

## Multi-Sectoral Nutrition and Food Security



Photo by Jake Lyell, MCC

USAID and its implementing partners played a critical role in identifying the determinants of malnutrition as they have been understood through time, addressing them with a multi-sectoral lens and exploring how the agriculture sector could better contribute to solving the malnutrition problem.

### USAID and Multi-Sectoral Nutrition in the 1970s

In the early 1970s, development sectors in general increased their focus on influencing centralized national planning processes; USAID was doing the same for nutrition. The term ‘nutrition planning’ was widely used in the 1970s to describe a process for developing and implementing national nutrition programs in countries. Planning in this context encompassed creating policies and developing strategies to support nutrition interventions, as well as coordinating nutrition program design, implementation, financing and evaluation at the country level.<sup>1</sup>

USAID was already beginning to understand undernutrition’s multi-sectoral determinants and not simply its manifestations. As food technology-based solutions, such as lysine fortification of cereal staples to increase protein quality, were unsuccessful, the Agency began exploring integrated systems to improve nutritional status through health-related activities, complemented by actions in other sectors such as agriculture, rural development, education, social protection and water, sanitation and hygiene. The point was emphasized in the book, “The Nutrition Factor: Its Role in National Development” by Alan Berg, a pioneer of USAID’s early nutrition actions, and in USAID programming under the leadership of the Agency’s first nutrition director, Dr. Martin J. Forman.<sup>2</sup>

*Multi-sectoral* nutrition planning became a USAID priority, representing an ambitious attempt to address malnutrition comprehensively through better understanding the diverse causes of malnutrition. This required

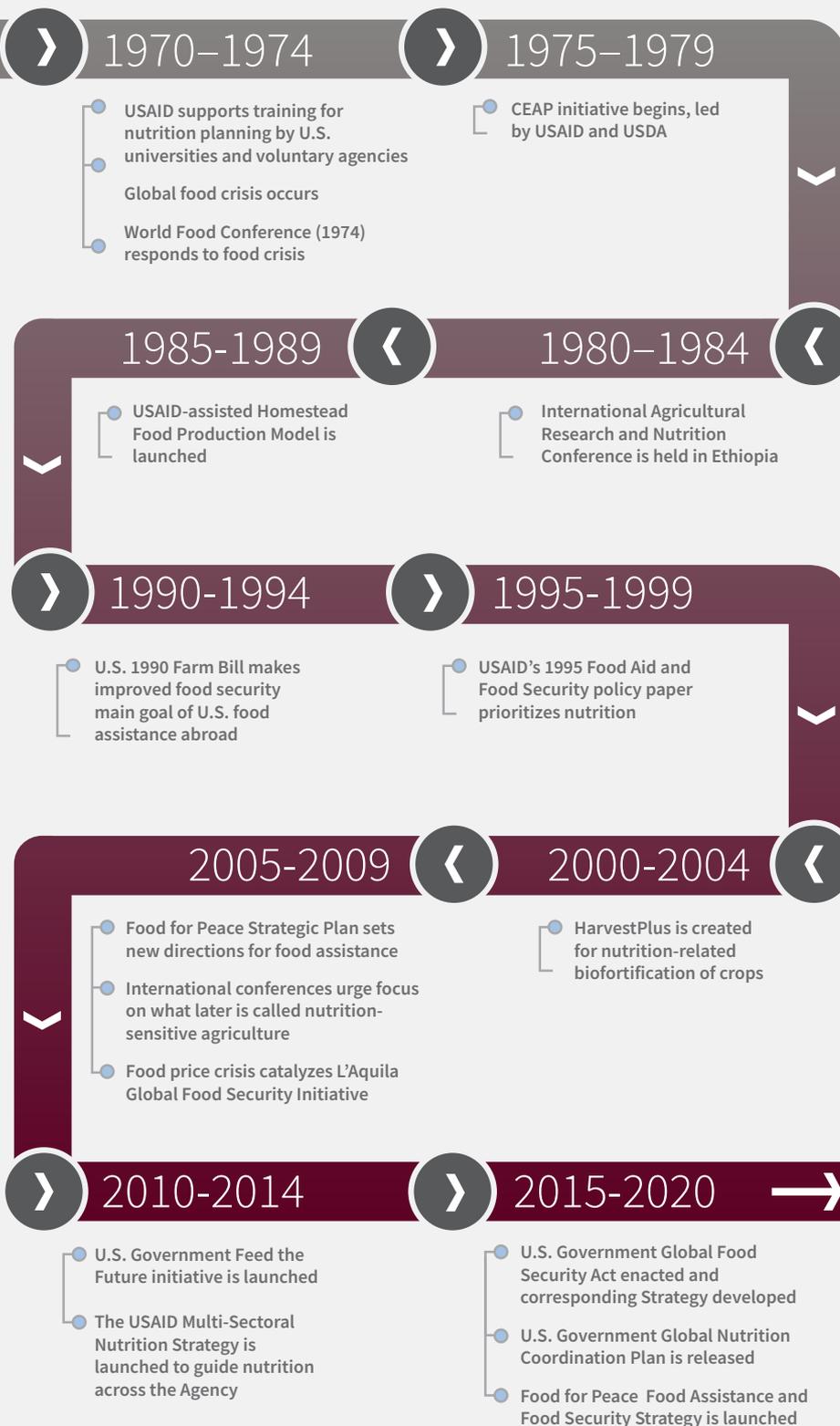
a commitment to action from multiple stakeholders—beyond just nutritionists—from a variety of sectors to improve nutrition. The first major international conference to address nutrition, national development and planning, held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1971 and attended by nutrition experts and senior planning officials from 55 countries, launched the international multi-sectoral nutrition planning movement.<sup>3</sup> USAID provided institutional development grants to MIT, Meharry Medical College and Cornell University to conduct training and inspire creative thinking on how to do multi-sectoral nutrition planning and related strategy development. Further expanding the pool of partners and innovations, USAID also worked closely with faculty at Tulane University on specific aspects of multi-sectoral nutrition,<sup>4</sup> and with the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama to broaden its research and training focus to assist member countries with national food and nutrition policy formulation.<sup>5</sup>

