



United States Government Accountability Office

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Report to the Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies,  
House Committee on Appropriations

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August 2021

# GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

## Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance

**GAO@100**  
A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work

# GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-548](#), a report to the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, House Committee on Appropriations

## Why GAO Did This Study

The United Nations reported that nearly 690 million people in the world were undernourished as of 2019, and estimated that food insecurity could worsen due to COVID-19. In response to the Global Food Security Act of 2016, FTF agencies monitor and report the progress of their global food security assistance and developed a process to graduate FTF target countries from the initiative.

GAO was asked to review U.S. global food security assistance. This report evaluates, among other things, USAID's monitoring and public reporting of FTF's progress and assessment of countries' potential to graduate from FTF. GAO reviewed FTF documents and data, and interviewed representatives of USAID, FTF partner agencies, and other stakeholders, including implementing partners from four sample countries selected based on factors such as geographic diversity and amount of food security funding.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations that USAID work with the FTF partner agencies to improve how they assess and report on FTF performance, including establishing performance goals, ensuring that performance indicators follow leading practices, improving the clarity of public progress reports, sharing annual graduation scorecards, and completing required reviews of the graduation assessment process. USAID generally agreed with all eight recommendations.

View [GAO-21-548](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or [kenneyc@gao.gov](mailto:kenneyc@gao.gov).

August 2021

## GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

### Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance

## What GAO Found

Feed the Future (FTF), a U.S. government-wide global food security initiative coordinated by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), collects data to monitor how FTF projects promote agriculture, resilience, and nutrition (see photos). However, USAID and its FTF partner agencies are limited in their ability to use performance data to assess the initiative's progress because they have not set FTF-wide performance goals and few FTF indicators fully meet two key attributes of successful performance indicators. Specifically, only three of 40 performance indicators both (1) were clearly linked to the initiative's overarching goal and (2) had measurable targets. FTF has targets for its overarching goal of reducing poverty and child stunting; however, the FTF agencies cannot determine how the results of FTF's projects contribute to this overarching goal. USAID officials said it is difficult to set FTF-wide performance goals and targets because of the initiative's breadth. However, prior GAO work provides strategies to help the agencies conduct meaningful FTF-wide performance monitoring.

#### Examples of Feed the Future's Agriculture, Resilience, and Nutrition Projects



Sources: Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation (left), PEG Africa (center), and Partners in Food Solutions (right). | GAO-21-548

USAID'S 2017–2020 public reports on FTF include some information on FTF's projects, but contain unclear and unsupported statements on its progress. USAID followed two of four leading practices on performance reporting by including baseline or trend data and discussing data limitations in the FTF reports. However, the reports did not describe how the performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward FTF's objectives—another leading practice. Further, the reports did not outline performance targets so readers could compare the performance data against these targets, also a leading practice. Lastly, although the reports stated that FTF has led to estimated decreases in poverty and stunting, FTF data do not support these statements on FTF's impact. As a result, FTF's public reports do not communicate a clear picture of the initiative's progress toward achieving its objectives.

As required by law, USAID developed a process to assess countries' potential to graduate from being an FTF target country, but USAID has not fully followed this process. USAID developed annual scorecards to assess the countries; however, due to a bureau restructuring and the COVID-19 pandemic, USAID has not shared the 2019 or 2020 scorecards with its missions or the FTF partner agencies. USAID also has not worked with these entities to complete required annual reviews of the graduation assessment process itself. As a result, USAID has limited the partners' engagement in, and the usefulness of, this process.

