



**FEED**<sup>THE</sup>**FUTURE**

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



# EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR FOOD SECURITY

Photo by Ashley Peterson, Land O'Lakes

Feed the Future is America's initiative to combat global hunger. We help partner countries harness the power of smart agriculture to address the root causes of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, while helping them build resilience and the ability to own their own development for years to come.

[www.feedthefuture.gov](http://www.feedthefuture.gov)

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## WHY WOMEN?

Women play a vital role in ending global hunger. They participate in all aspects of the food system, from farming and research to trade and marketing to entrepreneurship, leadership and caring for family members.

However, women face multiple constraints in many of the activities they pursue. Relative to men, they tend to own less land, have limited ability to hire labor, and face impediments to accessing credit, extension and other services. Social expectations about women's and men's roles and abilities also create unbalanced workloads and limit women's voices and leadership in markets.

Closing this "gender gap" can have a measurable impact on agriculture in developing countries, where many people depend on the sector for a living. When women advance, it has a ripple effect throughout their families and communities: Studies show that women are more likely than men to reinvest their income back into their household to support the family's nutrition, health and education.

### Women Feed the Future

- ✓ Women are key to solving hunger. They make up nearly half the agricultural workforce in developing countries and, when they have equal access to land and other inputs, their yields can improve by 20-30 percent, feeding up to 150 million more people.
- ✓ Empowered women are better able to improve nutrition. Improvements in women's status account for more than a quarter of the reductions in undernutrition among children since 1970.
- ✓ Women's empowerment builds resilience. After a catastrophic flood in 2014, Bangladeshi households where women were more empowered maintained or improved their food security.

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## INVESTING IN WOMEN

Feed the Future helps women – as business owners, farmers, health workers and more – overcome barriers and constraints to reaching their full potential. For example, we help women:

- Access assets, markets and information.
- Increase their participation and decision-making roles both in the household and in community groups.
- Gain greater access to financial and business services.

In fact, Feed the Future helped 458,000 women access agriculture-related credit, including more than \$80 million in rural loans, in 2017 alone. We helped 9,000 women's groups build their capacities in management, marketing and services like storage and food processing in this time frame too.

Working with governments, businesses, universities, and directly with farmers and processors, Feed the Future provides training and opportunities for women to use agricultural technologies and develop innovations that increase their productivity, make laborious tasks easier and faster, and improve nutrition. In 2017, Feed the Future helped more than 3.6 million women apply improved agricultural technologies and practices – such as new seed varieties, techniques to improve soil health, and practices like planting in rows – which reduce their workload while increasing yields.

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## ENGAGING MEN

Working with women alone is not enough to achieve gender equality and foster an environment where women can benefit fully from improvements. Feed the Future has effectively increased women's leadership roles in their communities by working through community-based organizations, changing gender norms, and engaging men to support women's empowerment efforts.

Take nutrition for example. It has traditionally been treated as women's responsibility. Feed the Future is engaging men in child nutrition and care while promoting more gender-equitable attitudes and responsibilities. In Ghana, videos have helped fathers better understand good nutrition practices, facilitated

conversations between wives and husbands, and encouraged couples to more equally share responsibility for child nutrition and care.

In Senegal, "gender champion couples" model the involvement of men in domestic tasks, gardening and hygiene.

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## MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

Early in the initiative, Feed the Future and its partners developed the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) as a standard for measuring impact. It also serves as a diagnostic to shape programming. Today, partners around the world are using the tool to collect data in more than 47 countries.

This data has even moved governments such as Bangladesh's to design programs that address the greatest constraints women in agriculture face.

The WEAI tracks rural women's roles and engagement in agricultural activities, relative to men's, in the areas of:

- Decisions over agricultural production
- Access to and decision-making power over assets and resources
- Control over use of income
- Leadership roles within the community
- Time use

Thanks to the WEAI, we know that from 2012–2015, in areas where Feed the Future works:

- 3.7 million more women have had input into productive decisions
- 3.3 million more women have had reasonable workloads
- 2.6 million more women have accessed credit and made decisions about what to do with it





Photo by Fintrac, Inc.

## BUSINESS SERVICES LEAD TO GREATER GROWTH IN HONDURAS

Through a program in Honduras, Feed the Future helped women-owned businesses improve their sales by 50 percent, thereby increasing their incomes by 81 percent. One of these businesses is Café ARIMEL, a coffee processing company run by two sisters.

In 2012, with help from Feed the Future, they conducted a business diagnostic to identify opportunities for growth. Feed the Future then provided a suite of trainings in market-driven production, improved productivity, and finance and administration. As a result, Café ARIMEL increased its total sales by 35 percent over two years. “We expect to grow by at least 100 percent over the next five years,” Eunice Arita said.

The sisters have invested in new equipment and are expanding their distribution network. Their success is proving to the larger community that women are capable of running efficient and profitable businesses—something long assumed to be the purview of men.



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