This early momentum led to the creation of multi-sectoral nutrition planning units in 26 developing countries during the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> USAID and the U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supported most of these, the majority of which included short, intensive trainings for government officials, NGOs and local USAID staff.<sup>7</sup> These planning units functioned with an assumption that other sectors’ officials would respond by reorienting a portion of their activities and resources to better address the causes of undernutrition.<sup>8</sup>

USAID’s efforts in Colombia, one of the most documented of all the USAID-assisted multi-sectoral planning investments, offer insights into the challenges encountered in the Agency’s initial, relatively brief experience with multi-sectoral nutrition planning.

Colombia’s National Food and Nutrition Plan (Plan de Alimentación y Nutrición or PAN) epitomized USAID’s multi-sectoral nutrition planning

## Milestones in Multi-Sectoral Nutrition & Food Security Programming



## Key Global Results

- In the 1970s, new multi-sectoral nutrition planning units were established in 26 countries, including training for relevant officials.
- Between 2010 and 2017, poverty dropped an average of 23 percent and child stunting by an average of 32 percent across Feed the Future focus areas.

## USAID Contributions to Global Results

- Training in nutrition planning of hundreds of development professionals has significantly increased consciousness of the importance of nutrition across related sectors, and has increased skilled human resources for nutrition.
- The USAID-USDA "Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies" (CEAP) research program (1977-1988) documented the many ways that economic policies can support or undermine the achievement of improved diets and nutrition, especially for the most vulnerable households.
- Since the 1990s, USAID has been at the forefront of work in biofortification, which has led to crops that are richer in such micronutrients as vitamin A, iron and zinc, while also increasing household production and consumption of these crops.
- From 2003 to 2009, stunting in children under 5 years fell 1.3 percentage points per year on average in communities receiving maternal and child health and nutrition services through Food for Peace assistance.

philosophy. Developed in 1974 by Colombia’s National Planning Department and implemented by the responsible ministries, with political support from the Office of the President, PAN was designed to provide a wide range of services. These included rural credit, agricultural cooperatives and agro-industry to generate employment and increase incomes of low-income households; community health promoters to provide greater access to services; a well-targeted food coupon program based on a detailed Colombia poverty map; and improved access to clean water. A local area was not considered “covered” unless services from at least three different sectors were being provided.<sup>9</sup>

A change of government in 1978 significantly weakened PAN, and the remaining, fragmented program ended four years later. Subsequent analysis identified several explanations for PAN’s termination, beyond the desire of a new government to establish its own development strategies. One was an infringement on the autonomy of sectoral ministries, which received little supplemental funding. Others were the absence of local structures and commitment, and the lack of civil society support, including the inadequate political organization and power of the low-income groups benefiting most from the program.<sup>10</sup>

Similar problems affected multi-sectoral nutrition planning units in other countries; the development sectors were not reorienting their activities and resources for nutrition. The units were accordingly deemed unsuccessful and began disappearing. Nutritionists, however, were quick to reassert their pre-eminence and introduced a period referred to by some as nutrition isolationism.<sup>11</sup> Starting around 1985, USAID nutrition programming narrowed its focus to the highly targeted, evidence-based interventions within the health sector that could save the most lives for the least cost, such as vitamin A supplementation, consistent with USAID’s Child Survival Initiative.

