthened

The **Global Food Security Act (GFSA)** authorizes the Feed the Future Initiative (FTF), the US government's premier effort to address the root causes of hunger and poverty in lower- and middle-income countries. In the last decade, FTF has reached millions, moving individuals and families above the poverty line and allowing children to live free from stunting and malnutrition. The GFSA must recognize how the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change wreak havoc on global food security efforts. A renewed commitment to existing investments along with new approaches that build on FTF's legacy of success is essential to meeting the challenge of ending hunger and malnutrition. Through GFSA, the US can leverage the full power of coordinated US government agency partners, US research, and perhaps most importantly, strengthened local partnerships and capacity development to ensure FTF is transformational for communities in the decades to come.

Feed the Future faces pressing new challenges

FTF faces a multitude of challenges, many of which have changed since the GFSA was last authorized in 2018. COVID-19 has devastated countries globally by destabilizing governments, overwhelming health systems, and dismantling progress made on food and nutrition security. Since the pandemic began, progress in reducing global hunger and poverty has fallen to pre-2018 levels.

In contrast, funding for global food security programs has remained relatively stagnant, exacerbating income losses and increases in food prices brought on by global supply chain and economic disruptions. The World Bank estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed an additional 119 to 124 million people around the world into extreme poverty in 2020. Estimates of undernourished people rose during that same period. Between 720 and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020, an increase of 118 million over the previous year. In addition to the more widely covered issues of missed childhood vaccinations,

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5 to 7 million more children may be stunted, resulting in irreversible physical and mental damage.

Farmers, particularly smallholders, have simultaneously suffered from unpredictable weather, higher temperatures, and changing rainfall, all indicators of a growing climate crisis. Agricultural land spread and

quality are experiencing disruptions due to changes in climate. Altered weather patterns and temperatures have forced farmers to change when and how they grow crops. Crop yields for major staples such as corn are expected to decrease. Desertification alone will result in a predicted loss of millions of square kilometers across Africa. FTF needs additional approaches and resources to adapt to these changes and make a real difference in eliminating global hunger.

New approaches can help sustain progress toward ending hunger

From the beginning, FTF has been intended as a whole-of-government effort, currently coordinated across 11 US government agencies led by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Although first and foremost a food security effort, FTF can strengthen existing efforts to appropriately integrate nutrition;

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gender; water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH); climate adaptation; and other policies and strategies with major implications on global food security. Through clearer and more efficient coordination, the United States can better use its existing resources to meet new challenges.

US agricultural research and development (ag R&D) is one area in which the United States can better leverage its wide spectrum of knowledge. Ag R&D is the backbone of many groundbreaking innovations, both through domestic research institutions and global partnerships such as CGIAR. However, the US's role as a knowledge leader is being threatened. Investments in ag R&D have fallen despite measurable returns on investment as high as 10 to 1. Elevated long-term, stable investment in ag R&D now is essential to increase yields, diversify diets,

improve nutritional content, and adapt to a changing climate for years to come.

For truly sustainable improvements to poverty and malnutrition, policymakers should connect to farmers and communities to deeply engage community needs and preferences. The US government has begun elevating these concerns in policy, as in the new draft Local Capacity Development Policy, but deep engagement in practice is often accompanied by complex challenges. Recognizing existing community and individual assets and negotiating what long-term success looks like with community actors is critical to real and sustainable development.

Recommendations

The upcoming GFSA offers an opportunity to reassess US global food security programming in the face of a changing world. Congress can strengthen the legacy of US global food security efforts by affirming research commitments, particularly amid the climate crisis, and reimagining the US's relationship with local communities. By reinforcing existing investments, increasing coordination, and more effectively using US government resources, the GFSA can deliver sustained, equitable, and nimble progress toward ending hunger and malnutrition.

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- 1. Congress should increase authorization for appropriations, allowing FTF to help farmers and communities adapt to a changing climate and the ripple effects of the pandemic.**

2. Congress should recognize the importance of global food security and agriculture programs as well as the role of ag R&D for addressing climate change. **Extension efforts should be incorporated into the R&D process, especially around climate-smart agriculture and food security issues, to ensure that smallholder farmers have the information they need to adapt to a changing climate, protect their livelihoods, and feed their communities.**
3. **US government agency partners should increase data sharing and multimodel assessments around climate and agriculture to assist farmers in managing risks posed by climate change**, ensuring farmers ultimately receive crucial information. Examples include ensuring major climate data sources such as the US Department of Agriculture Climate Hubs, AgMIP, NASA Harvest, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration water resource mapping are connected with FTF Innovation Labs. New initiatives such as PREPARE and AIM4C can also be included once formally in operation.
4. US government efforts, particularly through USAID, have recently emphasized local capacity development and community engagement, which are critical to driving sustainable, long-term decreases in poverty and stunting. **Congress should prioritize local capacity development in the GFSA to reinforce the importance of community engagement in food security efforts.**
5. **FTF Innovation Labs should be appropriately resourced to address farmer and community needs and preferences at every stage of the research process.** Innovation Labs serve an important role in providing critical R&D to inform and address global food security efforts. They should have the capacity for robust consultations with intended beneficiary communities, in addition to strengthened partnerships with local universities and research institutions for capacity development. The Innovation Labs themselves can also better leverage diverse US research and knowledge, with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) prioritized for consideration as hosts of new Innovation Labs.