



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The Office of the Administrator

February 8, 2021

Mark E. Keenum, PhD
Chairman
Board for International Food and Agricultural Development
President
Mississippi State University
Lee Hall, Suite 4000
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Dear Dr. Keenum:

Thank you for sharing the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development's (BIFAD) very helpful findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the June 4, 2020, public meeting on *Food Security and Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19: Impacts and Interventions*.

We greatly appreciate BIFAD's recommendations that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) bolster economic-recovery programming; support nutrition; support social safety nets; support policy influence; support markets and supply chains; and support long-term and institutional arrangements. USAID will take BIFAD's findings, conclusions, and recommendations into account as we review our current programs and develop future strategies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The attached summary details how we have responded to, or plan to respond to, the BIFAD recommendations.

USAID is committed to its support of, and collaboration with, U.S. land-grant universities and BIFAD, and we look forward to continuing to work with you. Again, thank you very much for sharing your findings and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Gloria D. Steele

**Summary of Responses by the U.S. Agency for International Development to the
Recommendations from the 181st Public Meeting of the Board for International Food and
Agricultural Development: *Food Security and Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19: Impacts
and Interventions* (Public Meeting Date June 4, 2020)**

Recommendations:

1. *Bolster Economic-Recovery Programming*
 - 1.1. USAID should advocate for and support efforts by international lenders to provide economic stimulus and debt relief for poor countries.

Agency Response:

USAID has played a leadership role on modeling and measuring COVID-19's impacts, which helps make the case for debt relief and economic stimulus. USAID provides policy advice to the U.S. Department of Treasury, which leads the U.S. Government's relationships with international financial institutions. The G-20 and Paris Club creditors announced a Debt Service Suspension Initiative that reschedules payments from 46 participating poor countries due between May 1, 2020, and June 2021, providing them with \$5.7 billion in additional liquidity. Credit issued by USAID, now administered by the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, is among the payments that the United States suspended and is rescheduling.

2. *Support Nutrition*
 - 2.1. USAID should support the maintenance of critical health and nutrition services while reducing disease transmission, including reviving community-based social and behavioral communication campaigns on breastfeeding and complementary feeding for nutritious infant diets, support for pregnant and lactating mothers, and food fortification.
 - 2.2. USAID programming should prioritize, both in the short and long term, building nutrition quality, not just quantity, of food in the food system; supporting policies that promote safe access to fresh food markets; and supporting producers, processors, and sellers of nutritious foods.
 - 2.3. USAID's severe acute malnutrition treatment programs should be modified to assure less contact.
 - 2.4. USAID should strengthen and expand social protection programs during the pandemic and during the recovery period to ensure uptake of nutritious foods and access to nutrition services.

Agency Response:

In response to the pandemic, we have seen widespread adaptation and pivoting of USAID nutrition programs. Examples, many of which were featured during the September 14 BIFAD meeting, include:

- At the global level through the USAID Advancing Nutrition project, we are supporting COVID-19-related adaptations to the widely used UNICEF Infant and Young Child Feeding counseling card package to ensure that healthcare workers can continue to use

nutrition counseling to support mothers and caregivers to feed children in a safe and healthy way.

- USAID/Rwanda’s livestock market systems activity, “Orora Wihaze” is working to address challenges in the egg supply chain. Approximately 20,000 eggs per day have been or will be wasted due to supply-chain disruption, putting the incomes and livelihoods of farmers at risk. At the same time, vulnerable children across the country are at risk of malnutrition due to the loss of daily household income during the lockdown. To combat these issues, Orora Wihaze developed and implemented a support mechanism to aid poultry producers and avert the collapse of the egg value chain by facilitating a route and access to a new and important domestic market as suppliers to child nutrition programs.
- USAID/Uganda’s Integrated Community Agriculture and Nutrition Activity (ICAN) worked with local partners throughout Uganda, querying community groups about their needs in advance of the anticipated COVID-19 lockdown. Through collaboration with USAID’s major health programs, ICAN learned what would happen if COVID-19 spread to specific regions, what resources would be available, and what community needs would likely be. When Uganda began its lockdown, ICAN had already established deep connections with local leadership to respond to disasters, and ICAN’s activities quickly pivoted to respond to COVID-19. This included integrating messages about proper handwashing and social distancing into ongoing nutrition messaging regularly shared via radio and community groups, supporting mobile vans that spread information about how people could protect themselves and their loved ones, and conducting surveys of what goods were still available at local markets.
- In the context of COVID-19 where access to safe clinic-based service delivery is difficult and risky, there is an urgent need to increase access and quality of community-based health and nutrition services. Local community actors are key to the delivery of essential services. During the pandemic, programs have leveraged the robust network of community-level workers and local government partners who are on the ground and can continue delivery of key information and services. An example from Zambia demonstrated how community-based volunteers can be trained and equipped with tools to facilitate the dissemination of information and the distribution of essential health and nutrition products and services.