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# Contents

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Letter		1
	Background	4
	Lack of Performance Goals and Few Indicators with Key Attributes Limit Agencies' Ability to Monitor the Initiative's Progress	12
	USAID Provided Support That Generally Helped Data Collection, and Has Made Efforts to Address Some Complex Indicator Requirements	23
	USAID's Public Reports Include Some Data on Feed the Future's Projects, but Contain Unclear and Unsupported Statements on the Initiative's Progress	29
	USAID Developed a Graduation Assessment Process That Has Not Clearly Indicated Country Progress, and USAID Has Not Shared the Assessments with Key Stakeholders	35
	Conclusions	47
	Recommendations for Executive Action	48
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	49
Appendix I	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	52
Appendix II	Feed the Future Indicators	59
Appendix III	How USAID Calculates Poverty and Stunting Changes in Feed the Future's Zones of Influence, and Related Data	64
Appendix IV	Comments from the Millennium Challenge Corporation	69
Appendix V	Comments from the United States Agency for International Development	70
Appendix VI	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	75

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Tables

Table 1: Feed the Future Initiative Overarching Goal and Strategic Objectives, by Phase	7
Table 2: Indicators Tracked in Feed the Future Target Countries' Graduation Scorecards, by Category	37
Table 3: Feed the Future Target Country Assessments on the 2018 Graduation Scorecards, by Category	39
Table 4: Feed the Future Performance Indicators by Linkage to Specific Strategic Objectives and Intermediate Results in the Results Framework, as of September 2019	59
Table 5: Indicators Used by Feed the Future That Do Not Meet the Definition of a Performance Indicator, as of September 2019	63
Table 6: USAID's Estimates of Changes in Poverty Varied Greatly between Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries, and Reflect a Limited Time Period	65
Table 7: USAID's Estimates of Changes in Stunting Varied Greatly between Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries, and Reflect a Limited Time Period	66

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Figures

Figure 1: Feed the Future Lead and Programmatic Partner Agencies	5
Figure 2: Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries and Phase 2 Target Countries	8
Figure 3: Zones of Influence in Nigeria and Nepal for Feed the Future Phase 2	9
Figure 4: Performance Goals and Their Role in a Performance Monitoring Framework	13
Figure 5: Feed the Future's Results Framework	16
Figure 6: Feed the Future Review Process for Performance Indicator Data	26
Figure 7: U.S. Agency for International Development Public Reporting of Feed the Future's Progress, Measured against Leading Practices	30
Figure 8: The Three Steps in the Feed the Future Graduation Assessment Process	36
Figure 9: Feed the Future (FTF) Target Country Graduation Scorecard Assessments, 2018 to 2020, and the Reasons for Any Changes in Assessment Results between Years	41

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## Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
FTF	Feed the Future
FY	fiscal year
GFSA	Global Food Security Act of 2016
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
RFS	Bureau for Resilience and Food Security
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

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August 31, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Fortenberry:

The United Nations (UN) reported that, as of 2019, nearly 690 million people in the world were undernourished, an indicator of global hunger that had been increasing since 2014. In 2020, the UN projected that the number of acutely food-insecure people worldwide could continue to increase due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).<sup>1</sup>

To help address the long-standing problem of food insecurity, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has led the interagency coordination of Feed the Future (FTF), a U.S. government-wide initiative to provide nonemergency global food security assistance, since 2010. FTF's overarching goal is to sustainably reduce global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. Through FTF, USAID coordinates with 11 other federal departments and agencies—together called the FTF Interagency—to leverage their resources and expertise in agriculture, trade, nutrition, investment, development, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and policy. From fiscal years (FY) 2012 to 2020, these agencies provided a total of more than \$18 billion for these types of activities, according to U.S. government global food security spending data.

Congress passed the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (GFSA),<sup>2</sup> which required the President to coordinate the development and implementation

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* (Geneva: Dec. 2020).

<sup>2</sup>Pub. L. No. 114–195, codified as amended by Pub. L. No. 115–266, the Global Food Security Reauthorization Act of 2017, at 22 U.S.C. § 9301 *et seq.*

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of a whole-of-government Global Food Security Strategy.<sup>3</sup> While a monitoring, evaluation, and learning system was already in place for FTF, the act also required a rigorous accountability system for monitoring and evaluating the Strategy's progress and impact, including annual reporting to Congressional committees and the public. The GFSA also mandated the development of criteria and methodologies for graduating countries and communities from global food security assistance.<sup>4</sup> According to USAID, FTF activities respond to the GFSA.

