



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

# A Handbook for Engagement

Feed the Future would like to thank the following organizations for their support, feedback and contributions in developing the content for this publication.



This handbook uses the following broad definition for **civil society organization**: Any organization, whether formal or informal, that is not part of the apparatus of government, that does not distribute profits to its directors or operators, that is self-governing and in which participation is a matter of free choice. Both member-serving and public-serving organizations are included. Embraced within this definition, therefore, are private, not-for-profit health providers, schools, advocacy groups, social service agencies, anti-poverty groups, development agencies, professional associations, community-and faith-based organizations, unions, religious bodies, recreational organizations, cultural institutions, and many more.<sup>1</sup>



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# Letter of Introduction

Dear Colleagues:

The Global Food Security Act of 2016 strengthens and builds on Feed the Future's approach. It calls for leveraging "resources and expertise through partnerships with the private sector, farm organizations, cooperatives, civil society, faith-based organizations, and agricultural research and academic institutions."<sup>2</sup> **The U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy** recognizes how such partnerships "improve the reach, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of our efforts."<sup>3</sup>

We know that partnerships in agricultural development must begin with farmers and other stakeholders on the ground and the organizations that represent them. By working together and harnessing the skills, expertise and knowledge of local development actors across all sectors, we will be able to advance the U.S. Government's food security and nutrition goals while also contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

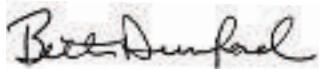
Feed the Future's focus on partnerships reflects a deepening consensus about a new paradigm for aid effectiveness that prioritizes inclusive country ownership. In helping to reorient development toward more locally driven and participatory approaches, the Aid Effectiveness Agenda underscores the value that engaging a wide range of citizens and stakeholders has for the effectiveness and durability of development. Such engagement creates new incentives for citizens, civil society organizations, government and donors to collaborate as they seek to accomplish shared development goals.

The economic, social and environmental objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals are so ambitious that their timely accomplishment requires the active, sustained participation of all sectors of society. The scale of the resource, capacity development and sustainability challenges is such that the most promising pathway is a “whole-of-society” mobilization and investment strategy. Success in addressing enormous development challenges will require mobilizing and engaging a broad range of institutions, stakeholders and communities. The benefits of this approach are increased effectiveness, greater transparency and longer-lasting development gains.

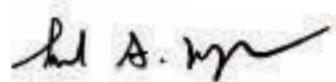
Effective and sustainable progress against hunger and poverty requires inclusive engagement with local civil society organizations and other stakeholders that are partners in program implementation, have strong linkages with local communities, bring their own private resources to bear, and develop innovative interventions tailored to local needs. By rooting its activities in partnerships that put local actors and organizations in the lead, Feed the Future ensures that development initiatives are locally owned and driven.

Feed the Future is committed to leveraging the power of both U.S.-based and local civil society organizations to ensure sustainable, country-driven programming. Feed the Future strengthens civil society engagement by facilitating deep collaboration among diverse civil society actors, including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, farmer cooperatives and associations, and women’s groups. Civil society organizations often implement development programs. They provide critical input on programming priorities. They help to empower individuals in both rural and urban settings and to educate them on food security and nutrition issues. They collaborate with host-country government to ensure it responds to citizen needs, and they forge other partnerships to act as drivers of change in their communities and countries.

We have already seen what's possible when we work together. Working with a diverse array of partners, from governments, private companies and other donors to universities and civil society, Feed the Future is helping millions of poor subsistence farmers improve their productivity and nutrition, connect to financial services and markets, and build better lives for their families and communities. Through partnerships, we strive collectively to catalyze and accelerate the food systems transformation required to reach the goal of sustainably reducing global hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Together, we are contributing to notable drops in poverty and stunting in Feed the Future target areas and to the achievement of broader development goals in the countries where we work. The task now is to sustain and extend this progress to ensure it reaches the most vulnerable populations and makes a lasting difference. Local ownership and partnerships will continue to be critical, and we hope this handbook will be a useful guide in cultivating them.



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# Background

## Civil Society Engagement Unlocks Full Potential of Aid Effectiveness

The principles from the **High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness**—the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership Agreement—emphasize local ownership, local capacity development, and collaborative partnerships among aid agencies and local actors.<sup>4</sup> Helping to reorient development toward more locally driven and participatory approaches, these agreements underscore the value that engaging a wide range of stakeholders has for the effectiveness and durability of development. They also reflect an international consensus that the economic, social and environmental ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without the active and sustained participation of all sectors of society.

