



December 19, 2022

Administrator Samantha Power
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Administrator Power:

On behalf of the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD), I am pleased to transmit a summary of the emergent findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from expert testimony and public discussion during the May 23, 2022, public meeting, *The Global Food Security Crisis: Exploring the Evidence Base and Lessons from the Past to Strengthen Agricultural, Nutrition, and Food Systems in the Face of Shocks*. We were grateful that you provided opening remarks at the public meeting—our first since our appointment by President Biden in January 2022.

At the meeting, invited expert panelists and the public took stock of evidence to identify weak links in food systems that must be strengthened to respond to and mitigate the impacts of current and future shocks and associated global food security challenges. Participants also shared lessons learned about resilience in the face of these disruptions. Although this meeting was only the first in a series of planned evidence-gathering efforts, several key findings and a clearer understanding of resilience, shocks, and systems emerged:

- Over the past 15 years, we have moved into a period of chronic crisis, as individuals, households, and communities in many geographies have experienced sequential and/or simultaneous waves of shocks. While sequential/simultaneous shocks are not completely new for some populations, this new reality is becoming the norm for many more. Even for those populations with prior experience with sequential shocks, many of the shocks are more intense, lasting longer, and happening much more quickly. In this new reality, the traditional paradigm (i.e., development progress, shock, backsliding, recovery, and continued development progress) is breaking down. Expert opinion at the public meeting suggested that these sequential and simultaneous shocks do not allow adequate time or resources for recovery. Thus, many individuals, households, and communities are driven along downward spirals to states of fragility.
- If we want to focus on building more resilient food and nutrition systems, then diversification at all levels is essential within food and nutrition systems. This includes diversification of livelihoods, production systems, markets, trading partners, food resources, and consumption.
- Building resilient food and nutrition systems will require multiple entry points across the following domains: 1) humanitarian–development–peace nexus, including a focus not only on humanitarian assistance but also on production and distribution; 2) scaling up climate resilience; 3) strengthening economic resilience; 4) lowering the cost of nutritious foods along food supply

chains; 5) addressing poverty and inequality; and 6) shifting to sustainable consumption patterns.

- Since outcomes within food and nutrition systems are significantly affected by such related systems as governance, health, and environment, framing of interventions to promote resilience needs to be broader and coordinated across food, agriculture, nutrition, and related systems.
- We need to optimize humanitarian aid and assistance so that our short-term investments to address current crises also contribute to longer-term development and resilience. We need to ensure humanitarian assistance efforts do not undermine longer-term development and resilience.

These points are further explained in the attached brief. BIFAD firmly believes that strengthening agricultural and food systems to respond to global food security crises and to mitigate the impacts of constant shocks is one of the most pressing challenges in our work today. These findings, conclusions, and recommendations are meant to support decision-making by USAID and its partners and stakeholders working to strengthen agriculture, food, and nutrition systems in the face of shocks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laurence P. Alexander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Laurence Alexander
Chair

Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD)
Chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

184th BIFAD Public Meeting
The Global Food Security Crisis: Exploring the Evidence Base and Lessons from the Past to Strengthen Agricultural, Nutrition, and Food Systems in the Face of Shocks

Overview:

On May 23, 2022, the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) hosted a virtual public meeting, *The Global Food Security Crisis: Exploring the Evidence Base and Lessons from the Past to Strengthen Agricultural, Nutrition, and Food Systems in the Face of Shocks*. This was the first public meeting of BIFAD members appointed by President Joseph Biden on January 14, 2022 and included an introduction to newly appointed BIFAD members, recognition for members whose BIFAD service ended in January 2022, and an overview of BIFAD's work plan priorities and key upcoming initiatives. BIFAD invited expert panelists and the public to present and take stock of evidence around key questions and to identify weak links in food and nutrition systems that must be strengthened to respond to global food security crises and mitigate the impacts of current and future shocks. Food systems, nutrition, gender, and humanitarian assistance experts shared lessons learned about resilience in the face of these disruptions.

Key Questions:

Within the past 15 years, we have moved from crisis to crisis (e.g., food price crises, political conflict, severe climate events, environmental shocks, emerging agricultural pests and diseases, and emerging human diseases). In many geographies, individuals, households, and communities are experiencing these as waves of simultaneous crises. How do we get out in front of these crises? How do we understand and strengthen our food and nutrition systems so that they are resilient to these crises?

Drawing from the expert presentations, shared evidence, and public discussion, BIFAD presents the following emerging findings, conclusions, and recommendations to inform both BIFAD's future work planning and the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) strategy implementation, policy, and programming.

