



EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR FOOD SECURITY

Photo by Ashley Peterson, Land O'Lakes

Feed the Future is America's initiative to combat global hunger. We partner with countries to harness the power of smart agriculture and food systems to address the root causes of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, we help them strengthen their resilience and ability to lead their own development for years to come.

Women's empowerment is critical to this endeavor. Feed the Future helps women overcome barriers to unleash their full potential, including in the wake of COVID-19.



Photo by Melissa Cooperman, IFPRI

WHY WOMEN?

Women participate in all aspects of the food system, from farming and research to trade and marketing to entrepreneurship, leadership and caring for family members. Yet they face multiple constraints in many of these activities.

Relative to men, women tend to own less land, have limited ability to hire labor, and face impediments to accessing credit, extension and other services (including through mobile platforms—otherwise known as the “digital divide”). And while the number of women-owned and -led businesses in emerging markets is growing, these enterprises and their leaders face numerous challenges: Constraints on human and financial capital and access to professional networks and markets impede sustainability, profitability and growth. Social norms and expectations about women’s and men’s roles and abilities also create unbalanced workloads and limit women’s voices and leadership in food systems.

Closing these gender gaps and tackling legal, social and cultural barriers that affect women in all facets of food systems can have a measurable impact on agriculture in developing countries, where many people depend on the sector for a living.

When women advance, it has a multiplier effect throughout their families and communities: Studies show that women are more likely than men to

reinvest their income back into their household to support the family’s nutrition, health and education.

WOMEN FEED THE FUTURE

- ✓ Women are key to solving hunger. They make up nearly half the agricultural workforce in developing countries and, when they have equal access to land and other inputs, their yields can improve by 20–30 percent, feeding up to 150 million more people.
- ✓ Empowered women are better able to improve nutrition. Research from Ethiopia, Nepal, and Bangladesh shows that families and communities where women are more empowered have better diets and less child stunting.
- ✓ Women’s empowerment builds resilience. After a catastrophic flood, Bangladeshi households where women were more empowered maintained or improved their food security.



Photo by CIMMYT

INVESTING IN WOMEN

Feed the Future helps women—as business owners, farmers, health workers and more—overcome barriers and constraints to reaching their full potential.

For example, we help women:

- Access agricultural inputs, technologies, markets and information.
- Increase their participation and decision-making roles both in the household and in community groups.
- Gain greater access to financial and business services so they can grow their businesses.

In fact, since it began, Feed the Future has unlocked over \$730 million in agriculture-related credit for more than 2.6 million women and women-owned businesses.

By working with governments, businesses, universities, and directly with farmers and processors, Feed the Future provides training and opportunities for women to use agricultural technologies and develop innovations that increase their productivity, make laborious tasks easier and faster, and improve

nutrition. In 2019, this led more than 2.3 million women to use improved agricultural technologies or management practices—such as new seed varieties, techniques to improve soil health, and post-harvest processing and value addition—which reduce their workload while increasing yields.

In Ghana, Feed the Future helped create over 1,100 village associations for savings and loans; 68 percent of members are women. Through savings and credit offered by these groups, women members were able to double their crop yields by purchasing better inputs. They subsequently secured long-term support from a guaranteed buyer of their harvests. They also invested in food processing and trade, increasing their incomes further and emerging as more sustainably self-sufficient with better community and business relationships.



Photo by Debora Chacon, Rana Labs

ENGAGING MEN

Working with women alone is not enough to achieve gender equality and foster an environment where women can benefit fully from improvements. Feed the Future has effectively increased women's leadership roles in their communities by working through community-based organizations, changing gender norms, and engaging men to support women's empowerment efforts.

Take nutrition for example. It has traditionally been treated as women's responsibility. Feed the Future is engaging men in child nutrition and care while promoting more gender-equitable attitudes and responsibilities. In Tanzania, men and women are

jointly participating in empowerment training where they have an opportunity to reflect and challenge established norms on gender-based roles in and outside of agriculture.

MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

Early in the initiative, Feed the Future and its partners developed the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) to make women's empowerment a measurable concept. Feed the Future uses the WEAI as a standard to measure impact and as a diagnostic to shape programming. Today, partners around the world are using the tool to collect data in more than 47 countries. This data has even moved governments such as Bangladesh's to design their own programs that address the greatest constraints women in agriculture face.

The WEAI tracks rural women's roles and engagement in agricultural activities, relative to men's, in the areas of: *decisions over agricultural production, access to and decision-making power over assets and resources, control over use of income, leadership roles within the community, and time use.*

From this data we know that from 2012–2015, in areas where Feed the Future works:

- 3.7 million more women had input into productive decisions
- 3.3 million more women had reasonable workloads
- 2.6 million more women accessed credit and made decisions about what to do with it.

In Bangladesh, Feed the Future contributed to an increase in the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index score of 31 percent from 2011 to 2018. New data on WEAI trends is forthcoming in 2021.

WOMEN AND COVID-19

Emerging evidence suggests that COVID-19 may be disproportionately impacting women and marginalized groups. Even before the pandemic, women and girls were more likely to live in households that are poor and had significantly higher levels of food insecurity than men.

Across food systems, pandemic-related mobility restrictions compounded by further increases in unpaid care responsibilities threaten women's livelihoods. They impede women's access to markets, supplies and information, particularly as digital platforms become critical, yet remain out of reach for many women. Women also lack job and social protections that would protect them in crises

like this, and are more vulnerable to sliding back into poverty and hunger as a result.

Feed the Future is addressing the economic fallout of COVID-19 in a number of ways to protect livelihoods and progress while building more resilience and inclusion for the future to ensure rebuilding leaves no one behind. This includes tailored support for women producers and women-owned and -led businesses.



Photo by Clement Tardif



Photo by Bobby Neptune



Photo by Fintrac Inc.

Senegal

In Senegal, women are banding together to mobilize local funding to protect their communities from COVID-19. Since March, they have repurposed 68 women's groups to pool resources for hygiene and sanitation supplies for their communities. Feed the Future originally established these groups as a forum for the women to share nutrition and horticulture information and fund their own agricultural projects. So far, they've bought soaps, gels and bleach and installed 650 locally made hand washing stations, benefitting over 3,000 people in six villages. Feed the Future is also training local entrepreneurs on how to manufacture soap and other essential supplies. Now that the initial infrastructure and response is in place, local governments are purchasing and supplying the soap, eliminating the need for emergency distribution and further equipping families to protect themselves.

Nigeria

Feed the Future is supporting 10 existing small and medium-sized agribusiness partners with new grants and business advice to weather COVID-19's impacts. One of these companies is ReelFruit in Nigeria, founded by Affiong Williams. With Feed the Future's support, ReelFruit will be able to maintain and grow operations during and after COVID-19, with a focus on sourcing products from smallholder farmers, many of them women. As her business is able to stay afloat, Affiong is not just creating opportunity for herself, but also creating opportunity in her community during this difficult time.

Uganda

In Uganda, Feed the Future and a local business services company provided advice and a grant to an entrepreneur. With this support, she has pivoted her yogurt company to stay in business, provide food locally, and stay safe. She has started marketing on social media and selling direct to consumers (contact free) as supermarket demand is down.