GAO was asked to review U.S. global food security assistance, including its amounts, progress, and coordination.<sup>5</sup> For this review, we focus on how USAID assesses and reports on FTF's progress. In particular, we evaluate the extent to which USAID, in consultation with its FTF partner agencies, (1) monitors FTF's progress, (2) provides support for collecting FTF performance monitoring data, (3) reports publicly on FTF's progress, and (4) assesses countries' progress toward graduation from FTF assistance.

To inform all aspects of our analysis, we reviewed FTF documents and data and interviewed officials from USAID; eight other FTF partner agencies that, together with USAID, are responsible for the most funding; and international organizations that work in food security or related data collection. We also interviewed selected entities in four sample countries: Bangladesh, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda, which we selected based on several criteria, including overall food assistance funding and geographic diversity. In particular for these countries, we met with USAID missions and FTF partner agencies involved in programming assistance. We also organized five focus groups with selected implementing partners. In addition, we held two discussion groups with members of a food security working group within a consortium of nongovernmental organizations.

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<sup>3</sup>The President delegated this responsibility to the USAID Administrator. See *Memorandum of President of the United States*, Sept. 30, 2016, 81 Fed. Reg. 76,483 (Nov. 2, 2016), set forth as a note to 22 U.S.C. § 9304.

<sup>4</sup>Graduating countries from FTF means transitioning them from the types of food security assistance provided under FTF to a different assistance relationship with the U.S. government.

<sup>5</sup>In response to this request, we have already issued a mapping of global food security activities. See GAO, *Global Food Security: Information on Spending and Types of Assistance Provided by the United States and Other Donors*, [GAO-21-47R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 19, 2020). Additionally, at the time of this review, we were examining coordination issues related to global food security assistance.

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all meetings after March 2020, including the focus groups, via video or teleconference.

To evaluate monitoring of FTF's progress, we reviewed documentation describing FTF's performance monitoring framework against guidance for performance goals and indicators from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).<sup>6</sup> In addition, we examined whether FTF's performance indicators met the definition of performance indicators and had relevant key attributes of successful performance indicators that we identified from GAO's body of work on performance monitoring;<sup>7</sup> specifically, whether those performance indicators had linkage to FTF's goals and measurable targets. To evaluate the support FTF agencies provide for the collection of FTF performance monitoring data, we reviewed FTF guidance and other documentation for the collection of data on project performance indicators. We also conducted a content analysis of responses from our interviews and focus groups to identify common themes in stakeholders' experiences with collecting FTF project performance data. We used as criteria federal internal control standards for communicating quality information to stakeholders.<sup>8</sup>

To evaluate public reporting of FTF's progress, we reviewed the Strategy Implementation Reports and the FTF Progress Snapshot Reports from 2017 to 2020 against four relevant leading practices on performance reporting that we identified from GAO's body of work on managing for results.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, we evaluated whether USAID followed, inconsistently followed, or did not follow the leading practices of: (1) including baseline and trend data; (2) discussing data limitations and actions to address them; (3) describing how performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward goals; and (4) comparing

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<sup>6</sup>OMB Circular No. A-11, *The Federal Performance Framework for Improving Program and Service Delivery*.

<sup>7</sup>GAO, *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011). GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 2002). GAO, *DNA Evidence: DOJ Should Improve Performance Measurement and Properly Design Controls for Nationwide Grant Program*, [GAO-19-216](#), (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2019).

<sup>8</sup>GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

<sup>9</sup>GAO, *Leading Practices for Managing for Results in Government*, [https://www.gao.gov/key\\_issues/managing\\_for\\_results\\_in\\_government/issue\\_summary](https://www.gao.gov/key_issues/managing_for_results_in_government/issue_summary).