Emerging Findings:

- 1. Persistent shocks are leading to increased fragility and malnutrition, with a disproportionate effect on females.**

Sequential and/or simultaneous shocks are leading to increased fragility. Within the past 15 years in many geographies, individuals, households, and communities have experienced sequential and/or simultaneous waves of shocks. While sequential/simultaneous shocks are not completely new for some populations, this new reality is becoming the norm for many more. Even for those populations with prior experience with sequential shocks, many of the shocks are more intense, lasting longer, and happening much more quickly. Thus, we have moved into a period of chronic crisis. In this new reality, our traditional paradigm (i.e., development progress, shock, backsliding, recovery, continued development progress) is breaking down. Rather, as expert opinion at the public meeting suggested, these sequential and simultaneous shocks do not allow individuals, households, and communities adequate time and resources for recovery and are driving them along a downward spiral to a state of continual fragility. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projects that by 2030, 2.3 billion people

will live in a context of fragility, including 80% of the world's poor populations.¹ The impacts of combined shocks are not well understood.

There are disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Shocks and crises have disproportionate impacts on women and girls, exacerbating existing inequalities. These shocks are affecting women's jobs and livelihoods, health, and wellbeing; increasing women's and girls' paid and unpaid care and domestic work; and impeding the resilience and rights of women and girls to adequate food in a changing climate. Women and girls eat less during crises (see below). Five priority action areas identified in the meeting to build resilient economies and food systems that work for women and girls are: 1) decent jobs for women, as part of gender-just systems transformations; 2) gender-responsive climate actions; 3) a focus on women's and girls' leadership; 4) investment in the care economy; and 5) better understanding and tracking of gender statistics.

Malnutrition is exacerbated. Almost 50% of fragile and very fragile countries are burdened by seriously high levels of stunting in children under five years of age and anemia in adolescent girls and adult women.² In four countries,³ there are 570,000 people at Phase 5 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Scale, which indicates a catastrophe/famine. IPC Phase 5 indicates "households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident."⁴ In total, 236.2 million people in 41 countries are in stress at IPC Phase 2 and above. Healthy diets are out of reach for almost 3 billion people. The full nutritional impacts of these crises are not easily observed. As shown during the food price crisis of 2008, there is evidence that women often buffer children from the impacts of malnutrition, as mothers' weights may decline significantly while changes in children's weights are not observed.⁵ Evidence also showed that micronutrient deficiencies for both mothers and children increased, especially anemia.⁶ This is yet another example of the disproportionate impact on women in crises. Beyond basic caloric intake, basic diet diversity and micronutrient adequacy are also compromised during these crises, and both are critical to short- and long-term resilience to shocks.

2. Diversification at all levels is essential to building resilient food and nutrition systems.

Dietary diversification is critical for resilient populations. Well-nourished children and adults have been shown to be more resilient to infectious diseases, such as the COVID-19 virus, than

¹ Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition. (2020). *Strengthening food systems in fragile contexts: Policy brief* (No. 15). https://www.glopan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/10989%E2%80%A2Fragile-Context-Policy-Brief_3Aug.pdf

² Global Nutrition Report. (2020). *Action on equity to end malnutrition*. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives. https://globalnutritionreport.org/documents/566/2020_Global_Nutrition_Report_2hrsKo.pdf. (Cited in Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, 2020.)

³ The four countries in IPC phase 5 are Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. See <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/ipc-dashboard/en/> for more information.

⁴ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. (June 2022). *Evidence and standards for better food security and nutrition decisions*. Food and Agriculture Organization. [IPC Brochure Understanding the IPC Scales.pdf \(ipcinfo.org\)](https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/understanding-the-ipc-scales.pdf)

⁵ Webb, P. (2010). Medium- to long-run effects of high food prices on nutrition. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 140(1), 140S-47S. <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.109.110536>

⁶ Ibid.

less-nourished people.^{7,8} Although we know very little about what people actually eat and what they want to eat, we make major policy decisions and investments based on assumptions about people's diets.

Both global and domestic supply chains are essential to promote access to healthy diets and diversify livelihoods. In many of the food crisis countries, necessary food groups are not available domestically. In addition, the supply of key inputs such as inorganic fertilizer is highly concentrated. This makes international trade extremely important. Global trends in the past 30 years have been toward significant concentration of product imports from fewer countries. Thus, diversifying sources of agricultural inputs and outputs (including building in redundancies) will be important to the absorptive capacity of import-dependent countries. Local and regional supply chains are also extremely important for resilience. More diversified local food systems can be a direct source of food, or at a minimum, provide substitutes when supply chains are disrupted. More diversified production systems (in terms of products and technologies/agricultural practices) and properly functioning local markets that support the operation of micro-, small-, and medium-scale enterprises can significantly improve rural livelihood diversification.