In line with these principles, the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy prioritizes locally owned and sustainable development assistance based on collaborative partnerships. In particular, Feed the Future works closely with local civil

society because of the vital role it plays in aggregating and representing stakeholder interests, whether this work is bringing farmers together to negotiate better prices or representing farmers' interests in national or regional policy-making processes.

Civil society engagement has long been a Feed the Future priority. In 2013, U.S. Government agencies implementing Feed the Future and U.S. civil society leaders held a series of discussions to address how the U.S. Government's flagship global hunger and food security initiative could better engage civil society by aligning itself with the Aid Effectiveness Agenda. These discussions culminated in a set of recommendations that formed the **Feed the Future Civil Society Action Plan (CSAP)**,<sup>5</sup> which had its public release on May 19, 2014. With a focus on training Feed the Future staff and providing them with the resources and guidance needed to design and implement activities that effectively engage and strengthen civil society, the CSAP outlines Feed the Future's plan to deepen its engagement with civil society.

This Feed the Future civil society engagement handbook provides suggestions on ways to put local partners in the lead and make sustained civil society engagement in food security development more accessible, constructive and productive. It describes four practices and highlights country examples for meaningful engagement. It also explains the rationale, capabilities and convening mechanisms that development actors are using to promote local ownership and sustainability. It is intended to complement the CSAP and draws on Feed the Future's already robust experience working with civil society. As with the CSAP, Feed the Future developed this handbook through an extensive consultative process with U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations.

## Local Ownership and Civil Society Engagement in Practice<sup>6</sup>

This handbook outlines four engagement practices for promoting local ownership and engaging civil society in an effort to translate aid effectiveness principles into practical mechanisms to advance development that is more participatory, inclusive, transparent, accountable and sustainable.

1. Local civil society and other stakeholders should participate meaningfully and help shape development priorities and strategies.
2. Local ownership should be based on a multi-stakeholder, “whole-of-society” approach.
3. The enabling environment and operating space for civil society and other non-state actors should facilitate their participation in development.
4. Civil society engagement and participation may require strengthening organizations’ capacity to be effective and sustainable.

These engagement practices, drawn from the principles of aid effectiveness and from the experience of those who have applied them in the field, are intended to support Feed the Future in promoting locally owned and led development as envisioned in the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy.

Under each engagement practice are illustrative steps or activities. Although these steps are designed to advance

local ownership and more effective civil society engagement, they are not universally applicable. Rather, they serve as an illustrative guide for advancing the engagement practices, keeping in mind that interventions should be tailored to each unique context. There also are country examples and additional resources under each engagement practice to explain how the practice has been used effectively and to provide more information to practitioners who seek to implement the practice in their own work.

The approach outlined in this handbook recognizes the multiplicity of actors in any system. It also recognizes the interconnectedness of these actors and the important role that each of them plays. Civil society is one of many actors to consider in a given local system, and practitioners will have to decide how best to include civil society and which organizations to engage in order to accomplish food and nutrition security goals. Such decisions should start with a strong understanding of the systems in which Feed the Future works and how best to work with local stakeholders to maximize and sustain Feed the Future investments.<sup>7</sup>

Feed the Future already has considerable experience working with civil society in the field and knows the value added that such an approach can bring. Oftentimes, civil society provides an important link to intended project beneficiaries and participants that ensures their voices are heard and are represented in projects or host-country processes. For example, Feed the Future supports producer associations to increase the bargaining power and raise the voices of individual producers. In policy dialogues, it supports local advocacy organizations and coalitions to represent the interests of farmers, fishers or other producers while also creating stronger policy systems that are more responsive and foster mutual accountability. Feed the Future recognizes that strengthening and partnering with local organizations not only supports local ownership, but it also fortifies the local systems where Feed the Future works. This better ensures that development projects continue long after Feed the Future investment has ended. This handbook draws on that experience to guide future efforts to engage and increase the capacity of civil society in Feed the Future programming.