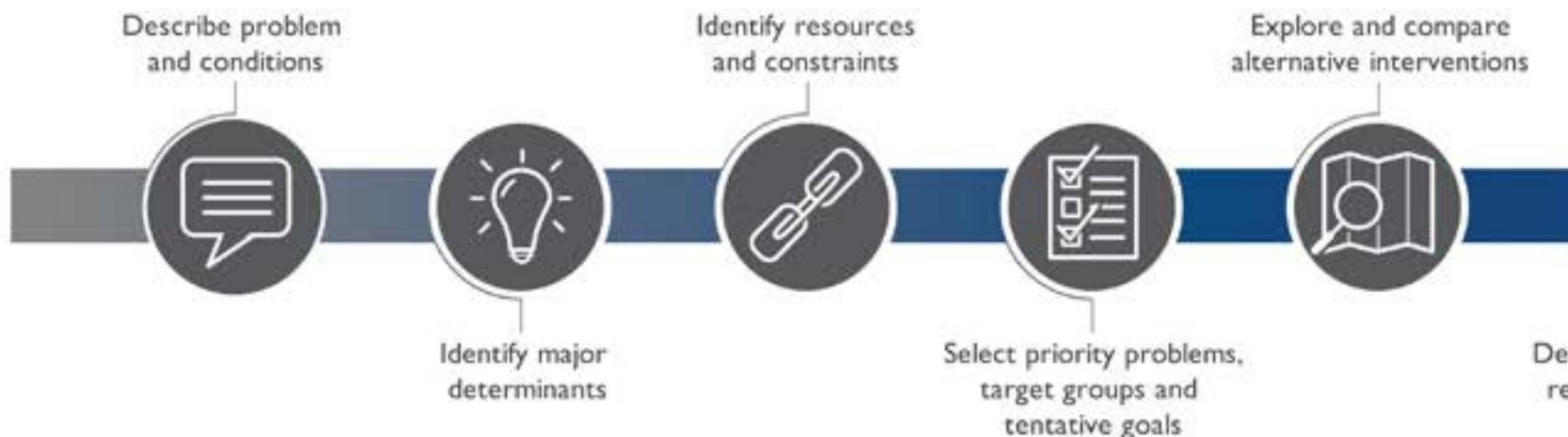
Important lessons were learned on why these multi-sectoral nutrition planning units failed. The nutrition planning approach was often very complex and based on highly elaborate causality models. Most proved too unwieldy and required too much data collection from those expected to utilize them. Planning units presented a long wish lists of multi-sectoral demands, often taken seriously only by the nutrition advocates themselves.<sup>12</sup>

In retrospect, knowledge gaps led to faulty assumptions. The broad perception persisting into the 1970s and early 1980s, even within USAID, assumed that improvement in nutritional well-being would be a natural outgrowth of the overall economic development actively pursued by many governments and development partners.<sup>13</sup> Since then, research has shown that “income generation is essential, but not sufficient, to improve nutrition outcomes.”<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, any value added by explicit nutrition interventions appeared minimal to many; this disregard was compounded by the relative absence of clear evidence of nutrition intervention effectiveness.

In addition, doubts were reinforced by an insufficient understanding of the functional consequences of small body size and short stature in children. Some argued incorrectly that the smallness was genetic or a healthy adaptation.<sup>15</sup> Only with the results of valuable longitudinal studies supported by USAID and others did it become clear that stunting and linear growth faltering are associated with multiple and often irreversible negative consequences, which can affect health and survival outcomes, physical and cognitive development and economic productivity.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, evidence was virtually non-existent at the time on the value of addressing the underlying and systemic causes of malnutrition, through what became known as nutrition-sensitive interventions, to be pursued by

### Key Steps in the Nutrition Planning Process



non-health sectors. The non-health sectors, each with their own agendas, were particularly reluctant to devote scarce resources to pursuits they perceived as peripheral to their primary objectives, which prevented coordinated, multi-sectoral action for nutrition.

One important result that emerged from the early multi-sectoral nutrition experience and the challenges it faced was the research agenda it generated, particularly regarding the evidence base, which USAID then actively pursued.

