

Global Agricultural Development Initiative

Commentary



The Task Ahead for the 112th Congress

by Roger Thurow

January 10, 2011 - As 2011 dawns, the United States government is poised to lead the greatest assault on global hunger through agriculture development since the Green Revolution half a century ago. This renewed commitment is exceedingly timely, with rising commodity prices foreshadowing a repeat of the 2008 food crisis and with the ever-expanding appetite of an ever-growing population demanding a doubling of global food production by 2050.

During the past two years, the administration has constructed a framework to implement the foreign policy priority unveiled by President Obama on the day of his inauguration: "To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish..." The action has been swift and along a wide front, reflecting the urgency and scope of the challenge.

By the end of 2009, the Presidential initiative known as Feed the Future was already at work; its ambitious goal is to harness the power of agriculture development to increase the harvests, nutrition and incomes of poor farming families, particularly in Africa. In April of 2010, to mobilize international partners, the U.S. spearheaded the launch of a multi-donor trust fund called the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP); within two months, initial grants were being awarded to improve farming in some of the world's poorest countries. This past fall, a Bureau for Food Security was created within the U.S. Agency for International Development to drive the implementation of these projects. Then, in December 2010, the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and

Development Review (QDDR) completed by the State Department and USAID placed Feed the Future and the Bureau for Food Security at the center of a strategy emphasizing more assertive and effective deployment of the country's civilian power to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century.

Now, to keep the momentum rolling, this new policy framework needs a firm foundation that can withstand the tests of time and political trends. Providing sustainable funding and authorizing a strong, consistent national commitment to American leadership on agriculture development and global food security would be a truly historic achievement of the 112th Congress. The next year or two will be critical in determining whether this leadership becomes an effective and lasting feature of U.S. development policy – or whether this moment of great opportunity will be squandered. For if the U.S. falters, the entire effort to conquer hunger and increase food production will likely crumble. Absent American leadership, it is doubtful that agriculture development will receive the sustained international policy attention and resources necessary to achieve the long-lasting results vital for nourishing the planet's population. This would be an epic failure for us all.

The success of Feed the Future would not only have an impact on reducing hunger and poverty and spreading global stability, but it would also burnish the image of America abroad. By authorizing and funding this initiative, Congress would embrace and

extend a proud tradition of American foreign policy. Eliminating hunger as a threat to global security was at the core of two of the most successful deployments of American civilian power in the past century: the Marshall Plan to secure democracy in impoverished and hungry post-war Western Europe and the Green Revolution to end famine and spur economic growth in Asia.

A New Approach to Development Aid

Echoes of these two landmark development and diplomatic achievements resonate throughout Feed the Future. As outlined in the 2010 National Security Strategy and repeated in the QDDR: “Through an aggressive and affirmative development agenda and commensurate resources, we can strengthen the regional partners we need to help us stop conflict and counter global criminal networks; build a stable, inclusive global economy with new sources of prosperity; advance democracy and human rights; and ultimately position ourselves to better address key global challenges by growing the ranks of prosperous, capable and democratic states that can be our partners in the decades ahead.” As with the Marshall Plan and the Green Revolution, Feed the Future has the potential to bring stability and prosperity to troubled, suffering lands and in so doing also open new markets for investments and trade.

In line with the QDDR’s call to lead through civilian power, Feed the Future is designed to tap the resourcefulness of the American farmer, the innovation of the U.S. agriculture industry, the ingenuity of land grant universities, and the passion of American diplomats and development experts. The Bureau for Food Security is intended to be a cornerstone of USAID’s efforts to change the way the country does development business. The ambition as stated by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah is no less than to rebuild USAID as the world’s premier development agency.

Reflecting the QDDR principles, Feed the Future is attempting to shift from emergency aid to sustainable investment and to extend the horizon for success beyond short-term gains to long-lasting advances that address the root causes of hunger. In past years, for instance, the U.S. has spent 20 times as much on food aid to Africa as it spent on agriculture development aid to help Africans feed themselves. If successful, Feed the Future would reverse that proportion.