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## ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE 1

# Meaningful Participation

**Local civil society and other stakeholders should participate meaningfully and help shape development priorities and strategies.**

An explicit premise of aid effectiveness is that local “stakeholders”—the citizens, civil society and institutions of the countries in which Feed the Future works—should become active agents of development rather than passive recipients of it. This engagement practice aims to broaden and systematize consultations and partnerships with local stakeholders, particularly civil society actors, and to ensure that they participate meaningfully in development projects and processes, whether they are Feed the Future activities or host-country policy reform processes. In Feed the Future assistance, mechanisms for civil society and other stakeholder engagement should be inclusive and iterative across the program cycle. Not only will such engagement yield more sustainable and effective interventions, it also will legitimize civil society being at the table in other local fora and decision-making processes while increasing organizations’ capacity to engage meaningfully.

Illustrative steps or activities:

- Establish **accessible processes** to encourage and legitimize the sustained participation of civil society and other stakeholders in development projects and processes. To promote broad-based and effective participation, engagement should be inclusive, with the full involvement of women, youth, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups. Engagement should be conducted in local languages, culturally sensitive and otherwise tailored to the local context.
- Ensure that civil society and other stakeholder engagement and consultations are **consistent and occur regularly** from project design to implementation to monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- Establish **expectations, standards and mechanisms for local stakeholder engagement** throughout the program

cycle. For example, forming an inclusive project advisory council with local stakeholders to analyze regularly the local context and project progress (or any problems that might arise) can help to ensure that activities stay on track to achieve desired results.

- Provide civil society and other stakeholders with **access to the information they need** to participate effectively. Public access to timely, relevant information helps stakeholders to make their participation substantive and well informed. Such access to information may require Feed the Future to increase transparency efforts throughout the program cycle and to support host-country government and private sector reforms to operate more transparently and accountably. Stakeholders also may need access to data sets that inform decision-making. Such data sets should be in a user-friendly format so that external stakeholders can aggregate and analyze them.
- Promote either the creation of new or the strengthening of existing **host-country government and other local mechanisms and participatory processes** that encourage broad-based stakeholder and civil society participation in development. Such mechanisms and processes can be promoted from the national level, such as in public consultation on laws or policies, all the way down to the community level, such as civil society involvement in establishing a municipal development plan.
- Create mechanisms to **demonstrate responsiveness** to civil society and other stakeholder engagement. Donors, host-country governments, the private sector or whoever is leading a development process should track and report to stakeholders on the ways their input influences the strategies, designs and implementation of programs and the monitoring of development results. The range of discussion and opinions expressed at meetings should be captured through notes that are made available in a timely manner to all participants and the general public.

## Examples of Engagement Practice 1

### CIVIL SOCIETY LEADS ACROSS BORDERS IN AFRICA

More than 100 organizations from 45 nations formed the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development

Program (CAADP) **Non-State Actors Coalition** (CNC), a continental platform for farmers' groups, civil society organizations and private sector actors to participate actively in the CAADP process. The CNC represents the interests of small-scale producers to ensure that CAADP meets their needs and that governments follow through on their stated goal to transform agriculture on the continent. It also advocates **policies** that better enable local people and communities to increase their productivity, their income from agriculture and their food security.<sup>8</sup>

At the national level, CNC members build local civil society capacity to evaluate national progress toward CAADP objectives. They actively seek opportunities to engage with governments on activities. They employ tools like country-specific report cards to contribute to the CAADP Biennial Review. Generally, they also become more involved in agricultural development. The CNC has already responded to interest from civil society networks in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda to help them promote agricultural sector improvements and developments more strategically and effectively.

Feed the Future supports the CNC to ensure civil society participates regularly and effectively in international and national policy processes related to the agricultural sector. As the CAADP process brings together African nations to prioritize agricultural development, the CNC represents farmers and other local actors in the process and promotes mutual accountability by monitoring implementation and continuing to press for evidence-based reforms. The CNC is an inclusive and prominent platform for mobilizing civil society engagement in CAADP across the continent. This gives it the ability not just to participate in regional policy dialogue but also to link national civil society organizations with similar interests across countries and provide them with the support they need to be effective in their respective country contexts. Feed the Future partners with the CNC to help the coalition fulfill that unique and important role.<sup>9</sup>

### LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS TAKE THE LEAD IN ZAMBIA

In Zambia, Feed the Future, through the United States African Development Foundation, provided grants to local organizations to put them in the lead to improve value chains and local development processes and

outcomes. The grants enabled the organizations, such as the **Petauke District Farmers Association**, to support farmers with quality control training, agricultural extension services, improved seeds and a guaranteed market for their nutritious groundnut crop. Additionally, the Petauke District Farmers Association supplied groundnut oil to the children's wing of the District General Hospital to be used as high-nutrition cooking oil in an area where many children suffer from stunting. A key to achieving the desired results was identifying ready partners who knew the local context and had a strong link with the people they represented and the capacity to engage in development processes.<sup>10</sup>

## LINKING GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN NEPAL

**Steven Fosher, a Peace Corps volunteer**, brought together civil society and government actors to identify and address local development needs. After consulting with community members about how to improve their families' diets and generate income, Fosher helped the District Agriculture Development Office and local groups distribute fruit trees to community members. When community members

received the trees, they also learned about proper planting techniques and how to maintain and care for the trees. His efforts met with enthusiasm, and the project soon expanded to include timber trees for livestock fodder and live fencing for crops and erosion prevention on hillsides. In total, 10 women's and community groups, eight schools, six village development committees and one municipality participated in the activity and continue to care for and benefit from the trees.

This approach enabled the community to respond to its priorities and the government to be responsive to citizens. By allowing local actors to take the lead and fortifying linkages between government and civil society, more people engaged directly in the project, and their lives changed for the better. This type of facilitation approach can be replicated across all levels of Feed the Future by consulting with key local actors and designing interventions to strengthen existing local systems. Leveraging relationships and partnerships across U.S. Government development assistance also can promote civil society engagement and country ownership.<sup>11</sup>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The **System-wide Collaborative, Action for Livelihoods and Environment (SCALE+)** methodology can help program managers design and implement local solutions that apply a systems lens, build social capital, and facilitate locally driven development.<sup>12</sup> The **Feed the Future Catalyzing Partnerships for Scale** mechanism can support U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Missions to increase the rate of adoption of production-, nutrition-, and resilience-enhancing technologies and practices using the SCALE+ methodology.<sup>13</sup> In Kenya, USAID has already used the methodology to increase the number of dairy farmers using high-nutrition fodder plants to improve their productivity and incomes.

**Collaborating, learning and adapting** can be incorporated across the program cycle to engage stakeholders continually, learn from them and make strategic adjustments to achieve results.<sup>14</sup>

**Managing adaptively** can build needed flexibility into project mechanisms to respond to changing local needs and allow civil society and other stakeholders to drive the process and results.<sup>15</sup>

Using a co-creation approach, such as through a USAID **Broad Agency Announcement**, is one way to involve local civil society and other stakeholders in designing a response to a particular development challenge.<sup>16</sup>

**Thinking and working politically** (TWP) is an approach which promotes flexible, adaptive development assistance that responds to the local context.<sup>17</sup> TWP can be supported by iterative **applied political economy analysis (PEA)** to analyze and understand the local context, including the factors that impact growth and governance, such as history, geography, formal and informal rules and their implementation, social and cultural beliefs and practices, and current dynamics. PEA also can identify opportunities, development actors, and incentives that can drive or inhibit change. Feed the Future can use TWP and PEA to design, implement and evaluate locally owned and led projects that are appropriate and feasible in a given country context.<sup>18</sup>



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## ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE 2

# Whole-of-Society Development

Local ownership should be based on a multi-stakeholder, whole-of-society approach.

A whole-of-society approach means enabling and empowering stakeholders from all sectors of society to assume much more direct and effective roles in shaping their own development. The stakeholders engaged should be broadly reflective of the diversity of interests within a country, thus they should include people of various ethnicities, religions and physical/mental abilities; women, youth, and various social categories; and the private sector. This approach also recognizes the importance of inclusion to empower all citizens rather than a select few. Such an approach must be strategic, though, to ensure that the right stakeholders are identified and consulted across society. Additionally, locally owned development requires mechanisms and formats to ensure that strategic multi-stakeholder mobilization and participation are sustained throughout program cycles and longer-term development processes.