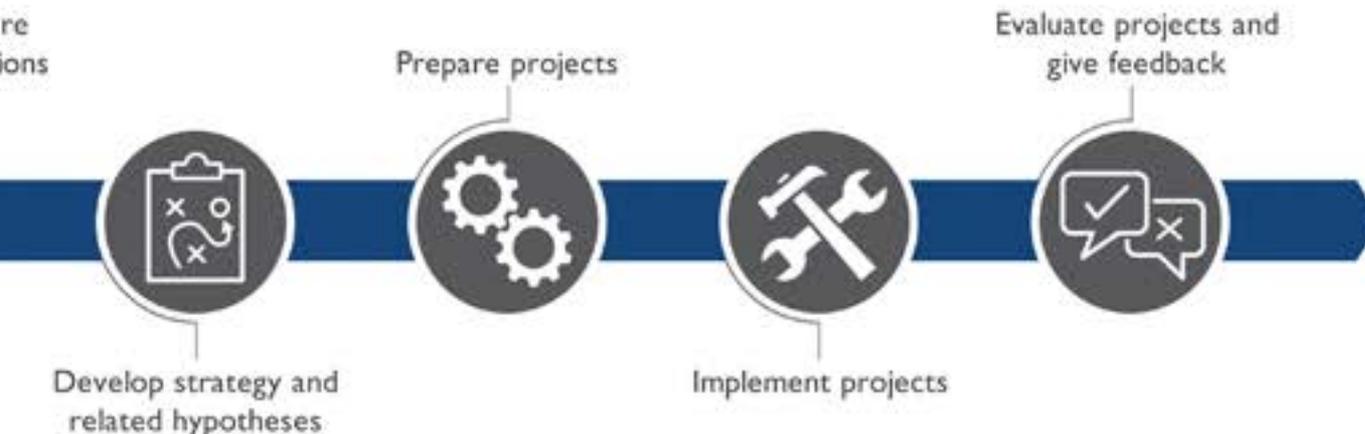
### The Consumption and Nutrition Effects of Agricultural Policies

Early industrial development policies, designed to keep food prices low for urban labor forces, were a disincentive to domestic food production. The global food crisis in the early 1970s and the additional urgency generated by the World Food Conference in 1974 led USAID to focus more on agricultural development, with the expectation that assisting developing countries to increase staple food crop production would translate into improved food consumption, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. Despite these expectations, however, little was really known about the magnitude—or even the direction—of agriculture intervention effects on food consumption. Therefore, in 1977, USAID prioritized improving its understanding of the consumption and nutrition effects of agricultural sector policies and programs,<sup>17</sup> and initiated a major program of applied research, technical assistance and training to generate evidence to fill the knowledge gap. This pioneering effort comprised a cluster of activities<sup>18</sup> that became known as the Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies (CEAP).



A community of mothers in Madagascar stand in line to have their children weighed. USAID

The CEAP initiative, implemented over an 11-year period, was financed and directed by USAID's Office of Nutrition, and managed by the USDA's Nutrition Economics Group.<sup>19</sup> The latter provided the expertise needed to develop and implement a complex set of activities through a multidisciplinary network of economists, nutritionists, anthropologists, agriculturalists, statisticians and computer specialists.<sup>20</sup> The initiative engaged well-known and respected U.S. academic and research institutions that had been working on mainstream USAID food and agriculture policy issues. Researchers found themselves challenged by nutrition economics, a new discipline that required them to ask questions, revise analytical frameworks and methods and work with additional types of data sets and experts.<sup>21</sup>



Source: Adapted from "Basic Elements of the Planning Process", a lecture by James Pines (VP of TransCentury Corporation) in 1975 at a CARE Nutritional Planning Workshop.

## EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANT CONSUMPTION EFFECTS IDENTIFIED BY CEAP RESEARCH

USAID, 1977-1988

- Producer price supports for maize in Honduras benefited wealthier farmers, while farmers with less than two hectares, who were net purchasers of maize, were hurt by the high maize price. Alternatively, in Egypt, price supports for meat had a progressive effect on income distribution, because beef is produced primarily on small farms and even landless agricultural workers engaged in beef production.
- A bread price subsidy in Sudan had a highly regressive impact on consumption, since the wealthy consumed more bread than the poor. In Sri Lanka, the government reduced its fiscal burden by switching from general food subsidies to a food stamp scheme, but this switch was also accompanied by deterioration in the nutritional status of the lowest income groups.
- Inflation in Peru more than offset retail food price control benefits, while in Jamaica it significantly reduced average calorie adequacy, with lower real incomes reflected in changes in demand for food.
- Terraced farming and some modern agricultural inputs introduced in Guatemala increased the incomes of small farmers growing vegetables by 30 percent, while those growing maize experienced only moderate income increases.