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actual performance results against planned performance targets, and discussing planned actions for unmet performance targets. We also identified other data in the reports that USAID presented as demonstrating FTF's impact and evaluated the presentation of these data against criteria from GAO's body of work on managing for results on including credible performance data in performance reports. To evaluate assessments of countries' progress toward graduating from FTF assistance, we reviewed the May 2018 *Feed the Future Target Country Graduation Policy and Review Process* to understand how the graduation assessment process should be conducted,<sup>10</sup> and evaluated actual implementation against that policy and federal internal control standards.<sup>11</sup> We also reviewed related internal guidance and presentations, and copies of scorecards that USAID created in 2018, 2019, and 2020 to assess target countries' progress. Appendix I contains additional details about our overall scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2019 through August 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

### The Feed the Future Interagency and the Focus of Its Work

As the lead agency for the FTF Interagency, USAID coordinates FTF efforts through its Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS), using resources across its Washington-based bureaus and regional and country missions. The other 11 FTF partner agencies have various roles in supporting FTF, though only six have a programming role by

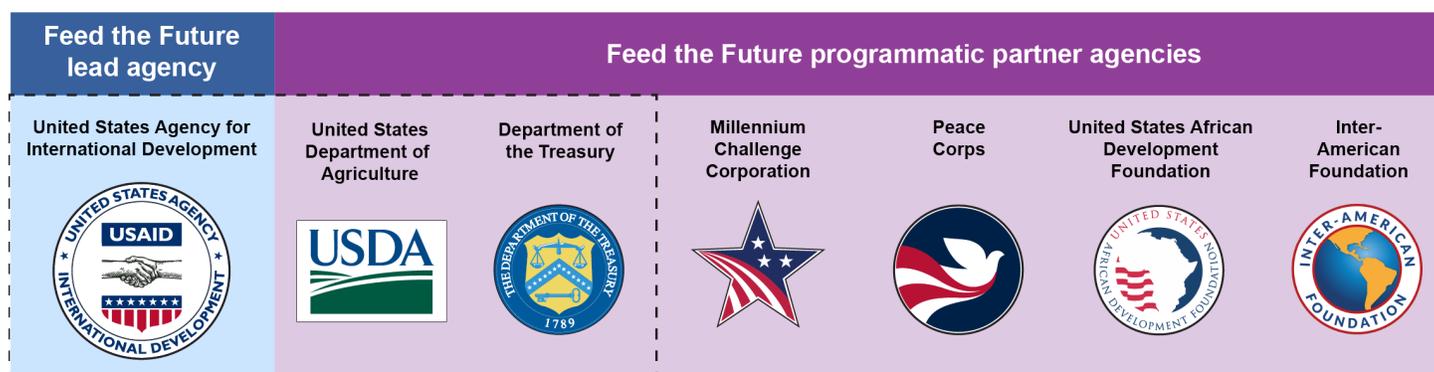
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<sup>10</sup>*Feed the Future Target Country Graduation Policy and Review Process*, May 2018. For a full copy of this policy, see <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/graduation/>.

<sup>11</sup>[GAO-14-704G](#).

implementing or overseeing global food security programs and projects.<sup>12</sup> These six agencies are the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and the Treasury, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Peace Corps, the U.S. African Development Foundation, and the Inter-American Foundation (see fig. 1).<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1: Feed the Future Lead and Programmatic Partner Agencies**



 Implements or coordinates programming through implementing partners and/or multilateral donor organizations

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

USAID, USDA, and Treasury manage FTF programs through various entities. USAID and USDA manage FTF programs through implementing partners, including private sector companies, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations such as the UN World Food Program. Treasury coordinates contributions to multilateral institutions that fund or implement food security projects, including the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program and the International Fund for

<sup>12</sup>The term “project” is used broadly in this report, and includes what is called an “activity” at USAID. The other five agencies within the FTF Interagency provide non-programmatic support to the initiative. They are the Departments of Commerce and State, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. Geological Survey. For example, the State Department leads diplomatic engagement on U.S. global food security policy. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation provides financing (e.g., loans and risk insurance) to private investments related to agriculture and food security. We did not include the Department of Commerce, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. Geological Survey in the scope of our review because they do not directly provide funding to global food security efforts.

<sup>13</sup>While the Inter-American Foundation is not named by statute as a “relevant agency” (see 22 U.S.C. § 9303(7)), it began informally participating in interagency coordination in FY 2018.

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Agricultural Development. The Millennium Challenge Corporation, U.S. African Development Foundation, Inter-American Foundation, and Peace Corps have global food security programs that the agencies or their representatives administer themselves.

