



# **Feed the Future**

## **Civil Society Action Plan**

*May 2014*

Aid is about building partnerships for development. Such partnerships are most effective when they fully harness the energy, skills and experience of all development actors—bilateral and multilateral donors, global funds, CSOs, and the private sector. To support developing countries’ efforts to build for the future, we resolve to create partnerships that will include all these actors.

-Accra Agenda for Action, paragraph 16

Civil society partners play an integral role in our work to end hunger, poverty, and malnutrition around the world. They not only advocate for disadvantaged groups and build local capacity, they also promote rural development and ecological agriculture practices. Engaging civil society partners in a collaborative manner will strengthen Feed the Future’s programs and help make our efforts sustainable.

At the U.N. General Assembly in September 2012, Secretary Clinton announced over \$1 billion in private resources pledged by U.S. civil society to improve food security and nutrition worldwide. She also reminded us that “when we work together to build capacity at the local level that can carry progress forward independently, and when new resources are brought to the table in a transparent, collaborative manner, that is the best strategy for achieving concrete, sustainable results.” This call for a focused, cooperative effort was followed by a series of discussions between government agencies implementing Feed the Future projects and U.S. civil society leaders about how the U.S. government’s flagship food security initiative could be strengthened through increased engagement of civil society. These discussions culminated in a set of recommendations provided by a working group under USAID’s Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid (ACVFA) to serve as critical inputs into this action plan. This action plan represents the initial steps that will be taken to strengthen civil society engagement in Feed the Future projects and will evolve over time as activities are assessed and opportunities arise.



PHOTO: David Snyder

## ACVFA Objective 1

Progress toward eliminating hunger, poverty, and malnutrition is enhanced and Feed the Future is strengthened by high-quality, gender equitable consultation and engagement with a wide range of more empowered civil society organizations in the field and the effective promotion of inclusive country ownership.



PHOTO: Food for the Hungry

**ACVFA Recommendation 1 (excerpted language):** Equip U. S. Government and Feed the Future Missions and staff with appropriate incentives, resources, training and tools—including a collaboratively developed handbook providing practical guidance and quality measures for field staff—to engage and empower local civil society, and identify at least one point of contact at both a Mission and agency headquarters level with the capacity and mandate to facilitate communication and engagement across Feed the Future partner agencies.

## Action Plan:

### Develop a handbook and invest in staff resources, training, and tools

- 1) Guidance to the Field: Feed the Future will issue guidance on the importance and basic tenets of civil society engagement in Feed the Future countries. (Timing: immediate and ongoing)
- 2) Staffing: A well trained and resourced Feed the Future civil society point of contact (POC) will be designated in all Feed the Future agencies in Washington, DC, and in the 19 USAID Feed the Future focus countries. The role of the POCs will be to support civil society engagement and to champion the efforts to strengthen local organizations as partners in Feed the Future projects. This will include sharing information on food security, agriculture, and nutrition; strengthening existing or creating new civil society networks; promoting the engagement of civil society in food security issues, policies, programming, and funding. (Timing: immediate)
- 3) Handbook: A handbook of best practices and lessons learned will be developed focusing on the partnerships that government and civil society organizations (CSOs) have formed to achieve shared development objectives. This handbook will be developed by USAID including the USAID Local Solutions working group, Feed the Future implementing partners, and Feed the Future country staff, in cooperation with CSOs and local indigenous organizations. (Timing: issued by end of 2014).
- 4) Training: Several local solutions courses as well as niche technical trainings are currently being provided by the Feed the Future Interagency and implementing partners. In addition, Feed the Future staff will design a training module focused on engaging civil society to promote food security and nutrition, while also ensuring that it is harmonized with existing gender trainings. (Timing: modules designed by October 2014).



**ACVFA Recommendation 2 (excerpted language):** Increase U.S. Government emphasis, including by Ambassadors, on promoting a supportive enabling environment for civil society in its diplomatic engagement and dialogue with government counterparts at all levels; facilitate opportunities for quality, gender equitable engagement between civil society and government partners; and ensure that Feed the Future demonstrates and promotes inclusive engagement through deliberate outreach to marginalized and vulnerable groups.