Sources: Rogers, B. "Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies: What Do We Know? A Review of USAID Nutrition Economics Group Research," 1989; and Kramer, C.S., and L.M. Rubey, "AID Food Policy Programming: Lessons Learned: An Assessment of the "Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies Project, 1977-1988," 1989.

Studies by CEAP included country-based policy research in Africa, Asia and Latin America<sup>22</sup> on producer price policies; consumer price policies and food subsidies; inputs, technology and marketing policies; and macroeconomic and trade policies.<sup>23</sup> Research also included country-specific, data-intensive analysis of food consumption.<sup>24</sup>

Income is a key pathway from agricultural production to food consumption. CEAP analyses provided numerous examples of the effects of countries' economic policies, both positive and negative, on the incomes and diets of poor urban and rural households.<sup>25</sup> USAID-supported research by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in the 1980s and 1990s generated new evidence on the importance of considering intra-household distribution of resources.<sup>26</sup> Additional IFPRI research provided important new insights on the nutrition effects of increased household income from cash crop production in six-countries.<sup>27</sup> While there is evidence of income's role in reducing hunger, this research identified that income alone could not solve child undernutrition. Also critical were investments in delivering the

Essential Nutrition Actions, providing health services and improving water, sanitation and hygiene.<sup>28</sup>

USAID's research on the consumption and nutrition effects of agricultural policies contributed to the food security dialogue that USAID began in the early 1990s. It was an important antecedent to USAID's efforts to improve the food security and nutrition effects of Food for Peace development food assistance beginning in 1995, and of the Feed the Future initiative since 2010.

## Diversifying Diets for Better Nutrition

Influenced by 1980s nutrition research on the importance of micronutrients, the international agricultural development community began to understand that the often-singular focus on staple foods was insufficient to meet nutrient requirements and assure adequate health and nutrition;<sup>29</sup> diversified diets were also needed to ensure sufficient intake of essential nutrients. Micronutrient supplementation and food fortification, discussed



**Women in Tajikistan work together to improve food production and child nutrition.**

USAID/Central Asia Republics, Tajikistan



in Chapter 3, were pursued as effective solutions to increase vitamin and mineral intake, but explicit attention to reducing nutrient deficiencies was required within the agriculture sector itself, starting with international agricultural research. Priorities for strengthening agricultural research's effect on nutrition were defined at a 1984 international conference in Ethiopia, organized by IFPRI and the U.N. Administrative Committee on Coordination/Subcommittee on Nutrition, which USAID help plan and co-chaired.<sup>30</sup>

Two agriculture interventions that USAID pursued to increase the production of nutrient-rich foods provide examples:

### Home Gardens

From the 1980s onward, home vegetable and fruit gardens, which often are possible even for functionally landless households, were increasingly incorporated into agriculture, rural development and nutrition projects. USAID worked with the World Vegetable Center in Taiwan, the U.S. Peace Corps<sup>31</sup> and NGOs to promote home gardens. Nearly half of USAID's development food assistance projects implemented between 2003 and 2009, for example, included gardens.<sup>32</sup>

Among the best-known home garden approaches is the Helen Keller International Homestead Food Production Model, developed and tested in Bangladesh beginning in the late 1980s; it has since been applied in a number of countries in Africa and Asia, and by 2017 had reached 1.5 million families.<sup>33</sup> This USAID-supported model initially focused on vitamin A-rich fruits and green leafy vegetables, but added animal husbandry activities as it expanded to address protein, iron and zinc deficiencies. Over time, the model has increased emphasis on women's roles, while being attentive to the time constraints they often face; social and behavior change addressing consumption and hygiene; and the identification of agro-ecological areas best suited to home gardening. While home gardens have been shown to positively affect women's income and empowerment, impact on nutritional outcomes and dietary diversity for both women and children has varied. Through USAID-funded research activities like the Collaborative Research Support Program and its successor, the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Nutrition, evidence continues to emerge on ways to ensure that children and households are consuming an adequate amount of their homegrown foods, and are obtaining adequate diversity in their diets from homestead food production and other sources, including nutrient-rich animal source foods.<sup>34</sup>

### Biofortification

Increasing micronutrient intake by increasing the density of vitamins and minerals in crops through plant breeding, or biofortification, was first seriously considered by scientists from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research in 1993. USAID was in the vanguard, funding the work of these scientists, who, in time, were able to prove that certain nutrient-rich crop varieties could be achieved through conventional



**A young Guatemalan woman feeds creole birds on her mini-household farm, created to diversify her household's diet and reduce malnutrition.**