Feed the Future doesn’t only intend to reorient aid in the direction of agriculture-led development. It also seeks to transform the very nature of that aid. The assistance will flow in support of projects designed and prioritized by the recipient countries, and it will seek to bolster the engagement of the private sector and strengthen the power of markets to drive an increase in agriculture productivity. It is hoped that this greater level of consultation – with government agencies, the private sector and civil society – will foster greater transparency on the deployment of the aid and better monitoring and accountability of the projects.

The Need for Agriculture-Led Development

Over the past two years, food security has risen to the top of the agenda of global issues needing urgent attention. The food crisis of 2008 saw soaring prices and widespread shortages trigger rioting in dozens of countries, destabilizing economies and governments. The ranks of the chronically hungry swelled beyond one billion people. At the same time, agriculture economists began raising the alarm over a new looming crisis: the need to double food production by 2050 to keep up with an increasing population (estimated to rise from the current 6.7 billion to more than 9 billion) that is also growing increasingly prosperous and consuming more food.

It is a daunting challenge, and expanding agriculture productivity in the developing world and improving the distribution of the food once it is produced will be especially important. Historically, agriculture

development has been an essential first step in alleviating extreme hunger and poverty in developing nations. It has also been vital in enriching and empowering women, who do most of the farming in the developing world.

That is the intent of Feed the Future, which aims to boost the productivity of smallholder farmers by improving the entire value chain of agriculture, from scientific research to availability of better quality seeds and fertilizer to post-harvest storage and the marketing of crops. The initiative also seeks to lead the way in reversing the international neglect of funding for agriculture development, as Ambassador William J. Garvelink, Feed the Future's deputy coordinator for development, told the U.K. Chatham House conference on food security in December. He noted that World Bank lending for agriculture fell from 30% in 1978 to only 8% in 2006; meanwhile, the percentage of American foreign aid going to agriculture fell from 25% in the 1980s to only one percent by 2008. As a result of this neglect of agriculture development, the momentum of the Green Revolution sputtered and its advances largely bypassed Africa.

The U.S. has orchestrated the rally to put agriculture development back at the top of the international agenda. At the G-8 meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, in July 2009, President Obama's pledge of at least \$3.5 billion over three years for agriculture development and food security helped to leverage and align more than \$18.5 billion from the other leaders in support of a common approach. A few months after L'Aquila, at the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh, the assembled leaders called on the World Bank to work with donor countries and organizations to develop a multilateral trust fund to scale up agriculture development assistance. That led to the launch of GAFSP with \$880 million in initial pledges from the U.S., Canada, Spain, South Korea and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Progress on the Ground

Both Feed the Future and GAFSP are focusing on countries that have developed their own agriculture investment plans and are already showing results in higher food production and lower levels of hunger. The idea is for the aid to be tailored to the needs of individual countries through consultations led by the recipient country governments and involving local business and civil society and the farmers themselves. In many instances, these country-developed projects are also peer reviewed by regional or, as in Africa, by continent-wide institutions.

Feed the Future began with December 2009 consultations in Rwanda, where the Rwandan government presented its own \$800 million-plus agriculture investment strategy. In the past couple of years, Rwanda has multiplied its output of staple crops – national corn production has quadrupled – and slashed its dependence on food aid. During the consultations, the Rwandan government demonstrated a need for additional funding to continue one of its signature projects: the terracing of tens of thousands of acres of steeply sloping hillside fields to increase arable land space and create better watersheds to hold seeds and fertilizer in place. The government also identified the need to invest in post-harvest training and improved storage capacity (one-third to one-half of harvests in Africa routinely go to waste because of poor handling and storage) and to build institutions that help farmers market their crops. Within months, Feed the Future money was targeting support of these objectives.

In Tanzania, Feed the Future is eyeing support of the government's "Farming First" initiative, which has raised agriculture development to the top national priority. One goal is to create investment opportunities in the country's Southern Trade Corridor which will link smallholder farmers and agribusiness interests from the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam to Malawi, Zambia and the Democratic

Republic of Congo. This represents a broader strategy to concentrate public and private investments in specific areas that, as Ambassador Garvelink pointed out, “show promise for gains in both productivity *and* market access in order to achieve greater impact.”

