



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The Administrator

February 29, 2024

BIFAD Chairman Laurence Alexander
Chancellor, University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff
1200 North University Drive
Pine Bluff, AR 71601

Dear Chairman Alexander:

Thank you for your letter and for the insightful recommendations from the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development's (BIFAD) 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*. The themes discussed in that meeting were timely, given the global food crisis that has revealed a number of underlying weaknesses to food systems. BIFAD's findings, conclusions, and recommendations reflect areas where USAID should expand and evolve our current approaches to address the food insecurity that households around the world are facing.

Your recommendation regarding better integration of immediate crisis response with investments for longer-term recovery and growth was particularly resonant. We are in the midst of a cross-Bureau effort to promote "HDP coherence," or complementary collaboration across humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) actors and assistance in pursuit of a common agenda. Led by our Resilience Leadership Council, USAID Bureaus are adjusting their approaches and structures to leverage our crisis response resources to increase long-term resilience. We are also working on developing additional guidance on activity design, robust process indicators, and evidence generation to help us program with HDP coherence in mind.

BIFAD's recommendation concerning the need for more and better evidence on how food, nutrition, and agricultural system actors are responding to multiple shocks also reinforces our ongoing efforts. The recent Resilience Evidence Forum, co-hosted by USAID's Center for Resilience, was an opportunity to identify the gaps that exist in our food security evidence base. We have recently brought in expert partners to advise us on improving resilience metrics and gathering data where possible. Moreover, we have recently established the new independent Office of the Chief Economist (OCE) to intensify and expand our efforts to use the latest evidence on the cost-effectiveness of interventions to inform USAID's programming across sectors. As OCE's support across the Agency grows, it will serve as a key partner to Agency Operating Units (OUs) on developing cost-effectiveness evidence reviews and supporting OUs to apply the insights from that evidence to program and strategy decisions to ensure Agency programming is delivering as much impact per dollar as possible. We acknowledge the essential role that the larger research community, including our university partners, must play as we pursue this work; this, too, is an area where OCE is providing support, drawing networks of

social scientists in to support USAID on improving program cost-effectiveness.

We were also pleased to see the Panel note the role that both livelihood and diet diversification play in helping households, communities, and systems build resilience and secure consistent access to safe and nutritious foods. For instance, BIFAD previously suggested that elevating women to positions of authority and promoting women's access to wage employment are two key sources of agrifood system resilience. Our programming going forward will certainly seek to prioritize the historically marginalized groups, including women, that are known to be more susceptible to shocks and stresses. We will take all of your findings and recommendations into account, and we look forward to talking with BIFAD more as we review our current programs and policies.

The attached summary includes a detailed response to each of the recommendations. I want to thank you and the other BIFAD members for your ongoing work and for your continued support of USAID.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "S. Power".

Samantha Power

Enclosure: Agency Response to BIFAD Recommendations from May 23, 2022

Agency Response to BIFAD Recommendations from May 23, 2022, Public Meeting

The USG's Global Food Security Strategy 2022-26 lays out a plan for building resilience of people, households, communities, systems, and countries to help them manage shocks and stresses without compromising their food security, nutrition, livelihoods, and well-being, especially among marginalized and underrepresented groups. USAID also recognizes that while our work in resilience should continue in areas of recurrent crises, risks are growing throughout our operational areas, and resilience approaches can be appropriate in all sectors and strategies.

BIFAD Recommendation 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.

1. Agency Response:

One goal of USAID's resilience work is to integrate and layer humanitarian assistance with investments for long-term solutions that prevent loss of assets during an emergency and lead to a strong recovery. There is a role for developmental approaches in areas experiencing significant humanitarian crises, and Feed the Future does invest in areas where humanitarian caseloads are high, recognizing that systemic issues must be addressed in places where hunger needs are the most urgent.

This work is done to complement USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) investments. In addition to short-term relief work, BHA invests in multiyear, multi-sectoral Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs) that target ultra-poor households that are most vulnerable to shocks and stressors. This programming combines emergency and development activities both to meet people's immediate needs and to reinforce household and community resilience capacities that help them mitigate, adapt to, and recover from future shocks and stressors.

These RFSAs often serve as a foundation layer of programming that facilitates multi-sectoral and market-based development investments by the Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS), Missions, and other development actors that intentionally leverage and integrate with BHA programming, to maximize long-term food security and resilience outcomes.