USAID and its FTF partner agencies focus on various types of activities to support FTF. According to USAID, in FY 2020, these agencies and stakeholders implemented more than 740 FTF projects in at least 108 countries covering a wide scope of activities. For example:

- At USAID, RFS and other bureaus support global food security programming. Specifically, RFS supports resilience and agriculture assistance, the Bureau for Global Health supports nutrition and maternal and child health projects, and the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance provides development food security assistance. For example, a project focused on resilience in Kenya sells livestock insurance that automatically pays farmers when there is a shock, such as a drought. According to USAID, this insurance can help farmers buy necessities, such as water and animal feed. In addition, a Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance project in Guatemala works with local water and sanitation offices to increase access to clean drinking water and improved sanitation facilities. RFS coordinates its work within USAID with the regional bureaus.
- USDA has several programs that support FTF, including the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program, which supports education, nutrition, and food security, and Food for Progress, which helps developing countries modernize and strengthen their agricultural sectors, according to USDA. For example, a Food for Progress project in Bangladesh works to help local farmers boost their incomes by adding freshwater prawns—a high-value and in-demand crop—into their existing farming efforts. The project also provides training to farmers on how to cultivate juvenile prawns in local ponds.
- Treasury’s contributions to multilateral organizations support a number of food security assistance projects. For example, the Food and Nutrition Enhancement Security Program, funded by the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program and implemented by the World Bank in Nepal, aims to improve climate resilience, agricultural productivity, and nutrition practices by promoting climate-adapted technologies, building farmer capacity for improved agronomic and animal husbandry practices, and providing better-performing plant and animal genetic resources.

- To help improve food security and economic livelihoods, the U.S. African Development Foundation and the Inter-American Foundation provide grants and technical assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa and local community-based organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, respectively.

## Feed the Future Phases

FTF started as a presidential initiative in 2010 and has been implemented in two phases: Phase 1 (2010–2016) and Phase 2 (2017–present). The 2016 Global Food Security Strategy outlined and expanded on FTF’s overarching goal and strategic objectives for Phase 2 (see table 1). In addition, USAID announced in early 2021 that it is leading an interagency effort to “refresh” and extend the Strategy, which covers FY 2017 through FY 2021. USAID stated that this effort will take place through October 2021, and will take into account the evidence and lessons learned from the past 4 years of FTF’s implementation.