Rwanda and Tanzania are among 20 Feed the Future focus countries. The others are: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia in Africa; Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Tajikistan in Asia; and Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to Feed the Future’s bilateral investments, the multi-donor trust fund GAFSP allocated more than \$300 million in grants last year. In June, \$224 million was approved for Bangladesh, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Togo and Rwanda. In November, \$97 million was awarded to Ethiopia, Mongolia and Niger. The projects range from the hillside terracing work in Rwanda to the development of small scale irrigation in Niger to improving access to regional and domestic markets for livestock producers in Mongolia.

The Task Ahead: Funding and Authorizing

Despite this progress, huge challenges to sustaining the momentum of American leadership remain.

On the funding front, some of the commitments appear to be wobbly, if not in retreat. Of President Obama’s \$3.5 billion three-year pledge, an estimated \$888 million was allocated in fiscal year 2010. The President’s fiscal year 2011 request of \$1.64 billion has been whittled down by several hundred million dollars in Senate and House appropriations mark-ups. Similarly on GAFSP, the U.S. led the initial donors with a pledge of \$475 million. Of that, \$67 million was committed in fiscal year 2010. For fiscal year 2011, the President requested \$408 million, but in December the House released a draft Continuing Resolution with only \$100 million allocated to GAFSP.

The impact of this faltering funding is already being felt; many ambitious agriculture projects in the developing world are going begging in the GAFSP process. In November, 20 countries submitted requests for grants totaling about \$1 billion. Only three were funded; 17 countries went home empty handed.

Less than a year old, GAFSP is already gasping for life. A host of humanitarian organizations penned a letter to the President and some Congressional leaders warning that any U.S. retreat on funding could lead to other donor countries turning back on their pledges as well.

On the implementation front, Feed the Future depends on greater collaboration within the administration and between the administration and Congress. As the QDDR envisions, the initiative would benefit from civilian power beyond the State Department and USAID, namely the expertise and resources of the Department of Agriculture and the Treasury Department, as well as perhaps from organizations like the Peace Corps. And a close partnership with Congress is vital. The Global Food Security Act of 2009 – introduced in the Senate by Senators Richard Lugar and Robert Casey and in the House by Congresswoman Betty McCollum – would have provided support for the ambitions of Feed the Future. Although the legislation was gaining support, a small minority prevented it from reaching the floor for a vote of either chamber.

The funding and implementation would be aided by a public awareness campaign to rally the government and the American people behind Feed the Future – and to hold the course over time. But absent a global hunger and food security coordinator – an ardent and vociferous person who could turn up the volume on the public clamor as well as ensure collaboration between government agencies – such a campaign has yet to gain much steam.

Since the Green Revolution 50 years ago, the world has known the *way* to successful agriculture

development. But the *will* – the *political will* – has been absent. Now the will has finally reemerged to make possible an historic strike against hunger in the 21st century and to ensure food security for future generations. The task ahead, as USAID Administrator

Shah told a gathering in Des Moines in October, is to “build a lasting durable political constituency, domestically and globally, that maintains the commitment and focus that the world has now rediscovered.”

About the Author

Roger Thurow joined The Chicago Council on Global Affairs as senior fellow for global agriculture and food policy in January 2010 after three decades at *The Wall Street Journal*. For 20 years, he served as a foreign correspondent, based in Europe and Africa. Thurow and *Journal* colleague, Scott Kilman, are authors of the recent book [*ENOUGH: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*](#).

Global Agricultural Development Initiative Commentaries

Global Agricultural Development Initiative Commentaries offer a platform for experts and thought leaders' insights on emerging developments on agricultural development, food security, and related issues. The views expressed are those of the author and not those of The Chicago Council on Global Affairs or the Global Agricultural Development Initiative's Cochairs and Advisory Group. The Chicago Council takes no institutional position on policy issues.

Global Agricultural Development Initiative

Launched in 2009 and expanded in 2010, the Global Agricultural Development Initiative supports a renewed U.S. focus on agricultural development as a means to increase food security, alleviate global poverty, and spur economic development. The Initiative aims to provide support, technical assistance, and innovation towards the formulation and implementation of U.S. global agricultural development policies and offer external evaluation and accountability for U.S. progress on its policy commitments. For more information, please visit:

www.thechicagocouncil.org/globalagdevelopment.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Founded in 1922 as The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is a leading independent, nonpartisan organization committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue, and public learning.

Banner Photograph: © Ray Witlin / World Bank