

Global Agricultural Development Initiative

Issue Brief Series



Ensuring the Success of Feed the Future: Analysis and Recommendations on Gender Integration

By Ritu Sharma

March 8, 2012 - Feed the Future (FTF) is a U.S. initiative launched in May 2010 to address the root causes of hunger. An estimated 925 million people currently suffer from malnourishment worldwide, the majority of which are women and children.ⁱ With the global population expected to reach nine billion in 2050, hunger levels are projected to rise even further. Agricultural development in which both women and men are fully empowered to expand the production of and access to nutritious food is critical to combating this growing crisis.

The FTF initiative, which is being implemented by USAID in partnership with 20 target countries, is an ambitious and laudable undertaking. It is the first serious investment in agriculture by the U.S. in several decades. However, a serious commitment to gender integration as part of the initiative is crucial. FTF will only be successful if it addresses the constraints faced by both women and men farmers.

Women are the backbone of the agricultural sector in many countries around the world. Almost 70 percent of employed women in South Asia and more than 60 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture.ⁱⁱ Women are also most often responsible for selecting and preparing food for their families and for their children's nutrition.

The women who comprise almost half of the developing world's total agricultural labor force are faced with the challenge of trying to do too much with very little. They often lack access to key productive resources and opportunities that would make their work easier, faster, and more economically viable. The 2011 State of Food and Agriculture report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) found that if women were to have the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase the yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ The report also identified a distinct "gender gap" in women's access to land, livestock, labor, education, extension, financial services, and technology.^{iv} The United Nations' 56th Commission on the Status of Women taking place in New York this week prioritizes the "empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development, and current challenges." Awareness is growing of the crucial role of rural women in achieving global food security.^v

This brief analyzes how FTF has addressed gender inclusion in its planning and early development. It identifies seven pillars for improving women's rural livelihoods so they, and their families, can reap the full benefits of rural and agricultural development.

The full incorporation of these pillars onto the United States' agricultural development programming would ensure its inclusiveness, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability. The brief concludes with several recommendations for how FTF can further integrate women and gender to strengthen its work.

Seven pillars for improving women's rural livelihoods

The following seven pillars for improving women's rural livelihoods provide a framework for successful agricultural and rural development activities. FTF's success in integrating gender concerns into its programs can be evaluated against these benchmarks.

Collaborate and consult with women farmers. Since men and women often play different roles in agricultural activities, women's perspectives are integral to project assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. For example, while women are often involved in producing, processing, and preparing food, men are usually more engaged in trade and marketing activities. It is critical to have sustained engagement with women farmers and their organizations throughout project lifecycles to guarantee full incorporation of gender concerns.

Ensure private property rights. A worldwide comparison of agricultural census data shows that less than 20 percent of landholders are women.^{vi} To confidently invest their time and resources in their work, women need access to and control over the land, crops, and livestock they manage. A study in Uganda found that when women had insecure land tenure and were dependent upon a relationship with a male relative for access, productivity and income levels fell due to land mismanagement.^{vii}

Increase access to credit, financial services, and risk mitigation. Both men and women need credit, savings, and insurance to purchase seeds, fertilizer, tools, and other inputs to improve productivity. Due to a variety of constraints, including transportation, time, and access to capital, women have a harder time accessing the financial services that would greatly improve their livelihoods.

Provide women farmers with time- and labor-saving tools. Farming, processing, cooking, and marketing are time- and labor-intensive activities. Most rural women in developing countries work for approximately sixteen hours a day—more than the number of hours worked by men, with a greater proportion of time spent on unpaid activities.^{viii} Outdated tools and inputs as well as the lack of readily accessible water and fuel often contribute to women's time and labor burdens.

Enhance transportation and technology infrastructure. Infrastructure such as irrigation, roads, farm processing equipment, and communications technologies is critical for efficient production and success in the market. Promoting better access to infrastructure for women can save labor and time and improve productivity and profitability.

Expand skills training for women farmers. Literacy, numeracy, and basic training in crop and animal production, processing, storage, and sales techniques can dramatically increase production, family food consumption, and income. Extension services that factor in women's circumstances (through the provision of childcare services or the scheduling of trainings during times of the day when women can participate) are more likely to be successful.

Integrate natural resource management. Communities need improved natural resource conservation skills if they are to engage in

sustainable farming. While women stand to lose the most in the face of natural resource loss, they are also well positioned to be on the front lines of mitigating and adapting to these changes.

Feed the Future and gender integration: Initial progress

In the nearly two years since its launch, FTF has made great strides in strengthening its commitment to gender integration. Its initial blueprint document—the draft FTF guide—acknowledged women’s roles in agriculture but did not acknowledge the complexities of gender integration. As a result of advocacy by Women Thrive Worldwide and the broader gender and food security community, this oversight was remedied in the final version. Gender was established as a crosscutting principle and key focus area and a commitment was made to strive for gender equality across all stages of planning and implementation.

The next stage of FTF included several sets of planning documents, including Implementation Plans (IPs) and Multi-Year Strategies (MYSs) for each country or region. Initial analysis of the IPs revealed several weaknesses. First, the relationship between gender and agricultural productivity was not adequately addressed. This linkage is of crucial importance. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could raise total agricultural output by 2.5 to 4 percent.^{ix} Secondly, gender, climate change, and natural resource management were not adequately addressed despite the many connections between these topics. Women are custodians and users of traditional knowledge (including knowledge of climate resilience) and are managers of seeds and native food varieties.^x Rural women also tend to have fewer occupational options

and less mobility than men. Thus, many rely heavily on local natural resources.^{xi}

Most of the MYS documents are an improvement over the initial IPs and are far more specific in their activities relating to gender integration. Nevertheless, the results and monitoring and evaluation sections in many MYSs are weak in their inclusion of gender-specific indicators and sex-disaggregated data. What gets measured is what gets done. If a particular strategy identifies a key issue for women but then does not include a corresponding indicator, that issue is likely to be overlooked during program implementation.