We are also supporting external coordination of COVID-19 data modeling and analytics for nutrition. Specifically, we are leading an effort with our partners to map the external landscape of COVID-19 analyses taking place across donors, academic institutions, and implementers. This activity will encourage collaboration and coordination among the nutrition community as we collectively strive to understand the projected impacts of the pandemic on nutrition outcomes of interest and plan for responsive programming.

3. *Support Social Safety Nets - Food Assistance*

- 3.1. USAID should support generation of real-time data to identify new hotspots of food insecurity to support countries in better targeting social safety net programs.
- 3.2. USAID should continue to support social programs and safety net programs, assuring that relief programs to sustain the food supply chain do not replace the food supply chain with government services or block activities that can be done by the private sector, especially in inputs and food supply chains.

- 3.3. USAID should require and support clear and transparent mechanisms to ensure cash transfer programs get to intended beneficiaries. USAID should support balanced combinations of cash transfer and food assistance programming.
- 3.4. USAID should invest in innovative mechanisms to compensate farmers and link the distribution of nutrient-dense foods to markets and to social safety net programs for the most vulnerable.

Agency Response:

- In line with the [Grand Bargain Sub-group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection](#), USAID does support linking humanitarian assistance (including food assistance) and social protection where it is feasible and able to contribute to a coherent shock-responsive system. USAID notes that many social safety nets that contain a food-assistance transfer are often designed around poverty-reduction objectives and target accordingly. USAID is committed to meeting the humanitarian imperative and ensuring that emergency food assistance is targeted based on humanitarian need and at a scale designed to meet those needs.
 - USAID supports The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), which is a leading provider of early warning and analysis on food insecurity globally. Analysis from FEWS NET helps identify food-insecurity hotspots and projections of populations in need, which leads to more efficient and effective targeting of humanitarian resources. However, as noted above, social safety nets have targeting protocols often structured around poverty dimensions and rarely around food insecurity as a stand-alone criteria. While some safety nets are designed to be shock responsive (e.g., in response to food-insecurity hotspots), the majority are structured around providing predictable social assistance to the chronically poor.
 - All of USAID's programs for emergency food assistance are required to consider the [Modality Decision Tool](#), which evaluates modalities (cash, voucher, in-kind) selection in light of appropriateness, feasibility, objectives, and cost. It uses a modality-neutral and context-specific approach requiring that evidence is provided to inform response and modality analysis. This ensures that resources being provided are appropriate to market conditions and do no harm.
 - USAID supports linking humanitarian cash and social protection for an effective cash response to the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the [Grand Bargain Sub-group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection's call](#). As per this call, where feasible and appropriate, and in line with humanitarian and accountability principles and preferences of affected populations, humanitarian cash and social protection should be delivered and scaled up to meet these needs, alongside other forms of assistance. As cash may not be appropriate in all situations to meet food security and nutrition outcomes, planning for in-kind assistance, including food assistance, or a balanced combination of food assistance and cash, remains essential. Decisions must be informed by a systematic response analysis.
4. *Support Policy Influence*
 - 4.1. USAID should help countries maintain and strengthen policy and decision-making systems. Particularly important is strengthening the capacity for inclusive, evidence-based decision making including the capacity to represent marginalized populations including women and children, and the capacity to generate and use objective evidence around needs and solutions.

- 4.2. USAID should encourage host-country partners to support policies and programs for economic stimulus and to eliminate counterproductive measures, including export bans and non-tariff barriers, especially around food safety.
- 4.3. USAID should encourage host country partners to establish “green lanes” for food, inputs, and labor movement (with health protections, including transportation and testing, at blockage points like border crossings) in order to mitigate the impact of restrictions on internal and international food movement.
- 4.4. USAID should encourage host country partners to focus explicitly on gender and nutrition issues in their policy response.

