
Hunger and Whole of Government

By Connie Veillette, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow for Global Food Security and Aid Effectiveness

The U.S. [Feed the Future](#) initiative was created in 2010 to respond to increasing levels of chronic food insecurity in many developing countries. The initiative adopted a whole of government approach ostensibly to tap into expertise residing outside of the principal agency in charge of foreign assistance and development, the U.S. Agency for International Development. Unfortunately, the extent to which Feed the Future capitalizes on the expertise and budgetary resources of a wide array of government agencies remains largely untapped.

Since the end of the Cold War, USAID had experienced at least a decade of reduced funding that had resulted in a loss of expertise in certain assistance categories. Agricultural development assistance was one category that had seen annual declines in funding since the 1980s when those programs comprised about 25 percent of the U.S. aid portfolio. By 2003, that had declined to 1 percent.¹ As a result, when spikes in global food prices hit in 2007 and 2008, and as Feed the Future was being developed under the leadership of the State Department, some observers believed that

USAID lacked agricultural experts that would enable it to lead such an effort. Characterizing the initiative as a whole of government effort was one response, but it also gave rise to competition among agencies that did not recognize USAID leadership in development. USAID was eventually named as the lead agency in the 2010 [Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review](#) with the intervention of its new Administrator Raj Shah who forcefully argued that development was its own discipline, and one in which other U.S. agencies lacked experience.

Since 2010, annual funding has averaged around \$1 billion in funds provided through the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This bill funds the bulk of agencies having international missions, such as the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, some Treasury programs that oversee U.S. contributions to international organizations such as the World Bank, and some smaller international development funds.

What is Feed the Future?

The Feed the Future initiative (FtF), created in 2010, is a U.S. assistance program addressing global food insecurity. Following global spikes in food prices in 2007 and 2008, it was recognized that many developing countries with high percentages of chronic hunger had experienced decades of neglect of agricultural productivity, investments in agriculture research and extension, and the infrastructure that supports local, regional, and international food markets. The initiative is led by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) within a whole of government framework. Since 2010, it has received roughly \$1 billion annually.

Countries are selected as “focus countries” based on the following criteria: need; potential for agricultural growth; opportunities for regional synergy; the willingness of potential focus country governments to invest in agriculture; and their commitment to policy reforms. Twenty countries were initially chosen, but Nicaragua was dropped early in the process based on not sufficiently meeting the criteria. The initiative also includes “aligned agricultural programs” in 9 additional countries that receive some assistance for agricultural development but that are not Feed the Future focus countries.

Feed the Future Focus Countries:

Bangladesh	Kenya	Rwanda
Cambodia	Liberia	Senegal
Ethiopia	Malawi	Tajikistan
Ghana	Mali	Tanzania
Guatemala	Mozambique	Uganda
Haiti	Nepal	Zambia
Honduras		

Aligned Agriculture Programs

Burma	South Sudan
Democratic Republic of Congo	Timor-Leste
Egypt	Yemen
Georgia	Zimbabwe
Nigeria	

The roles of other United States agencies not funded by this bill are not articulated in administration budget submissions. Administration supported legislation introduced in the 113th Congress would have authorized Feed the Future and its whole of government approach but did very little to clarify the activities of other agencies. With the start of a new Congress, the administration and congressional committees are setting their legislative and budget agendas, including possible re-introduction of global food security legislation. Many in the development and agriculture communities are considering if and how a whole of government framework helps or hinders the United States commitment to eradicate hunger by supporting the agricultural development of poor countries.

Many interested [observers](#) have expounded on the benefits of authorizing legislation, with [some](#) calling for a more broadly written bill that reflects the wide range of

sectors and approaches that global farmers will need to eliminate chronic hunger now and in the future when demographic and environmental pressures will continue to further undermine productivity.

The bills introduced in 2014 ([H.R. 5656](#) and [S. 2909](#)) were limited to authorizing the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the State Department. As the primary agencies in charge of devising and implementing U.S. foreign policy and operationalizing the U.S. development agenda, it is not surprising that these agencies would be the central focus. However, as is clear from Feed the Future documents, the whole of government approach entails at least 9 additional agencies. Neither legislation nor government budget documents include an articulation of what activities and resources partner agencies are bringing to the overall effort.ⁱⁱ This has led to [calls](#) for a whole of government budget on global food security.

