

PolicyPennings by Daryll E. Ray & Harwood D. Schaffer

Feed the Future links agriculture, nutrition, and infant health

Among the recent reports that address the issue of global food production is the “2014 Feed the Future Progress Report: Accelerating Progress to End Global Hunger” (<http://tinyurl.com/n7xumhf>). Feed the Future is the US government’s response to the 2007-2008 spike in global food prices that resulted in a significant increase in the number of people experiencing hunger and undernutrition.

At the 2009 G-8 Summit in L’Aquila, Italy, President Obama pledged \$3.5 billion toward an initiative to increase global food security. The 2014 report, which reviews the progress of the initiative in the years since 2009, makes the point that the US commitment has “leveraged additional commitments of more than \$18.5 billion from other donors.”

The Feed the Future initiative uses a “whole-of-government” approach to reducing hunger and undernutrition and their effects. This approach is designed to move from a piecemeal strategy of addressing global hunger and food production activities by various agencies, each with a different area of responsibility—agriculture, trade, development, commerce, etc.—to a coordinated effort by all agencies.

“Feed the Future’s top-level goals are to improve food security through increasing incomes and reducing undernutrition among the world’s poorest, especially for women and girls. The initiative is unique in its focus on nutrition; it is committed to reducing stunting rates by 20 percent in its zones of influence and sustainably reducing hunger and undernutrition by recognizing the link between nutrition and agriculture and the critical 1,000 days from pregnancy through a child’s second birthday. Feed the Future also works to address the root causes of food insecurity and increase the resilience of vulnerable populations to shocks, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.”

The initiative “is driven by country-led priorities and rooted in partnership with governments, other donor organizations, the private sector and civil society to enable long-term success.” To increase the effectiveness of the program, the US government works with countries that “are chosen selectively, based on their willingness to invest in agriculture and commitment to policy reform.” It also works with more than 160 companies as well as researchers in the US and around the world.

To provide an understanding of the scope of Feed the Future, the report spotlights activities in three countries, Senegal, Bangladesh, and Honduras. In Senegal, activities have included increasing rice and

maize production, helping small farmers obtain financing and insurance, and assisting them in negotiating contracts with processors.

“Intensifying rice production while helping farmers diversify into higher value, nutrient-dense commodities such as horticulture and fish” exemplifies the initiative’s work in Bangladesh. Honduran farmers have benefitted from programs to “help ensure higher maize and bean production for home consumption and encourage farmers to devote more cropland to high-value coffee and horticulture crops to increase income.” Despite a drop in coffee prices and an outbreak of coffee leaf rust “more than 4,300 households... were moved well above the \$1.25 poverty threshold. Average per capita daily income shot up 237 percent, from \$0.71 to \$2.39, among these families.”

Given limits on the availability of land, “the [Feed the Future research] strategy emphasizes a unique approach called ‘sustainable intensification,’ which focuses on growing greater amounts of more nutritious food using fewer resources.” Activities that are a part of this effort include protecting wheat yields from wheat stem rust; developing and introducing climate-resilient maize varieties; making more varieties of the common bean available through seed production networks; making the most of soil through improved soil management technologies; increasing the availability of animal-sourced food for nutrition, income, and resilience; and producing more fruits and vegetables for market sales.

“Every year, undernutrition contributes to 3.1 million child deaths—45 percent of the worldwide total.” Feed the Future links agricultural production and nutrition in order to reduce hunger and undernutrition. “The initiative has an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to increase access to nutrition services, improve hygiene and sanitation, and support the cultivation and consumption of nutrient-dense crops.”

“Looking to the future, we must continue what works and forge ahead in the fight to end poverty, hunger and undernutrition once and for all,” the report concludes.

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