**Ana Christina Chaclán/  
Buena Milpa Project**

breeding or agronomic practices without compromising yields. Created in the early 2000s and funded by USAID and other support, the Biofortification Challenge Program, later renamed HarvestPlus, constitutes an alliance of more than 70 partner organizations with mandates to develop and test such crops, educate farmers and consumers on their value and develop markets. The alliance has succeeded in applying biofortification to produce crops rich in vitamin A (orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, maize and cassava), iron (pearl millet and beans) and zinc (wheat and rice), and in increasing household production and consumption of these foods.<sup>35</sup> Biofortification is a promising approach for increasing essential micronutrients in people's diets, as part of a larger strategy to eliminate population-level micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>36</sup>

### Food Security and the Transformation of the Food for Peace Program

Agricultural productivity increased substantially after the 1970s food crisis; by the 1980s, the resulting abundant food supplies and affordable prices were being taken for granted. A long-term decline in USAID and other donor funding followed for agricultural development.<sup>37</sup> The definition of food security used at the 1974 World Food Conference is that overall food supplies or availability are adequate. While this might have been the case, it did not mean that the food consumption problems of the poor had been solved. Realizing in the 1980s that more was required, the development community reached a deeper understanding of food security and nutrition determinants, some of which was derived from the lessons learned from USAID's multi-sectoral nutrition planning, analysis and research efforts



Women in Senegal harvest Okra.  
Olivier Asselin, USAID/Yaajeende

described earlier. Their focus broadened to include more attention to increasing people's access to and utilization of food.<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. Congress recognized the concept's importance in the 1990 Farm Bill, when it designated enhancing the food security of the developing world as the overriding objective of U.S. international food assistance.<sup>39</sup> The law adopted a more complex view, defining food security as "access by all people at all times to sufficient food and nutrition for a healthy and productive life." Food assistance uses in the law included combating maternal and child malnutrition and promoting economic and community development. USAID also acknowledged the importance of food security in a 1992 policy determination that defined food security and described the three variables central to its attainment:

- **Food availability:** in the development context, this is whether the necessary quantities of appropriate and necessary foods are available and in proximity to the population from domestic production, commercial imports or donors.
- **Food access:** whether individuals have adequate incomes or other resources to purchase or barter for sufficient food.
- **Food utilization:** whether food is properly used; ensuring proper food processing and storage, sufficient knowledge of nutrition and child care and adequate health and sanitation services.<sup>40</sup>

Food for Peace began a long-term effort to enhance program performance, with new directions outlined in a 1995 USAID policy paper, "Food Aid and Food Security."<sup>41</sup> Major changes to development food assistance programming after 1995 included prioritizing two objectives: improving household nutrition, and increasing agricultural productivity. Nutrition was mentioned specifically in the food security definition, and improved nutritional status of young children was chosen as the ultimate indicator of success. Food for Peace worked closely with its NGO partners to convert activities implemented under its non-emergency category into truly multi-sectoral development programs.<sup>42</sup>

Following this 1995 policy, which continues to provide guidance for USAID food assistance, the Agency took other steps to successfully transform Food for Peace programs to better achieve food security,<sup>43</sup> as outlined in a 2005 strategic plan. One step was redirecting development food assistance to more food-insecure countries, initially in Africa, and, starting in 2006, to 20 priority countries,<sup>44</sup> using three food security indicators as selection criteria with child stunting prevalence as the most important.<sup>45</sup> Another step was strengthening monitoring and evaluation requirements<sup>46</sup> to ensure that Food for Peace and its implementing partners adequately assess and report on program performance.<sup>47</sup> Food for Peace also worked to phase out most school feeding and urban food-for-work activities and to reallocate the majority of resources to agriculture and natural resources management



as well as to health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene.<sup>48</sup> As a result of these efforts, between 2003 and 2009, more than three-quarters of households receiving Food for Peace development assistance reported increases in household incomes and access to food, among areas reporting on these indicators.<sup>49</sup>

As outlined in a 2016 strategy, Food for Peace continues to refine and update its evidence-based programming to meet the evolving challenges of hunger, such as climate change (by broadening the understanding of potential impacts on disease vectors, water resource availability and natural disasters), rapidly growing youth populations (by focusing on young people as positive change agents) and extreme poverty (by investing resources in areas where extreme poverty is a primary driver of chronic malnutrition).<sup>50</sup>