What is the Whole of Government Approach (WofG)?

Whole of government is an amorphous term used to call for the better integration of approaches and solutions, often in response to problems that cross-cut a range of issues. As funding streams, legislative authorities, congressional oversight, and agency policy boundaries have become increasingly silo-ed, proponents of WofG have sought to develop an approach that would allow for leveraging the comparative advantages of various government agencies in a unified effort to tackle a common problem.

In practice, WofG is difficult to manage. It requires that one agency or individual be given leadership authority, presumably from the White House. In the absence of leadership, inter-agency competition for control consumes inordinate time and energy. Success will depend on the lead agency's ability to overcome inherent problems, and that often depends on the nature of the lead agency's political position within the administration.

Collaborating is time consuming particularly in the beginning when time must be spent defining interagency roles and responsibilities. Every agency within a whole of government construct has its own structure, culture, and decision making process that may not be compatible in terms of budgeting, transparency or accountability. Each agency's congressional oversight and appropriations panels may be unevenly committed to the effort. The programs of various agencies do not always lend themselves to common frames of evaluation, monitoring, and correlating adjustments. Each of these challenges is mirrored and often amplified within U.S. embassy country teams.

Agencies identified as part of Feed the Future

- U.S. Agency for International Development
- Department of State
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Treasury
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- U.S. Trade Representative
- Millennium Challenge Corporation
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. African Development Foundation
- U.S. Peace Corps

But what about –

Department of Defense
Department of Interior
Department of Education
National Science Foundation

National Institutes of Health
Trade and Development Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Inter-American Foundation

Global Food Security Sectors & Possible Agency Partners

Agriculture Development: USAID; MCC; USDA, TDA; OPIC; US Africa Development Foundation; Peace Corps; Treasury.

Health and Nutrition: State; USAID; HHS; CDC.

Food Safety: USDA; USAID; FDA.

Natural Resources & Environment: USDA; State; USGS; Interior; EPA; USAID.

Research: USDA; USAID; FFAR; NSF.

Trade: USTR; Commerce; TDA; USAID; USDA; State; MCC.

A useful whole of government budget could do more than just outline funding levels of various agencies' food security work. It needs to explain how each effort fits within overarching goals and to justify the comparative advantage of each. For example, how will the U.S. Trade Representative, the Department of Commerce, USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service, USAID or the Department of Treasury support better trade flows to and from food insecure nations? How does the health systems capacity building work of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Centers for Disease Control, and USAID's Global Health Program support Feed the Future's nutrition goals? Are there any duplications of effort among agencies? And perhaps most importantly for program sustainability, are all programs, regardless of sponsoring agency, being evaluated on the same terms?

Below are three examples of agencies and their food security capabilities that are not adequately reflected in current programs.

The [Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) is an example of an agency included as a Feed the Future partner but its work and resources are not articulated in budget documents. USDA's [website](#) describes it as being "strategically placed in over 80 countries constantly monitoring agricultural matters globally. Since 2010, USDA has aligned appropriate programs to Feed the Future plans to support agriculture development in target countries and regions: Ghana, Kenya, East Africa, Bangladesh, Haiti, Guatemala and Central America." It is not clear if USDA is actively

undertaking agricultural development in all 19 Feed the Future focus countries or just the ones listed on its website.

More specifically, some USDA divisions manage specific programs related to global food security.

- [Foreign Agricultural Service](#)
- [Economic Research Services's](#) Annual Food Security Assessment
- [Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service](#)
- [McGovern-Dole](#) International Food for Education and Child Nutrition
- [Borlaug Fellowship](#) Program
- [Cochran Fellowship](#) Program
- [Norman Borlaug Commemorative Research Initiative](#) (joint program with USAID)
- [Food for Progress](#) (that provides funding for such projects as [Land O' Lakes](#) work in Tanzania)

These programs are in addition to what many believe are a core strength of USDA – its support for research and partnerships with research institutions. The [National Institute of Food and Agriculture's](#) site suggests that it plans "to deepen and increase the relevance of NIFA research partnerships to Feed the Future goals." The joint USDA and USAID 2011 Feed the Future [Research Strategy](#) does outline a research agenda but without further budget information, it is not clear how the strategy is guiding joint or complementary investments in research relevant to food insecure countries. USDA's [Agricultural Research Service](#) provides some insights on what international research it is funding but does not relate it to a strategy.