Agency Response:

The Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) and its key implementing partners flexed to take on the COVID-19-related policy challenges including surveillance—both of the pandemic itself, including development of novel contagion metrics, and of the pandemic’s impacts on resilience and food security. We will also ensure that our bilateral missions are aware of BIFAD’s proposed actions and undertake measures to adopt them where they can. Examples of actions taken to date include the following:

- Within weeks of understanding the scope of the pandemic, USAID/RFS, working with U.S. university partners, generated and disseminated information to field Missions on how to mitigate the secondary impacts, especially on food security and vulnerable populations, of policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Combined with consistent messages for other partners and donors, many countries moved to protect agricultural production by exempting the agricultural sector from trade restrictions and enabling markets to function.
- In May, the Agency developed a novel COVID-19 Policy Response (CPR) tracker to follow the rapid change in policies creating an empirical source for further analysis of policy impact. The CPR will collect data across more than 19 countries into 2021.
- RFS sponsored a set of workshops targeting African thought leaders and decision-makers on “The Growth Mindset”—an approach to improve decision-making under stress with particular emphasis on the COVID-19 pandemic but recognizing other stresses such as locust infestations.
- In July, RFS helped stand up a new local think tank, AKADEMIYA2063, headquartered in Kigali, Rwanda, that is monitoring and reporting on the impacts of COVID-19 on food prices and other food systems indicators at the sub-national level in most Feed the Future (FTF) target countries in Africa.
- USAID, through a multi-donor partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution (AGRA), supported country-level efforts to coordinate responses across sectors. USAID facilitated the establishment of a coordinating body across health, agriculture, and finance ministries (among others) in Kenya.
- In December the Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab/Rutgers Policy Research Associate Award will launch new COVID-19 surveillance metrics and the Northwestern University [SARS-CoV-2 dashboard](#).
- RFS continues to be proactive in supporting the development of information and analysis for improved policy- and decision-making during COVID-19 and sustaining robust policy systems and decision-making during and after the recovery from COVID-19.

5. *Support Markets and Supply Chains*

- 5.1. USAID should support food processing and formal and informal market functioning by keeping workers and traders healthy through training, behavioral incentives, social distancing, improved health services, and market infrastructure improvement.
- 5.2. USAID should continue to support the functioning, and rebuilding, where needed, of global, regional, and domestic supply chains to promote country resilience.
- 5.3. USAID should support programming to resolve smallholder liquidity challenges, e.g., through loan guarantees.
- 5.4. USAID should continue to support trade and market access, including through facilitation of intraregional trade.
- 5.5. USAID should support food safety standards given they play a crucial role in reducing non-tariff barriers at the regional and global level.
- 5.6. USAID should support access to transparent information on global stocks and markets
- 5.7. USAID should support the processing and packaging industry in modified logistics, automation, robotics, storage facility construction, and e-commerce. USAID should target women and minorities in the COVID-19 response and recovery effort.
- 5.8. USAID should focus on institutional innovations with new technology to address supply chain disruption.
- 5.9. USAID should promote smart social distancing and food system innovations to restructure value chains.
- 5.10. USAID should promote practical approaches to improving fresh food markets without jeopardizing human health, food security or resilience. Using a One Health approach, USAID should enable a risk-based, not a hazard-based, approach to controlling disease in markets, supporting co-creation of tailored solutions and regulations (e.g., training, cutting boards, disinfectants, safe containers, market certification, and selective banning of wildlife, but not livestock, from markets).

Agency Response:

USAID has contributed to the continued safe functioning of food processors, markets, supply chains, and trade through a variety of actions, including:

- Making additional investments in COVID-19-specific interventions, such as: analytics and modeling support to identify and track impacts of policy decisions and inform policy approaches; financial and technical support to food small and medium enterprises (SMEs); facilitation of private capital for additional COVID-19 financing; and rapidly developing and scaling science-based messaging to share practical approaches to continue farmer and food SME operations while mitigating the spread of disease.
- Developing and disseminating guidance on how Missions can incorporate best practices on safe, functioning markets (including animal-sourced food and livestock markets); trade; and digital tools to promote social distancing into their current and future programs.
- Hosting multiple virtual-learning events to disseminate information about COVID-19-sensitive programming as relates to food security; market systems; nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); and strengthening resilience, and, too, on doing so within areas of recurrent crises.