3. To build more resilient food and nutrition systems, we need to use a broad lens.

Building resilient food and nutrition systems will require multiple entry points across the following domains: 1) humanitarian–development–peace nexus, including a focus not only on humanitarian assistance but also on production; 2) scaling up climate resilience; 3) strengthening economic resilience; 4) lowering the cost of nutritious foods along food supply chains; 5) addressing poverty and inequality; and 6) shifting to sustainable consumption patterns. Actors across the food system—smallholder producers, traders, transporters, processors, and financial institutions—have a critical role to play in both ensuring market systems continue to function during a crisis and mitigating some of these shocks.

Interventions need to be broader and coordinated across food, agriculture, and related systems. Since outcomes within food and nutrition systems are significantly affected by such related systems as governance, health, and environment, the framing of interventions to promote resilience needs to be broader and coordinated across food, agriculture, nutrition, and related systems. This requires coherent policies and investments across systems and investments in the accelerators or enabling conditions of transformation, including governance and institutions, innovation systems, human capital, infrastructure, and data.

4. Humanitarian aid and assistance must also invest in long-term solutions for building resilience.

The Horn of Africa is currently suffering a fourth consecutive season of drought, which is projected to push 45 to 55 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia into acute food insecurity in 2022.⁹ There is a need to layer short-term emergency response with longer-term market support, such as smarter cash advances and more agile and innovative funding mechanisms that allow funding for emergency or development responses. This requires timely

⁷ Webb, P., Flynn, D. J., Kelly, N. M., Thomas, S. M., & Benton, T. G. (June 2021). *Supporting policy with scientific evidence*. Knowledge for Policy. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/covid-19-food-systems-rebuilding-resilience_en

⁸ Black, R. E., Victora, C. G., Walker, S. P., Bhutta, Z. A., Christian, P., de Onis, M., Ezzati, M., Grantham-McGregor, S., Katz, J., Martorell, R., & Uauy, R. (2013). Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet*, 382(9890). [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(13\)60937-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(13)60937-x)

⁹ FEWS NET. (2022). East Africa Key Message Update: Scale of food assistance needs in East Africa continues to outpace the humanitarian response, February 2022. FEWS NET. (Cited in Mercy Corps, 2022)

response to the context and needs at a given time in a way that preserves local markets and institutions. For example, to build resilience against recurring drought in the Horn of Africa, Mercy Corps has been investing in critical livestock markets through destocking interventions, in which livestock are purchased before the peak of the drought while they are still in good condition. This drought response strengthens the local livestock markets, builds social capital among pastoralists and traders, and provides cash to pastoralist households to buffer impacts of the drought season.¹⁰ As another example, partnerships with private companies to develop insurance products more adapted to local needs, paired with encouraging family savings, help to protect households through the next crisis.

Conclusions:

- 1. Sequential and/or simultaneous shocks often impede the ability of households and communities to recover and rebuild assets, causing a downward spiral toward continual fragility.**

Agriculture-led economic growth can pull people out of poverty, but it is less clear that agriculture-led growth alone can help populations in fragile contexts who are experiencing chronic crises to recover.

- 2. Diversification at all levels is essential to building resilience within systems.**

Diversification includes livelihood diversification (both on and off farm) for economic resilience, diversification of production systems, diversification of markets, diversification of trading partners (including food imports and exports), and diversification of food resources for more diversified dietary consumption.

- 3. For populations in crisis, investing in and protecting consumption (not just production) through dietary diversity and diet quality is critical for making people resilient to recurrent shocks.**

An approach to protecting consumption is enabling populations in crisis to secure crisis income through **valorizing assets**—their labor, livestock, learning, and land—to build the resilience of the rural, non-farm economy alongside the farm economy, allowing for the food system to buffer against future crises (for example, improving food safety, rural banking of the value of livestock, cash for work, cash transfers, other income transfers, support to non-farm small- and medium-sized enterprises, and market infrastructure development).

- 4. To guide strategies aimed at ensuring reliable access to safe, affordable, and healthful foods, there is a need for evidence to better understand consumer demand and the factors influencing the demand side of food systems.**

Demand-side evidence can help us to understand consumption patterns and tradeoffs that households are making among different kinds of foods to better inform policy decisions that consider tradeoffs. At the same time, more informed and empowered consumer demand could drive shifts in food and nutrition system transformations. However, too little is known about the demand side of food and nutrition systems. There are windows of opportunity to incentivize and shift to more diverse, nutritious diets. For example, in food transformation, everything from production systems to the consumer represents an opportunity for diversification and improvement (e.g., improved shelf life, improved storage, reduced food loss and waste). More

¹⁰ Mercy Corps. (2022). Outsmarting La Niña: Lessons and recommendations for strengthening resilience through the drought response in the Horn of Africa. [research-brief-horn-africa-drought-032122.pdf \(mercyorg.org\)](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-brief-horn-africa-drought-032122.pdf)

informed and empowered consumer demand could drive shifts in food and nutrition systems transformation.