### Feed the Future: The U.S. Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative

The 2007-2009 global food price crisis renewed the international community's interest in food insecurity. The U.S. Government responded quickly, providing more than \$1 billion in food aid and development assistance to both meet immediate humanitarian needs and to stimulate increased agricultural production in the countries hardest hit by food price increases. After the crisis, the Group of Eight industrialized nations, popularly referred to as the G-8, declared the international fight against food insecurity a high priority at their 2009 summit in L'Aquila, Italy. The U.S. Government took a leading role in this global effort and launched its Feed the Future initiative.<sup>51</sup>

Building on efforts begun under the Bush Administration to tackle the root causes of hunger and poverty, the 2010 launch of the Feed the Future initiative galvanized the U.S. Government's commitment to reducing global poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition through inclusive agriculture-led growth. The initiative was guided by the Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security (2009), which embodied best practices for effective and accountable development.<sup>52</sup> The Global Food Security Act of 2016 codified the U.S. Government's commitment to ending global hunger, poverty and child malnutrition by authorizing it into federal statute. As required by the Act, the U.S. Government departments and agencies collaborating under Feed the Future developed a new Global Food Security Strategy (2017-2021), which guides Feed the Future implementation.<sup>53</sup> Led by USAID, Feed the Future leverages the resources, skills and expertise of a variety of federal agencies and departments. The initiative also includes partnerships with host governments, other donors, multilateral institutions, foundations, NGOs, researchers, academia and the private sector, and it concentrates on geographic "Zones of Influence" in a select set of countries.<sup>54</sup>

Feed the Future's goal<sup>55</sup> is to sustainably reduce global hunger, malnutrition and poverty by addressing their underlying determinants. Assistance is provided to smallholder farmers to increase agricultural productivity and incomes, while fostering resilience and women's empowerment as well as market connections and economic growth. Notably, integrating agriculture and nutrition was an ambitious and pioneering aspect of the initiative when it was launched. A 2016 review of the Feed the Future initiative found that it increased the share of overall U.S. assistance for agriculture and nutrition, and that the focus countries were well selected based on having the requisite need and the potential for effective partnerships.<sup>56</sup> Between 2010 and 2017, this work contributed to an average 23 percent drop in poverty and 32 percent reduction in child stunting within Feed the Future focus areas.<sup>57</sup>

Nutrition-related characteristics of the Feed the Future development model include:

- Making "A Well-Nourished Population" a Feed the Future objective, along with "Accelerated, Inclusive Agriculture Sector Growth," and "Strengthened Resilience among People and Systems."
- Clarifying the major pathways, from agriculture interventions to improved food consumption and nutrition: the food production pathway, the agricultural income pathway and the women's empowerment pathway.

### Message from Rajiv Shah, Former USAID Administrator

**“ This nutrition strategy is unique, because it targets a very specific challenge and elevates it across our work in health, agriculture, water and sanitation and food assistance. With it, we commit to working across our priorities to ensure that safe and nutritious foods are accessible, healthy dietary practices are followed and the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases are prioritized.”**

Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator (2010-2015)

Source: "USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014-2025," 2014

- Adopting a nutrition-sensitive agriculture approach that promotes nutrient-rich foods (i.e., foods high in the nutrients lacking in poor diets), which for Feed the Future means prioritizing the horticulture, legume, aquaculture, livestock and dairy value chains.
- Investing substantially in performance monitoring and evaluation, including indicator development and professional data collection and analysis, to provide credible evidence of program performance.<sup>60</sup>

### USAID's Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy

While Feed the Future was revitalizing USAID's commitment to agriculture-led economic growth and improved nutrition, USAID's global health efforts focused on high-level goals to prevent child and maternal deaths, recognizing that undernutrition is estimated to contribute to 45 percent of under-5 mortality, and anemia to about 20 percent of maternal mortality.<sup>61</sup> Nutrition became the nexus connecting these two high-level goals for USAID. In May 2014, USAID released its first Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, which describes an integrated, Agency-wide approach to addressing global malnutrition through 2025.<sup>62</sup> Guided by this strategy, USAID's nutrition programming seeks to reduce malnutrition—and address its determinants—in women of reproductive age (15-49) and in children, with a specific focus on the 1,000-day window from pregnancy to the child's second birthday. This is to be realized through Feed the Future action, USAID's global health programs and USAID's Food for Peace development activities.