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Illustrative steps or activities:

- Support **surveying or mapping the landscape of non-state actors and development stakeholders**—who is doing what, where—to ensure inclusive and strategic engagement processes and to identify capabilities and resources that can contribute to locally owned development.
- Be **inclusive**. Engage women's and youth-led organizations, ethnic and social minorities, and representatives of other disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, to ensure they have a seat at the table. Support these groups with appropriate resources and technical assistance to ensure they can participate fairly and effectively.
- **Support coalitions and build linkages** to bring diverse groups together to work collaboratively to achieve a shared vision and speak with a stronger, unified voice. Coalitions may help link community-based organizations to national-level civil society organizations to promote improved communication and ensure that local interests are well represented at the national level.
- **Balance the representation and participation of groups** in dialogue, planning and implementation to ensure organizations with a historical lack of influence in setting and implementing development agendas are not dominated by those with greater clout.
- Establish, in collaboration with host-country governments, **communications and information-sharing tools** to enable all stakeholders to learn about, access and participate effectively in national development processes.
- Enable the **active and productive participation** of civil society and other stakeholders at all levels and regardless of income by, for example, meeting in easily accessible venues or offsetting the costs of engagement (e.g., paying for staff time or travel).

## Examples of Engagement Practice 2

### BUILDING A COALITION IN GHANA

Coalitions play an important role in promoting participatory processes that bring together multiple stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of coalitions, Feed the Future partnered with an international nongovernmental organization, the Alliance to End Hunger, to support

stronger civil society organizations and coalitions in target countries. In Ghana, the Alliance partnered with the Hunger Alliance of Ghana, providing it with hands-on assistance and funding to develop and reach its organizational goals. Over time, the Hunger Alliance has blossomed into an effective vehicle for civil society and other actors to participate in food security and nutrition decision-making in Ghana. It now has 40 members and 140 collaborators to advance its mission of achieving a hunger-free society.

Recently, the Hunger Alliance held a series of consultative meetings that brought together representatives from civil society organizations, the private sector, multilateral organizations and donors to discuss nutrition, food security, and agricultural development reforms. The Hunger Alliance also facilitated the creation of a hunger task force in the Ghanaian Parliament to advance key reforms more effectively.<sup>19</sup>

### WORKING TOGETHER FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN HONDURAS

In Honduras, a national policy called for increased spending on women's economic activities, but local implementation was limited. The policy, therefore, did not have the intended impact of facilitating women's access to resources that would help them achieve food security. To encourage this implementation, USAID partnered with women's networks in nine municipalities that represent the voices of more than 3,000 women. The project increased women's leadership skills, broadened their access to credit, responded to their



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needs in the agricultural sector, raised men's awareness of the benefits of gender equality, and engaged government and civil society leaders in policy formation and implementation to start to narrow the gender gap in agriculture.

Working hand in hand with civil society partners and existing networks, USAID ensured that women and men in the target municipalities led the process and had the capacity to continue to organize, work together and engage government to promote gender equality long after the project ended. By identifying the disparity between the policy and its implementation, USAID helped local partners use local tools to advocate inclusive development in their communities and ensure that agricultural development benefits both women and men. More project information is available [here](#),<sup>20</sup> including information on the project's approach and a video and comprehensive toolkit for designing a similar project.



Beekeeping is a collaborative effort. © MORGAN ARNOLD / LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In recognition of the fact that engaging everyone is neither effective nor efficient, this USAID [blog post](#) by Monalisa Salib explores how to make collaboration more strategic by identifying who needs to participate in order for the interests of appropriate groups to be represented.<sup>21</sup>

Root Change, a social change organization, has developed one [model](#) for civil society mapping and networking.<sup>22</sup> The approach seeks to identify and then link organizations to help them achieve their development objectives. The CAADP Non-State Actors Coalition deployed the tool in Tanzania and Senegal, leading to the creation of the [AgriNSA Map](#).<sup>23</sup>

FSG, a consulting firm for social change leaders, uses an approach called [collective impact](#), which "occurs when organizations from different sectors agree to solve a specific social problem using a common agenda, aligning their efforts and using common measures of success."<sup>24</sup>



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## ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE 3

# Enabling Environment

The enabling environment and operating space for local civil society and other non-state actors should facilitate their participation in development.