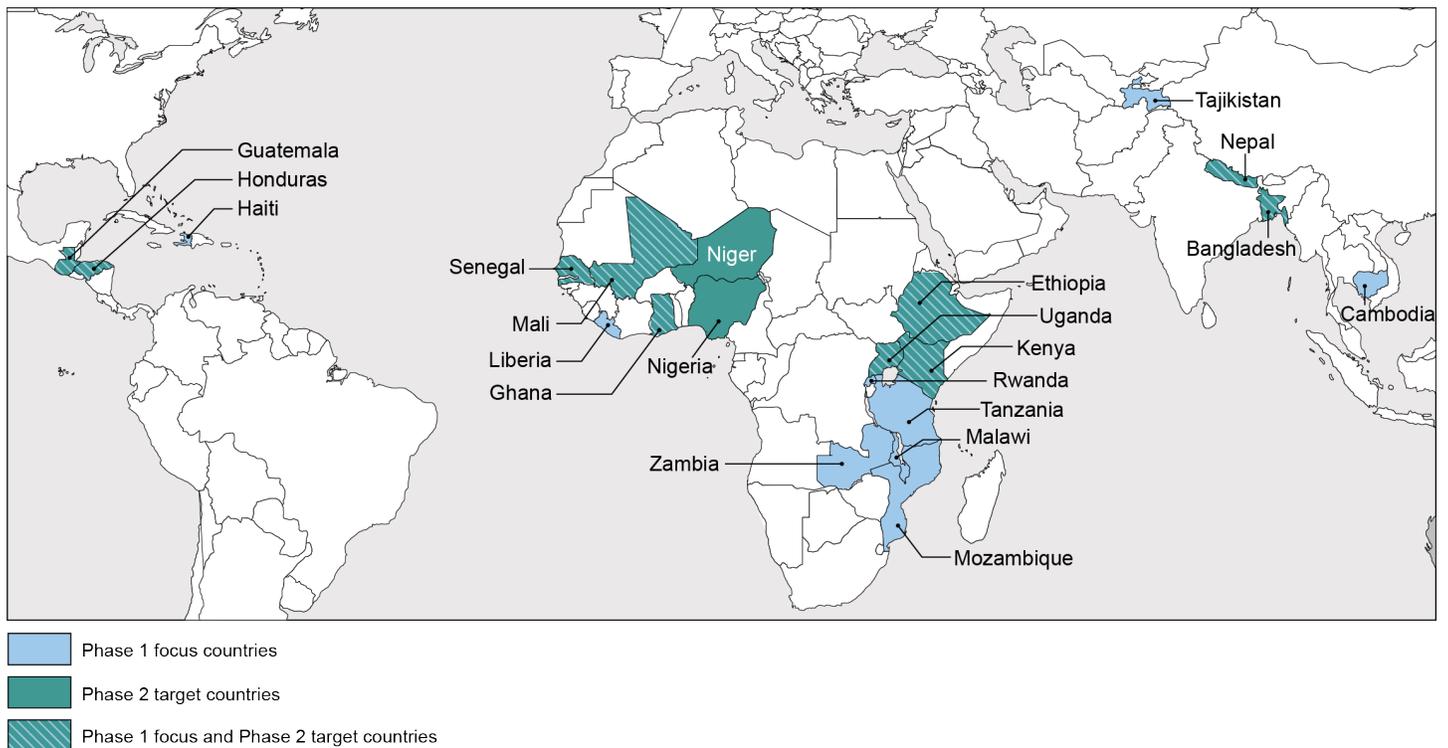
**Table 1: Feed the Future Initiative Overarching Goal and Strategic Objectives, by Phase**

	<b>Phase 1: 2010–2016</b>	<b>Phase 2: 2017–present</b>
Overarching goal	Sustainably reduce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global poverty</li> <li>• Hunger</li> </ul>	Sustainably reduce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global poverty</li> <li>• Hunger</li> <li>• Malnutrition</li> </ul>
Strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive agricultural sector growth</li> <li>• Improved nutritional status, especially for women and children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive and sustainable agricultural-led economic growth</li> <li>• A well-nourished population, especially among women and children</li> <li>• Strengthened resilience among people and systems</li> </ul>

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

Since its inception, the FTF Interagency has prioritized FTF activities in specific countries, which it modified from Phase 1 to Phase 2. Specifically, the FTF Interagency prioritized activities in 19 countries (called focus countries) for Phase 1 and in 12 countries (now called target countries) for Phase 2. Ten of the Phase 1 focus countries continued as Phase 2 target countries (see fig. 2). For Phase 2, the FTF Interagency developed country plans for each of the 12 target countries that lay out what the interagency planned to achieve in each country from FY 2018 to FY 2022.