Examples of Mission-level responses include:

- USAID/Afghanistan developed a food-safety program for butcher shops to improve hygiene, including COVID-19 mitigation training.
- East Africa Regional FTF is supporting measures to keep food and agricultural inputs moving across borders and from ports to inland countries, strengthen safeguards for cross-border trade and protocols, and address measures that restrict the flow of goods between countries.
- USAID's Bangladesh Aquaculture and Nutrition Activity (BANA) established weekly virtual meetings with the Department of Fisheries and is conducting a survey on the fisheries sector to obtain information on road closures, changes in production, supply and demand levels, and other data points.
- The Dekkal Geej fisheries activity in USAID/Senegal is currently working with the national network of Community Level Artisanal Fishing Associations and the Direction des Pêches Maritimes on urgent increased dissemination of guidance already available, and developing communication materials (posters, handouts) and rural radio shows on the prevention of disease transmission and the protection of fishing communities.

6. *Support Long-Term and Institutional Arrangements*

- 6.1. USAID should support research on innovation, preparedness, and food supply chains in developing countries and should encourage partnerships with local research institutions and networks of researchers to provide data and evidence to address COVID-19 food security challenges and guide policy responses.
- 6.2. USAID should continue to support global disease surveillance predictive platforms to inform early warning and early action.
- 6.3. In the long term, USAID should build relationships with and strengthen the capacity of policy advisory systems in partner countries to develop a critical mass of human capital and organizational capacity to address COVID-19 and other challenges. USAID should encourage partner governments to include local food policy organizations at the table, in addition to health and disaster management ministries, to strengthen their policy responses.
- 6.4. USAID should continue to allocate resources for economic growth-promoting strategies, including agricultural research, universities, and extension.
- 6.5. USAID should promote a One Health approach integrating human, animal, and environmental health within the Agency's organization and among country partners.
- 6.6. USAID should encourage local partners to coordinate across national and subnational levels.

Agency Response:

- USAID/RFS supports a portfolio of research activities uniquely positioned to deliver innovations and knowledge critical for addressing COVID-19 food-security challenges. These programs' efforts continue in the wake of the pandemic, with implementing partners pivoting to online platforms for collaboration, training, and data analyses to ensure that the work on the ground continues. USAID support for the Feed the Future Innovation Labs and

other research activities remains steadfast as we look to establish evidence-based mitigation strategies for both the short-term and second-order impacts of COVID-19.

- USAID's Global Health Security program has increased our investments in understanding, monitoring, and mitigating the spillover and spread of emerging zoonotic disease from animals to people, to focus on risk mitigation through the newly awarded STOP Spillover project; and will also continue to focus on the discovery and characterization of known and new viruses through a yet-to-be-awarded Discovery & Exploration of Emerging Pathogens - Viral Zoonoses (DEEP VZN) project. Through the Global Health Security Initiative, we focus on building country-level systems and capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to emerging threats. Stop Spillover, the future viral discovery work, and the Global Health Security initiative are a part of USAID's broader efforts to address the rising threat of emerging infectious diseases.
- Please see response to recommendation 4 above regarding recommendation 6.3.
- USAID remains committed to conscientiously implementing agriculture-led strategies that promote economic growth. USAID/RFS's recent reorganization included the launch of the Center for Agriculture-Led Growth, which houses both the Research Community of Practice and the Bureau's extension expertise. This ensures significant resources are allocated to strategies that promote economic growth, including agricultural research, universities, and extension.
- Shortly after the pandemic started, USAID formed a cross-Bureau One Health working group under the Agency's Environment and Natural Resource Management framework. The group aims to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration to mitigate the drivers of critical One Health issues, such as emerging disease threats, antimicrobial resistance, land degradation, and wildlife trade. The group sets priorities for cross-sector collaboration and technical support to Missions with a strong evidence base on One Health approaches. This working group currently lacks dedicated operational funds. One Health Working Group members are also supporting coordination and information sharing across existing programming such as STOP Spillover (GH), HEARTH (multi sectoral funding), DEEP VZN (GH), and Wildlife TRAPS (EEI).
- USAID continues to encourage coordination between national and sub-national partners, particularly through our portfolio of resilience and market systems-oriented programs. This programming is designed to build country-level capacity via coordination frameworks in the public and private sectors to address shocks and stressors, as well as market resilience. This includes addressing the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on areas including food security with a strong focus on enabling continued access to safe and functioning markets, prevention of backsliding, and water security.