The enabling environment and operating space for civil society and other non-state actors affects their ability to participate fully in development. The parameters and determinants of the enabling environment and operating space are the policy decisions, regulations and laws implemented by central and local governments. In many countries, civil society space is increasingly constrained by restrictive government policies and laws. Such measures not only limit the freedoms and autonomy of civil society but also directly, and sometimes critically, hamper civil society contributions to national development.

The U.S. Government is committed to safeguarding and expanding the space for civil society around the world. Feed the Future may be able to support civil society in the sectors of agriculture and nutrition even in places where civil society activity is otherwise constrained. Such support can catalyze broader civil society participation in development and can

help to preserve civil society operating space and to develop civic values and participation skills. Nonetheless, Feed the Future must exercise caution to ensure support helps local partners without having unintended consequences.<sup>25</sup>

Illustrative steps or activities:

- Create the conditions for success in whole-of-society, locally owned development by opening **more supportive policy, legal and regulatory spaces for all civil society** and other non-state actors to work. Constraints that reduce the legitimacy, independence and operating space of local and international nongovernmental organizations should be identified and eliminated.
- Non-state actors should have the ability to **organize, register, seek funding, convene supporters, operate programs and engage with governments and donors**.

That ability should not vary by gender, race, ethnicity or any other factor.

- Ensure that the enabling environment allows civil society to play the **range of roles** it should in order to achieve more effective development. Civil society should be able to access information and data, engage in policy dialogues and other development processes, and advocate reforms and accountability, among other things.
- Continually **monitor** the civil society-enabling environment, **adapt assistance** to respond to changing needs and circumstances, and support civil society as much as possible regardless of constraints on civil society operations. It is often imperative to respond quickly, empower local voices to prevent and fight against closing space, and build coalitions to work together to confront challenges.<sup>26</sup>
- Nurture organizations led by **youth** and provide youth leaders with more opportunities to learn and participate in development. In many societies, the large share of youth in the population can present a risk to social stability or an opportunity for enhanced engagement and empowerment of future civil society leaders.



Community members in Burma review maps and make use of their data.  
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shared by all. Historically, insecure land rights discouraged farmers from investing in their land to improve productivity. Working across sectors, USAID Mission Burma facilitated an unprecedented public comment and consultation process on the country's first national land use policy.

Civil society advocacy and engagement enriched the process and produced a better policy that recognized ethnic ancestral lands for the first time.

Civil society participation ensured that the policy responds to citizen needs and interests. The development of this policy marks a change in the government's willingness to involve civil society in decision-making and to be accountable to citizens. USAID, recognizing the important value added of working with civil society organizations and ensuring their voices were heard, put local organizations and actors in the lead to ensure they owned and led the process.

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## Examples of Engagement Practice 3

### CIVIL SOCIETY INFLUENCES LAND REFORM IN BURMA

Land reform is one of many critical reforms underway in Burma as it moves toward a more inclusive, democratic society in which the benefits of economic development are

### WATER USERS ASSOCIATIONS BRING CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT TOGETHER IN TAJIKISTAN

In Tajikistan, Feed the Future supported the creation and strengthening of water users associations to bring farmers together to improve their access to and the management of irrigation water for nearly 122,655 hectares of land, affecting approximately 127,450 households. Water users associations are well recognized and proven nongovernmental organiza-



In Tajikistan, members of water users associations participate in programming and development processes, helping to improve water management. © USAID

tions that manage, maintain and self-finance irrigation water distribution within a contiguous service area. The associations serve a fundamental need to distribute irrigation water efficiently and equitably, and the Tajik government accepts them because they serve that important role.

The associations give people a voice and an opportunity to participate in their communities, constructively engage government authorities, and jointly manage a precious resource for the benefit of everyone. Members acquire skills in advocacy to engage government effectively in responding to local water management needs, in disputing resolutions to hold people and government accountable for appropriate water usage, and in organizational and financial management to sustain the associations in the long term. The water management improvements that the associations spearheaded increased agricultural productivity by enabling farmers to produce more than one crop per year in some areas.