While these oversights are concerning, other important steps have been taken in partnership with the NGO community that show a continued strengthening of the commitment to gender integration. For example, gender is a key feature of FTF’s “Global Food Security Research Strategy” and the “Results Framework,” which all FTF countries will be required to use. USAID has increased its institutional capacity and mission-level ability to effectively integrate gender and has developed briefings on gender and agriculture for mission staff. At the Commission on the Status of Women just last week, USAID launched the “Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index” that tracks women’s empowerment through FTF. Several of the pillars mentioned above appear in the index, which focuses on five areas: decisions over agricultural production, power over productive resources such as land and livestock, decisions over income, leadership in the community, and time use.^{xii} According to statements made at the release, the U.S. government will use the index for performance monitoring and impact evaluations across FTF’s focus countries.^{xiii} The release of this tool, a partnership between FTF, USAID, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the Oxford Poverty and Human

Development Initiative (OPHI) of Oxford University, further illustrates how the U.S. is ensuring that gender is prioritized in its agriculture programming, monitoring, and evaluation.^{xiv}

The index's release coincides with USAID's launch of the "Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment," a new policy that aims to "improve the lives of citizens around the world by advancing equality between females and males and empowering women and girls to participate fully in and benefit from the development of their societies."^{xv} The policy, which makes the integration of gender and the inclusion of women and girls central to all U.S. international assistance—including food security programs—applies to all implementers and contractors.

Recommendations: How can Feed the Future further integrate gender?

While FTF's first phase of planning and development included a variety of gender integration gaps and inconsistencies, many improvements are under way. FTF, USAID, and the U.S. government are on the right track to integrating gender. However, tools are only helpful if used properly and consistently, and policies are only effective when fully implemented and monitored.

Further improvements and greater accountability will be critical moving forward. The following practices, if adopted, would ensure ongoing prioritization of gender considerations through all stages of project planning and implementation and guarantee the involvement of and benefits for both women and men.

Begin with a gender analysis. This analytical step is of critical importance if the unique constraints that

women face are to be addressed. Gender analysis was not included in a number of MYSSs, and this needs to be remedied. Furthermore, the countries that do reference gender analysis are ambiguous as to how it will be integrated into the project timeline. These timelines should be clarified and analyses should be completed as early as possible. When gender analysis is completed after projects are under way, it is more likely to sit on a shelf rather than be used as a dynamic tool to inform ongoing work.

Require all FTF country strategies to follow the final "Results Framework" released in 2011 and require the use of the "Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index" and sex-disaggregated data. There should be in-depth gender impact evaluations in as many countries as possible. Gender integration principles must be carried through to the results framework in each country or they will not be taken seriously in program implementation. Monitoring and evaluation drives program priorities, and when gender indicators are not required, they often do not get measured.

Assign a gender advisor for food security and agriculture to each FTF target country. All missions should solicit the expertise of USAID's Bureau of Food Security (BFS) gender advisors to improve and expand actionable commitments to gender integration. Each of the three anticipated BFS gender advisors should have designated time to put towards mission capacity building for gender integration. If countries with poor gender integration strategies do not receive guidance on strengthening their strategies, FTF will not be as effective in improving the food security of men and women in target communities.

Create a forum where country missions can share best practices and discuss progress or challenges. As evidenced across the IPs and MYSSs, there is great

variation in how gender integration is carried out. While each country context is unique, there are lessons that can be shared on how to meaningfully integrate gender into program plans and activities.

ⁱ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2010. "Global hunger declining but still unacceptably high." Economic and Social Development Department policy brief. www.fao.org/docrep/012/al390e/al390e00.pdf.

ⁱⁱ FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid. Gender refers to the different roles, resources, rights, and responsibilities of women and men in a society, which impact their work as farmers.

^v UN Women. 2012. Commission on the Status of Women. "Overview". <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/56sess.htm>.

^{vi} FAO. 2010. "Gender and Land Rights." <http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/al059e/al059e00.pdf>.

^{vii} Mason, Karen O., and Helene M. Carlsson. 2005. *The development impact of gender equality in land rights.* In *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement.* Philip Alston and Mary Robinson, eds. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. As cited in: USAID Issue Brief: *Land Tenure, Property Rights, and Gender.*

^{viii} IFAD. 2010. "Lightening the Load: Labour-saving technologies and practices for rural women." Marilyn Carr with Maria Hartl.

^{ix} FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development.*

^x UN Economic and Social Council. 2012. Commission on the Status of Women. "Empowerment of Rural Women Report," http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2012/3.

^{xi} Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women. 2012. "Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals." <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/ruralwomen/facts-figures.html>.

^{xii} USAID. 2012. "Groundbreaking Index Launched to Empower Women and Fight Hunger." <http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2012/pr120227.html>.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} USAID. 2012. "Release of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index." http://www.usaid.gov/press/media_advisories/2012/ma120222.html.

^{xv} USAID. 2012. "USAID Launches New Gender Policy To Ensure Gender Equality and Female Empowerment." <http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2012/pr120301.html>.

About the Author

Ritu Sharma is a member of the Global Agricultural Development Initiative's Advisory Group. She is Co-Founder and President of Women Thrive Worldwide, the leading organization advocating in Washington, D.C., for the interests of the world's poorest women and girls. More information can be found at www.womenthrive.org. To read the full brief on gender in Feed the Future, featuring detailed country charts, analysis and examples, please visit: www.womenthrive.org/GenderScan.

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Global Agricultural Development Initiative

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