The Department of Defense is not usually considered an agency with a food security mission although it, working with USAID, is often the first responder in providing emergency relief following natural and man-made disasters. At first, this entails the provision of basic food and water provisions, but the Pentagon has come to understand the value of agriculture development in fragile states and conflict zones. The scope of DoD agriculture assistance in places like Afghanistan and Iraq are little understood. Comprising just a very small portion of the U.S. defense budget, programs such as the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), Agribusiness Development Teams (ADTs), and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), often get lost in the shadow of the military's larger budget priorities. As such, they often do not attract congressional scrutiny and most certainly are not evaluated for effectiveness. In fact, a 2012 Government Accountability Office (GAO) [study](#) found that evaluation reports were not completed for 90 percent of DoD projects carried out from fiscal year 2005 to 2009.

In addition, the Pentagon provides assistance in countries at peace. As part of DoD [Directive 3000.05](#), the U.S. military conducts so-called stability operations in countries that are susceptible to instability or that provide environments friendly to foreign terrorists. Such programs have been conducted in Kenya, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, and the Philippines.

Global flows of commodities and food products form a core of international trade.

During crises, such as the price spikes of 2007 and 2008, country actions to protect their own markets, such as export bans, can have severe global or regional food security consequences. When trade flows are working well, they allow for countries to benefit from their own comparative advantages in some crops while also benefitting from importing foodstuffs that they do not produce. [Free trade agreements](#) and [trade and investment framework agreements](#) do not always include specific sections on agriculture, nor do they seem to be part of a global food security strategy. Current negotiations on a [Trans Pacific Partnership](#) and a [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership](#) may indeed be burdened with difficult challenges relating to agriculture. When these agreements do include agriculture, they are often protectionist with regard to rich country markets. It is unclear whether USAID programs to build trade capacity and State Department attempts to open up markets are lining up with what the Office of the U.S. [Trade Representative](#) or the Department of Commerce's [International Trade Administration](#) are doing on creating regional trade regimes.

Whole of Government Options

On any given subject, there are a range of government agencies with some related expertise. The question is whether the challenge, in this case eradicating chronic hunger that feeds international instability and creates acute hunger crises, can benefit from a whole of government approach, or how such an approach can be constructed to avoid its inherent difficulties. As new

legislation is considered, a variety of options could be of interest.

One alternative is to empower one agency with the authority and resources to manage all facets of U.S. global food security programs. That agency then could access expertise across government through the use of [Participating Agency Service Agreements](#). This anticipates that other agencies would be “hired” to implement certain projects in some countries, but the concept could be expanded to incorporate portions of a food security program, such as agriculture research programs, or health aspects.

A second alternative would require the lead agency to convene the relevant agencies in order to build a strategy and related budget requirements. Such an approach may result in portions of these agencies’ budgets being categorized for global food security with the strategy guiding how those resources would be spent in consultation with the lead agency. While this would instill some policy and budget coherence, it would require numerous congressional committees to understand how a portion of budget authority under their jurisdiction fits into the Feed the Future program.

A third alternative would place the program’s leadership within the White House or executive office building. This so-called Tsar approach would invest authority at a supposed higher level to facilitate cooperation across agencies. The Tsar would convene, create a strategy across government, determine the division of budgetary resources, assign implementing activities to various agencies, and be responsible to Congress for results. This approach may lend itself to designating one agency as lead in certain environments, such as DoD in conflict zones and USAID in countries at peace.

These are far reaching options that would require a reorientation of current efforts. A much less costly option, and one that should be done regardless of structural alternatives, is the submission of a whole of government budget. Only with such a document can we have a full picture of U.S. global food security programs. It is information that Congress needs to make funding decisions and that agency managers should have in order to craft effective and efficient programs.

ⁱ Renewing American Leadership in the Fight Against Global Hunger and Poverty, The Chicago Initiative on Global Agricultural Development, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. 2009.

ⁱⁱ A GAO study from 2013 is the best source for understanding the challenges of whole of government and gives some indications of agency roles and responsibilities. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657911.pdf>