## Action Plan:

### Promote diplomatic engagement with CSOs

The State Department will continue to build on commitments outlined in the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, asking diplomats and development professionals to reach beyond governments to offer a place at the table to groups and citizens willing to contribute and work to improve peoples' lives. As part of this effort, the State Department is intensifying its efforts to safeguard civic space in Feed the Future countries and worldwide. In September 2013, President Obama and Secretary Kerry launched Stand with Civil Society, an unprecedented global campaign to push back against restrictions on CSOs. The State Department is asking all U.S. embassies to intensify their work to sustain and defend civil society and requesting that posts provide information on how Washington can amplify these efforts. The U.S. Government is also engaging multilaterally through organizations such as the Community of Democracies, which is successfully coordinating diplomatic action in countries where civil society is threatened by restrictive legislation, and the Open Government Partnership, where we are helping governments



PHOTO: U.S. Department of State

improve the ecosystem for CSOs. The State Department will issue a cable with recommendations to Ambassadors and Embassy staff for engaging with civil society, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, around issues and policies related to food security; this cable will also emphasize the connections between civil society engagement under Feed the Future and the broader United States effort to Stand with Civil Society, including through government-to-government engagement. In addition, the State Department's Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society launched in 2011 is elevating engagement with civil society alongside traditional government-to-government cooperation. The Dialogue has established civil society working groups at more than 40

United States diplomatic posts around the world, and over a dozen major recommendations developed through this process have been adopted as policy by the Secretary of State. Feed the Future will explore opportunities to leverage the work under the Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society as well as President Obama's call to promote diplomatic engagement with CSOs in order to advance Feed the Future. (Timeline: Cable issued by end of May 2014)

**ACVFA Recommendation 3 (excerpted language):** Feed the Future solicitations for projects or programs supporting both governmental and nongovernmental institutions should make provisions for quality civil society engagement. Plans should anticipate the necessary resource requirements and encourage the development of capacity for quality, gender equitable, civil society engagement, in both civil society and government partners. In addition, program planning should better leverage the significant resources, capacity, and potential for partnership offered by U.S. non-governmental and international organizations implementing food security and nutrition programs in-country.

## Action Plan:

### Provide resources and support for project design and program plan-

In recognition of the United States government's commitments to development effectiveness, Feed the Future will seek to place local civil society as well as private sector and government partners at the center of our strategic and project planning processes. Feed the Future collaborators will seek to leverage the United States government's ability to convene governmental and non-governmental partners to discuss development challenges related to food security and nutrition and gain their insights on how the capacities of non-governmental as well as private sector and government partners could be leveraged and combined to address these challenges.

Feed the Future agencies will also leverage the resources of private entities and non-governmental organizations in food security programs to ensure quality civil society engagement at the earliest stages of project design. Feed the Future will build on the work of the USAID Local Solutions working group by making sample solicitations and mechanisms available to all USAID staff and Feed the Future interagency collaborators, and will provide support on how best to incorporate meaningful changes into project design and evaluation to support great local engagement and ownership of Feed the Future programming. Program designers will then have exemplary language that can be included in program descriptions and work plans to promote effective civil society engagement. By including explicit language in solicitations, we hope that the development community can work together to build their capacities, viability and eventual success. (Timeline: ongoing)

**ACVFA Recommendation 4 (excerpted language):** Leverage Feed the Future multi-stakeholder engagement at the country level to strengthen coordination and mutual influence among actors engaged in agriculture, food security, and nutrition. This should include local civil society, multilateral agencies, local government, and the private sector. Where appropriate, strengthen existing platforms or alliances to harmonize and amplify local civil society's "voice" for food security and nutrition at the country level, ensuring authentic representation of the rural populations served by Feed the Future.



PHOTO: USAID

## Action Plan:

### Strengthen local alliances and explore program approaches

Each Feed the Future focus country will explore ways to promote community-government engagement to help drive project results and sustainability, as well as how to best strengthen civil society networks to foster partnerships and organizational capacity. A variety of program modalities will be examined such as social accountability and participatory governance interventions, or a Communities of Practice model that will also include addressing gender roles and class issues that seek to strengthen women's participation and leadership amongst other things.