USAID has also been a leading member of the U.S. Government's international nutrition working groups, task forces and coordination bodies, and a leader in both the preparation and implementation of the U.S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan. Launched in 2016, this cross-government effort draws experts from 11 agencies that are committed to advancing nutrition research, action and learning to address critical domestic and global nutrition concerns, leveraging existing resources to do so. Since its launch, this coordination mechanism has guided the creation of formal leadership and structure to advance progress towards U.S. Government nutrition goals and has advanced research, information exchange and learning in multiple priority areas for nutrition action.<sup>63</sup>

### USAID Country Experiences with Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Programming

With Feed the Future and the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy in place, USAID continues tackling the challenge of integrating nutrition within agriculture and other sectors, with a high priority on coordination and collaboration. Specific elements of three country programs illustrate the range of approaches to multi-sectoral nutrition programming:

#### *Bangladesh*

In Bangladesh, USAID increased dietary diversity through the creation of Farmer Nutrition Schools. These provided information to village members on improved farming practices to grow and eat more nutrient-rich crops, as well as advised pregnant and lactating women on better child care and the importance of handwashing with soap. For women participating in the



An agricultural leader in her community educates other local farmers in Bangladesh on how to safely use pesticides.

Ashraful Islam



A woman and child wash their hands at a community hand washing station in Indonesia.

USAID

Farmer Nutrition Schools, the consumption of foods representing a diverse diet<sup>64</sup> rose by 50 percent between 2012 and 2015, from an average of four to six different food groups consumed.<sup>65</sup> In addition, USAID trained more than 65,000 individuals in modern fish farming methods and improved nutrition practices. The majority of participating households increased fish production and consumption.<sup>66</sup>

### Nepal

USAID works through its Suaahara multi-sectoral nutrition project in Nepal (2011-2021) to reduce undernutrition among women and children in the 1,000-day period, which also involves fathers, mothers-in-law and adolescent girls. Operating in more than half of the districts in Nepal, the large-scale project had reached nearly 2.4 million people by 2016. Its main components include maternal, infant and young child nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; maternal and child health; family planning; and homestead food production with market linkages.<sup>67</sup> The project also addresses gender and other social inequities and strengthens nutrition capacity and coordination of local officials, communities and outreach workers.<sup>68,69</sup> This project works closely with similar Food for Peace multi-sectoral nutrition activities and Feed the Future agriculture activities in Nepal. It has also facilitated the rollout of the Nepal government's national multi-sectoral nutrition strategy.

### Ethiopia

USAID's Empowering New Generations to Improve Nutrition and Economic Growth (ENGINE) Project in Ethiopia (2011-2016) forged partnerships with

federal, regional and local governments in several sectors. The project worked to achieve nutrition objectives in four regions, reaching 5.7 million children under 5 years old during the project's lifetime. Among the USAID-assisted nutrition initiatives in the 2010s, the Ethiopia example may be unique in the strength of its close working relationships with Ethiopian government counterparts. USAID helped revitalize the country's multi-sectoral nutrition coordination body, which oversaw the development of the government's National Nutrition Program (2016-2020). This has been viewed as an international model for such plans. The project's activities and creative partnerships have contributed to significant reductions in stunting among children 3-36 months (with declines of 12, 14 and 20 percent in three regions), and improved young child feeding (the proportion of children meeting minimum dietary diversity standards more than doubled) and maternal nutrition (126 percent increase in the number of pregnant women who took iron-folic acid supplements).<sup>70</sup>

## Learning to Tackle Malnutrition through Multiple Sectors

Beginning with USAID's early experiments with multi-sectoral nutrition assistance, the Agency became increasingly proactive in exploring the effects on nutrition of activities in multiple sectors, perhaps most importantly in agriculture and in development food assistance to improve food security. The vital importance of these efforts is demonstrated in the growing number of effective nutrition-sensitive and multi-sectoral projects in low-income countries.

Experiences over more than four decades provide increased clarity on multiple issues, including (1) the need for attention to the determinants as well as the manifestations of undernutrition, (2) the importance of enlisting the support of multiple development sectors to meet this need, (3) the identification within these sectors of the interventions most likely to provide or facilitate nutritional impact, (4) the necessity of an explicit focus on the most nutritionally vulnerable population groups, (5) an understanding of the importance of reducing dietary deficiencies of micronutrients as well as calories and protein and (6) the essential role of accurate and meaningful data collection and use for the design, monitoring and evaluation of strategies, plans and interventions.

In order to advance its global nutrition goals, USAID continues to refine its multi-sectoral approach, and to enhance actions to link humanitarian assistance with development programming. Through this process, it is important to the Agency to continue learning about the added value and effect multi-sectoral actions and delivery systems have on nutritional, and the synergies achieved by increased collaboration and coordination with high-impact, nutrition-specific interventions in vulnerable areas. These actions support progress towards USAID's vision of a world in which countries, communities and families have the capacity to achieve and sustain healthy, well-nourished populations.