This integrated work is informed by USAID's 2012 *Building Resilience to Recurrent Crisis: USAID Policy and Program Guidance* and is coordinated through the USAID Resilience Leadership Council, which brings USAID Bureaus together regularly to discuss how resources can be leveraged and integrated for greater impact to build resilience in these highly vulnerable communities. Both BHA and the REFS Center for Resilience provide technical support to USAID Missions for this work. BHA, REFS, and Missions also coordinate monitoring, evaluation, and learning through the use of backbone support mechanisms to share the resource burden, leverage expertise, coordinate learning, and promote the best possible outcomes. Over the coming year, USAID will be developing additional guidance on activity design, strengthening

measurement and evidence generation, and examining ways in which the Agency can address key institutional barriers to achieving greater coherence across our humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming.

BIFAD Recommendation 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.

2. Agency Response:

USAID recognizes that Mission and implementing partner staff need tools so they can adequately measure gaps in food and nutrient intake to inform the design of programs and activities to improve diets. Data on diet quality are important to understand dietary trends, create awareness about diet quality issues, and inform policies and programs to improve diets and health outcomes. A holistic understanding of diets in our target populations is warranted and concerns not only what they eat now, but also what elements of their diet are at greatest risk in the case of economic or climatic shocks.

USAID, with its implementing partner USAID Advancing Nutrition¹, is involved in several activities to support learning, evidence, and measurement of diet quality for a range of population groups including women, children, and families.

Additionally, food environments refer to the physical, economic, political, and sociocultural contexts in which consumers engage with the food system to make their decisions about acquiring, preparing, and consuming food. Assessing food environments is an important step toward ensuring that families have healthy and diverse diets. USAID is working on recommendations for implementing assessments in our programming areas to monitor and evaluate market food environments.

BIFAD Recommendation 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.

¹ USAID Advancing Nutrition is the Agency's flagship multi-sectoral nutrition project, led by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), and a diverse group of experienced partners. Advancing Nutrition strengthens the enabling environment for and supports country-led scale-up of effective, integrated and sustainable multi-sectoral nutrition programs.

3. Agency Response:

For more than a decade, USAID’s resilience efforts have included analyzing and programming in complex risk environments with combined and multiple shocks, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. There is a wide literature base focused on community- and household-level responses to multiple shocks and a more nascent interest and focus on the food-system and market-system actors and their responses to shocks and stressors. In particular, USAID’s guidance, research, and programming on market-systems resilience is particularly well suited to understand how current system actors are responding to multiple shocks. Research by TANGO International currently being conducted on the market-systems activity *Rural Resilience* in northeast Nigeria is an excellent example of high-quality, mixed-method research being conducted on the market system and diverse food-system actors facing a combination of conflict, displacement, election tensions, currency crisis, flooding, COVID-19 secondary impacts, and other climate-related shocks and stresses. Conducting additional research along these lines, from other contexts and combinations of shocks, would be very valuable and USAID is currently exploring opportunities to support such research in the future. Additionally, measuring and monitoring nutritional status, and the ability of individuals and households to maintain nutritional status in the face of shocks and stresses, will provide useful information, as optimal nutrition is both a contributing factor to resilience capacities and an important indicator of attained resilience.

Agency Feedback on BIFAD Proposed Follow Up and Further Evidence Gathering:

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.

Agency Feedback:

Evidence gap mapping, commissioned by REFS and conducted by the nonprofit 3ie, noted a significant concentration of evidence on multicomponent interventions, that is, studies looking at a wide range of combinations of intervention strategies.² This diversity of

² See

<https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/building-resilient-societies-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-an-evidence-gap-map>

multicomponent approaches likely reflects a reality that intervention combinations are typically tailored to address context-specific barriers to resilience. However, this complexity revealed a wide array of pathways and orientations of multicomponent interventions, suggesting that additional systematic reviews are needed to understand the impact of these activity design choices; and potentially additional research is needed to fill out specific formulations of multicomponent interventions where evidence does not exist.