Feed the Future has supported the establishment of the necessary laws and regulations to permit the formation and operation of water users associations in Tajikistan. It also has supported the creation and strengthening of water users associations there. Given its success and strategic importance in developing the agricultural sector, Feed the Future continues to build the associations' management capacity. The associations maintain a foothold for civil society engagement in programming and community development processes, so the impact of supporting them extends far beyond improved water management.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The USAID *Stand with Civil Society: Best Practices* (2014) paper provides tools and strategies for safeguarding and expanding civic space, which are derived from USAID experience working with civil society, governments and multilateral organizations.<sup>27</sup>

There are numerous resources to assess the civil society enabling environment, including: the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Indices for **Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Eurasia, Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**; the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law **Civic Freedom Monitor**; and the CIVICUS Enabling Environment resources.<sup>28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34</sup>



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## ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE 4

# Capacity Strengthening

Civil society engagement and participation may require strengthening local organizations' capacity to be effective and sustainable.

Local civil society organizations, particularly those at the subnational level, which may be better able to represent farmer and other local stakeholder interests, often lack the organizational and technical capacity to engage effectively in development processes and decision-making. This can be the case especially for youth-led and women-led organizations, which often have fewer financial resources and may suffer from social barriers. Equipping organizations with certain tools and skills may help them become stronger, more legitimate and sustainable actors that can assess and represent citizen interests in local, national and even international fora.

Illustrative steps or activities:

- Focus on **developing the capacity of local civil society** as organizations, as technical actors within a given area, and as a sector. Feed the Future has a wealth of experience in strengthening local capacity through direct

awards to local organizations and through technical assistance and training. This experience can be used to shape capacity strengthening assistance.

- Draw on **cross-sectoral experiences** to build the technical and organizational capacities of civil society actors. Some sectors focus on increasing civil society capacity to aggregate and represent citizen interests and to serve as an accountability watchdog. Other sectors, like health and education, may focus on civil society organizations as direct service providers. Civil society assistance may be more effective when it is designed as a mixed approach that builds organizations both as representative bodies and as service providers. In the Feed the Future context, for example, programming might increase the capacity of a farmers association to work collectively to increase incomes and represent farmers' interests in their communities.

- **Measure capacity development** over time to respond to changing circumstances, and tailor assistance to empower organizations to become effective, self-sustaining entities. Measuring organizational performance using a tool such as the Organizational Performance Index (see page 17) is a more holistic way to measure the outcomes of capacity development.

## Examples of Engagement Practice 4

### ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN MALAWI

The USAID-funded **Feed the Future Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains** (INVC) project in Malawi partnered with local civil society organizations to enhance household nutrition and to increase the incomes of smallholder farmers through improved agricultural practices. After identifying collaboration with civil society as a strategically effective means to reach farmers and heighten their voices, INVC helped its local civil society-partner organizations to institute improved financial management and procurement practices, to increase their focus on business for the purpose of exploring new income sources and increasing their sustainability, and to better support farmers.



A Pamoja participant tends to green peppers grown using a drip irrigation system. © WORLD VISION

INVC, together with USAID Mission Malawi's local, Mission-wide capacity development activity, piloted the Organizational Performance Index (OPI) with two local partners. The OPI assessed the existing performance of these local organizations and then assessed the improvements in their performance that occurred as a result of USAID support. The OPI also provided an opportunity for the organizations themselves to evaluate their progress toward their goals and to take steps to address weaknesses. By leveraging other capacity development resources and expertise available in the Mission, as well as by using the OPI, Feed the Future more effectively tailored its assistance to the needs of its local partners.<sup>35</sup>

### CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE IN TANZANIA

World Vision's **Pamoja** project built resilience and improved the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in Tanzania. Pamoja developed and successfully implemented Empowered World View, a method to change how target populations view the resources available to them and how they use those resources to improve their livelihoods. In the wake of this mindset change, households and communities increasingly took responsibility for their own progress and for the community management of natural resources. World Vision used this change as a vehicle to bring people together to increase **social accountability** and form producer groups and associations, as well as to introduce a variety of innovative agricultural approaches and better connect farmers to markets. By first assessing why food insecurity persisted and why communities were not actively taking charge of their development, Pamoja was better able to catalyze the formation of strong, active civil society organizations to address local development needs.<sup>36, 37</sup>

### LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT YIELDS SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

For 10 years, USAID supported the African Fine Coffees Association (AFCA) to grow from a fledgling organization to an industry leader. AFCA is a regional, nonprofit, member-driven association representing coffee sectors in 11 member countries, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Over the course of a rigorous organizational development

process that focused on honing AFCA's strategy and building its organizational capacity in over 45 organizational areas, including planning, internal controls, training, human resources and risk management, AFCA moved from total donor dependence to operational independence and financial sustainability. AFCA also increased its impact and reach by forming key partnerships with organizations in its member countries and increasing the organizational capacity of its national chapters. The market results show the impact of building AFCA's capacity to promote Africa's specialty coffee industry—from 2001 to 2014, specialty

coffee sales grew by an average of 20 percent annually, and the value of sales quadrupled to over \$300 million.