For example, the Alliance to End Hunger will be working to strengthen six Feed the Future country alliances by increasing their capacity for advocacy and policy analysis. In Africa, the recently awarded Feed the Future Africa Lead II program will strengthen the capacity of non-state actors as stakeholders and partners in the CAADP process. Feed the Future will also support the African Union Commission, New Partnership for Africa's Development, Planning and Coordinating Agency and others to assist countries in developing and implementing inclusive reviews of stakeholder commitments aligned with the National Agricultural and Food Security Investment Plans and sector progress towards national food security goals. These types of projects will provide us with new insights on challenges and how we can effectively engage civil society coalitions to support community-government engagement as well as models to replicate in other countries. (ongoing)

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## ACVFA Objective 2

The U.S. public and its representatives in Congress hear strong, consistent, and strategic messaging about the importance and possibility of eradicating poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, and progress that is being made, from Feed the Future, the broader U.S. Government, and U.S.-based civil society.

**ACVFA Recommendation 5 (excerpted language):** Create a platform for better coordination of education and advocacy efforts between U.S.-based civil society, academia, the private sector and the U.S. government to optimize and amplify messaging around the fight against poverty, hunger, and undernutrition.

## Action Plan:

### Coordination of domestic communications outreach

The Feed the Future communications team will establish a platform for increased engagement between Feed the Future and CSO communicators. This platform will provide partners an opportunity to identify strategic opportunities to coordinate communications around global hunger efforts against common themes, upcoming events, and major messaging moments as well as opportunities to expand outreach with U.S. and international organizations fighting to end hunger and malnutrition.



It will also serve as a forum to identify and share key messages, approaches, and tools that partners can adapt/leverage with a variety of audiences, including the American public who are unaware of Feed the Future and its impact. For example, resource guides with common topline, reference sites, social media hashtags and handles can be developed and shared to help amplify key messages around events with potential for broad reach to domestic audiences. (ongoing)



PHOTO: Peter Jensen

**ACVFA Recommendation 6 (excerpted language):** U.S. leadership and accomplishments in the global fight against poverty, hunger, and undernutrition—and the roles played by Feed the Future and U.S. civil society in these efforts— should be a common and consistent message from the President and his Administration, and a rallying cry for U.S. and international non-governmental partners. Expand the American public’s knowledge of and support for Feed the Future through more consistent whole of government communications, and, together with civil society partners, develop new tools or enhance existing mechanisms such as Biden-Pell, to facilitate effective public outreach.

## Action Plan:

### Develop a whole-of-government message

The Feed the Future communications team will build on existing collaborative processes to strengthen interagency coordination on strategic communications by developing and updating an interagency Feed the Future communications strategy annually. This strategy will include coordinated input from both partner agencies and civil society or-



PHOTO: Jake Lyell

ganizations reflective of core Feed the Future priorities, and will include topline that outline results to date. The communications team will encourage continued amplification of these points by U.S. Government Principals, and will identify and implement strategic opportunities for engagement. They will raise awareness of worldwide hunger issues and all the U.S. is doing to make dramatic progress against them. Messaging will include tangible results that show progress in fighting hunger and will expand knowledge and support for Feed the Future at a domestic level, building a broader narrative that highlights the importance of ending hunger worldwide. (ongoing)

## Conclusion

This Action Plan reflects the principle that development does not occur to a society — it is something that must be believed in and supported by the members of that society. In some of the countries where Feed the Future agencies operate, the political space for civil society is constrained — this very constraint threatens sustainable gains in long-term food security. Feed the Future, with its focus on smallholder agriculture and equitable economic growth, can and should be a vector for increased voice and representation of civil society — making this a cornerstone effort to promote an enabling policy environment for agriculture.

This plan outlines the steps Feed the Future agencies will take to work directly with development partners, including the governments of Feed the Future countries, to ensure civil society groups are effectively engaged in the development and implementation of food security projects. USAID and donor partners, through the action steps outlined in this document, will help facilitate the creation of partnerships and coalitions among civil society actors, multilateral agencies, local government officials, and private sector entities. The continued engagement and support of the ACVFA Working Group members will be important in guaranteeing the successful implementation of this action plan from reviewing indicators to sharing lessons learned. An annual review meeting with the ACVFA Working Group will also be held to make adjustments to this plan and modify approaches, as needed.

Thank you to the ACVFA Working Group members for their vision, support, and dedication to making the development of this plan possible. In partnership, we will work together with local actors to achieve our goals to end extreme poverty, hunger, and food insecurity.