5. Short-term humanitarian assistance investments should also be designed to build longer-term resilience.

Given the significant resources dedicated to humanitarian aid and assistance in the face of these crises, it is critical that we ensure short-term investments to address crises while simultaneously building longer-term resilience to mitigate impacts of future shocks. Additional evidence on how to design such investments to build longer-term resilience is needed.

Recommendations:

Based on the emerging findings and data gaps identified in this public meeting, the Board recommends the following:

1. Identify frameworks and/or examples of successful integration of humanitarian aid and longer-term assistance investments.

Invest to understand how best to support immediate crisis response while also building longer-term food and nutrition systems resilience. Identify opportunities for integration of assistance investments with shorter and longer time scales across the Agency.

2. Invest to better understand consumption patterns.

Invest in research to understand what people are eating (across different income groups, age groups, and genders) and what they want to eat, including local and indigenous foods. This should include information on both expenditure patterns and details on actual household consumption quantities. This research should support USAID's decisions on priority interventions to support improved access to affordable, safe, and nutritious diets and further elevate the importance of nutrition and dietary patterns for resilient food systems.

3. Invest to deepen understanding of how food, nutrition, and agricultural system actors are responding to multiple shocks and the implications for food system resilience.

While combined and simultaneous shocks have only recently become the reality for some, multiple shocks have long been the reality of certain regions of Asia and Africa. Research to understand the drivers of past resilience in those regions, alongside research to understand how current system actors are responding to multiple shocks, will be important to guide strategies to support food system resilience.

Follow-up for BIFAD:

The BIFAD 2022–2024 work plan defines a work stream on “building resilient food and nutrition systems,” which is an ongoing workstream. Outcomes from the May 23, 2022 public meeting suggest further evidence gathering is necessary before generating additional recommendations for Administrator Power:

1. Evidence mapping of the vulnerability to combined shocks in food and nutrition systems.

The declared focus of the May 23, 2022 BIFAD public meeting was to take stock of evidence that identifies weak links in food and nutrition systems that must be strengthened to mitigate the impacts of current shocks and build system resilience to buffer against recurring and future shocks. It has become clear that evidence on which parts of the food systems are breaking down in the face of various shocks is scattered throughout the published (white and gray) literature as

well as unpublished experience of the private sector and professionals on the ground. A concerted effort is needed for a systematic review of evidence and key informant testimony to synthesize the state of knowledge on vulnerabilities in our food and nutrition systems. Key testimony will include consultations with USAID mission teams and senior USAID officials who have provided preliminary feedback and insights for this work stream. This evidence mapping should include an explicit objective to apply a gender-responsive lens to the assessment of vulnerabilities. Through scoping for this review, BIFAD will ascertain if any U.S. universities are studying the impact of combined shocks and seek to engage their expertise.

2. Identifying the most appropriate pathways to facilitate transformative systemic change that are inclusive of underrepresented populations and promote gender equality.

BIFAD and USAID recently launched the Subcommittee on Systemic Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems, which will lead transdisciplinary evidence gathering to advise BIFAD with independent recommendations on improving USAID programming and strategies. The subcommittee is envisioned to support USAID's role in accelerating systems change and transformative climate change adaptation and mitigation approaches in agriculture, food systems, and nutrition, and in targeting climate finance to benefit smallholder farmers. BIFAD will ensure gender-responsive climate action is an explicit objective in the subcommittee's work and in the commissioned study, tasking the study team to identify the most appropriate pathways to facilitate transformative systemic change that is inclusive of underrepresented populations and promotes gender equity and equality. Within this work, BIFAD will also explore how the USAID gender priorities within agriculture, food systems, and nutrition compare with the priority action areas presented by UN Women. BIFAD will explore opportunities to learn how effectively USAID is mainstreaming gender into programs related to agriculture, food systems, and nutrition and what barriers for greater integration exist.

3. Identifying opportunities to engage local private sector actors in the development of shorter, local, nutritious food chains.

Among the Board's priorities for 2022–2024, a second work stream is defined as “improving the affordability of safe and nutritious foods,” with the aim to help inform a cross-sector, whole-of-Agency approach to tackle the challenge of delivering safe, nutritious, affordable foods in Feed the Future target countries and nutrition priority countries. The Board's work in this area was launched in October 2022, as BIFAD convened a public meeting on evidence-based solutions for increasing the affordability, availability, and convenience of nutrient-dense foods for infants and children six to 23 months of age, providing adequate safety nets for families most vulnerable to early childhood malnutrition, and engaging across systems to deliver. Private sector panelists and participants presented evidence on how to bring down the actual cost of nutritious complementary foods for infants and how to incentivize the consumption of these foods.