The gap map also indicated a number of causal relationships, i.e., the extent to which common interventions result in strengthened resilience, for which little or no structured research has been conducted. These gaps will serve as a guide for future activity design and research planning. Particularly, USAID notes a need to conduct additional high-quality systematic reviews on select evidence areas that have been widely studied, such as the combination of social protection and safety-net programming with financial inclusion, and livelihoods intervention domains on income and savings outcomes. Additionally, through the Evidence Gap Mapping, USAID established that future research should expand on and leverage gender-sensitive and equity approaches in future research the Agency commissions. Additional efforts should be made to expand the evidence base for resilience using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods (such as the previously mentioned northeast Nigeria study conducted by TANGO); collect data using validated outcomes measures; report cost data and unintended consequences; and measure outcomes at different time points, including longer study periods than previously reviewed. USAID is also working with a partner, REAL (Resilience Evaluation Analysis and Learning), to review and analyze available data and literature to elucidate the relationship among sources of resilience and nutritional outcomes, with the purpose of improving USAID's ability to deliver and measure the effectiveness of programming to protect and improve nutrition outcomes in resilience portfolios and zones.

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.

Agency Feedback:

The compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, protracted

conflicts, and the global food-security crisis are affecting women disproportionately, while also putting their critical contributions to food security, nutrition, and resilience into greater focus. USAID has recently launched the Generating Resilience and Opportunities for Women (GROW) Commitment, which will tackle urgent challenges facing women in food and water systems, including climate change, while unlocking opportunities for women to advance economically—ultimately benefiting their families, communities, and societies at large through improved food security, resilience, and economic growth.³ GROW will, among other things, prioritize investments to enhance the climate resilience of women producers, in all their diversity, by increasing their access to and benefit from climate-smart technologies and innovations and to climate information. GROW will also promote gender-responsive climate finance and insurance tools (such as index insurance, parametric disaster risk finance) and social protection to protect women’s and men’s assets and livelihoods and promote green entrepreneurship and jobs that are accessible to women as well as men. Across all GROW’s priority areas, the initiative will address the systemic barriers to gender equity and equality by supporting innovative and transformative programming that addresses discriminatory norms and rules. As the new report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on the Status of Women in Agrifood Systems underscores, gender-transformative programming is needed and can drive a positive impact while being cost effective. Further research that builds on this nascent evidence base, particularly considering institutional approaches beyond the household, would be valuable.

USAID/REFS has also partnered with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on two research activities aimed at identifying opportunities for transformative change in Feed the Future countries. First, during 2023, IFPRI developed and published food-systems diagnostics for 21 countries.⁴ These diagnostics describe the structure of the food systems and identify potential entry points for USAID investment. Second, over the course of 2023–2024, USAID/REFS will be supporting IFPRI to run investment prioritization modeling for approximately 20 target countries to estimate which types of interventions would have the largest impacts on poverty, hunger, growth, and diets.

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 6 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

³ See

<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/apr-17-2023-administrator-samantha-power-announces-usaids-generating-resilience-and-opportunities-women-grow-commitment>

⁴ See <https://www.ifpri.org/agrifood-system-diagnostics-country-series>

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.

Agency Feedback

USAID shares the priority of improving the affordability of safe and nutritious foods, as articulated in the GFSS. The GFSS recognizes that Feed the Future must work across the food system and with greater integration of the three GFSS Objectives to enhance production, affordability, and marketing of safe and nutritious foods that reduce malnutrition and improve diet quality. Similarly, USAID agrees that this can only be achieved by engaging with the private sector, given their significant role in food markets from global to hyper-local. For this reason, USAID encourages a market-systems approach to food-systems change, which includes private-sector engagement with diverse private actors such as multinational corporations, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and producer cooperatives.

Households in the Zones of Influence in the Feed the Future target countries already source part of their food from short value chains, so efforts to create these are perhaps less necessary than continued efforts to improve their productivity, safety, and nutritional diversity. USAID agrees that from a resilience perspective, global value chains should be balanced with shorter, regional, and national value chains to allow for adequate redundancy and diversity to provide agility in the face of new and ongoing shocks and stresses with the potential to disrupt any single source of supply. Sometimes disruptions will be to local food sources, and sometimes to international food sources. USAID also recognizes that the benefit of diversity and redundancy must be balanced against inefficiencies from too-short value chains that create food loss and waste, leaving less-favorable agroecological zones without nutritional variety. The Nutritious Foods Financing Facility (N3F) is the first nutrition impact-first fund that catalyzes private sector financing to help scale up the production and distribution of nutritious and safe foods for local consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa. N3F will provide SMEs with financing and technical assistance support tailored to challenges hindering their pathways towards sustainable growth. There are also questions about the business viability of servicing small-market footprints at a lower consumer cost, which could harm communities and our public-sector partners if short value chains fail or require excess subsidy to maintain competitiveness while providing food availability and affordability. Efforts to further explore these potential resilience-efficiency tradeoffs and business models would be useful.