USAID began this development initiative by identifying the particular product and civil society actor that held the potential to increase farmer incomes in Africa. Then, with AFCA in the lead, USAID provided continued support to the association as it grew into an effective, sustainable organization. This strengthening helped AFCA navigate international markets and cultivate support from national partners across the region.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The **Organizational Performance Index** measures performance across multiple domains and in relation to the broader system in which a particular organization operates. The tool is easy to use. It emphasizes outcomes, measures, and organizational effectiveness and efficiency in the near term. It also captures the relevance and sustainability of an organization over the longer term.<sup>38</sup>

The **Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA)** is a self-assessment tool that organizations can use to assess seven essential organizational systems and capabilities: (1) governance and legal structure; (2) financial management and internal control systems; (3) administration and procurement systems; (4) human resources systems; (5) program management; (6) project performance management; and (7) organizational management and sustainability. The OCA is intended to be used to produce an action plan for capacity improvements that is owned and implemented by the organization itself. The OCA also can be adapted so that it is more suitable for certain organizations or in certain development contexts, for example, with the use of the National Alliance Partnership Program's *Self-Assessment Workbook for Network Organizations* (2014) or in the contexts **Africa Lead II** uses for government institutions.<sup>39</sup>

Some countries have tailored capacity measurement tools to better meet the needs of civil society operating in a particular country context and/or sector that may be seen as more legitimate and useful for local organizations. For example, USAID designed **institutional strengthening standards for civil society organizations** in Kenya. The standards help Kenyan organizations working in the health sector become more effective and efficient in the delivery of health services while also making them stronger, more sustainable organizations. The tool was developed through a collaborative process with civil society, government, academic institutions, development partners and other donors.<sup>40</sup>

The Farmer-to-Farmer **Organizational Development Index (ODI)** is a participatory tool to evaluate the organizational capacity of potential host/beneficiary organizations and to track and score the progress they make in improving their organizational capacity over time.<sup>41</sup> The categories assessed include (1) governance, (2) management, (3) human resources, (4) financial management and (5) sustainability. As described in this **online training module**, the ODI also facilitates discussion between project staff and the host on organizational capacity goals, as well as challenges and opportunities, to help plan project interventions.<sup>42</sup>

World Vision's **Citizen Voice and Action in Uganda: Civic Demand for Better Health and Education Services** describes an approach that aims to increase government accountability while also encouraging communities to take greater individual and collective responsibility. World Vision has used this approach in over 150 primary schools and health clinics across Uganda, facilitating community dialogue as well as advocacy and monitoring of government service-provision standards to improve access to, and the quality and accountability of, education, health and water services.<sup>43</sup>



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## Conclusion

The engagement practices outlined in this handbook can help Feed the Future advance the goals of the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy to reduce global hunger, poverty and malnutrition through locally owned and sustainable development assistance. Although the approach to local ownership and civil society engagement must be tailored “to the local context,” the engagement practices in this handbook can help to guide the development and use of such tailored approaches. The potential payoffs from prioritizing local ownership and civil society engagement are increased impact, greater transparency and accountability, and longer-lasting gains. It is a strategy and a process that aims to mobilize the fullest possible range of skills, resources and commitments to accomplish jointly determined national development agendas.

The strategy cannot be completed through one consultation with local actors; it is an iterative process. It should be incorporated into development projects from design to implementation to evaluation, ensuring that projects flexibly respond to local needs and development challenges as they change over time. This approach empowers civil society organizations to participate in development processes and legitimizes their seat at the table, whether in a Feed the Future project or a host-country policy dialogue. Multi-stakeholder participation underlies democratic, accountable governance and creates sustainable mechanisms for government, civil society and the private sector to engage in dialogue and make decisions based on shared interests well beyond the duration of development interventions. It is an approach that supports the implementation of the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy by building local capacity and systems to sustain development results in the long term.

## Endnotes

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