**Figure 2: Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries and Phase 2 Target Countries**

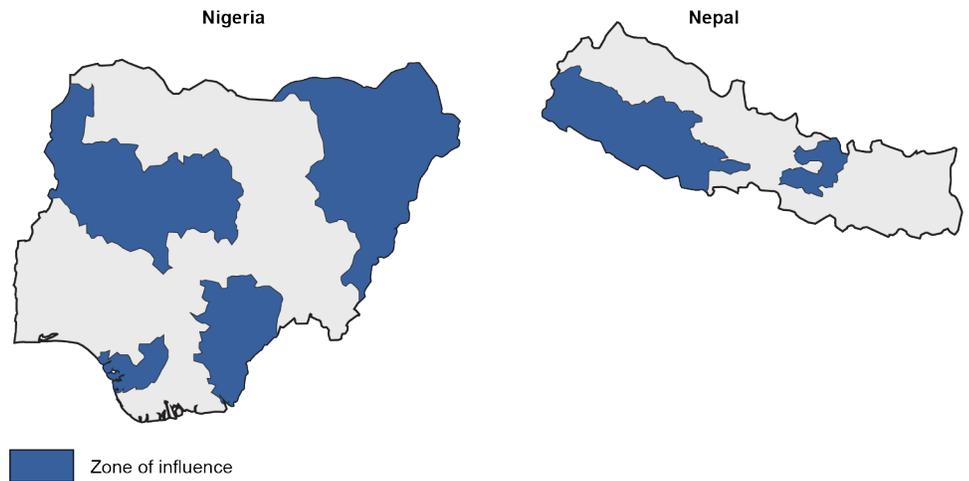


Source: Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

During each phase, the FTF Interagency also further prioritized its efforts within each country in “zones of influence,” which are geographic regions where FTF aims to achieve the greatest impact. For example, see figure 3 for the locations of Phase 2 zones of influence in Nigeria and Nepal.

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**Figure 3: Zones of Influence in Nigeria and Nepal for Feed the Future Phase 2**



Source: Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: Zones of influence are geographic regions within each country where Feed the Future aims to achieve the greatest impact.

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## Feed the Future Indicators

USAID, in consultation with the FTF partner agencies, developed a set of 53 indicators, which they define as performance indicators in the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, to track the progress of the FTF Initiative and its projects, to report publicly on that progress, and to support decision-making and performance-based management.<sup>14</sup> The handbook outlines definitions for all FTF indicators and provides guidance on the methodologies for collecting data on and measuring the indicators.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>USAID and the FTF partner agencies first developed a set of indicators in 2011. They subsequently revised these indicators in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019, with each revision including some new, dropped, or substantively revised indicators. For this report, we are referring to indicators from the 2019 list of indicators. Feed the Future Interagency, *Feed the Future Indicator Handbook*, Sept. 2019.

<sup>15</sup>FTF's 2019 *Indicator Handbook* also lists 25 other indicators that the FTF Interagency defines as context indicators, most of which are monitored at the country level. We did not include these context indicators in the scope of our report.

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FTF categorizes its indicators as project, zone of influence, or national indicators, depending on the level at which the data are collected.<sup>16</sup>

- **Project:** Partner agencies or implementing partners annually collect and submit to USAID data on their projects' outputs and outcomes, such as on the number of individuals participating in U.S. government food security programs.
- **Zone of influence:** USAID collects data through periodic surveys of samples of people living in the target countries' zones of influence. These data are used to track impacts and outcomes specifically in the areas where FTF operates, such as on the yield of targeted agricultural commodities.
- **National:** USAID tracks certain country-level data, when available, from national governments or international organizations, such as the World Bank and UN. An example is the value of targeted agricultural commodity exports.

In addition, these FTF indicators can be output, outcome, or impact indicators, depending on what the indicator is measuring.

- **Output:** Measures tangible and intended products or consequences of a project, such as the number of individuals trained.
- **Outcome:** Measures short-term results of projects' activities or results at the zone of influence level, such as the yield of agricultural commodities.<sup>17</sup>
- **Impact:** Measures medium- to long-term effects produced by a portfolio of policies and projects that intend to change the development situation of the population in a country or an area within a country, such as the prevalence of poverty.

According to the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, all performance indicators are required as applicable, in order to ensure consistency of reporting and

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<sup>16</sup>While FTF guidance uses the term "implementing mechanism" to refer to "a means of implementing a project to achieve identified results," this report instead uses the term "project." In addition to project, zone of influence, and national indicators, FTF also has one multi-level indicator.

<sup>17</sup>FTF has outcome indicators at the project and zone of influence levels.

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meaningful aggregation of results.<sup>18</sup> As such, agencies, country missions, or implementing partners are required to report on any indicators to which they contribute results. For target countries, almost all zone of influence and national-level indicators measuring impacts are considered applicable and therefore are required. As a result, according to the handbook, FTF should be able to aggregate data for individual indicators across the areas where FTF works to understand its overall results. In addition to its performance monitoring data, FTF has other sources of information about the initiative's results, such as impact or performance evaluations from its projects.

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## Feed the Future Public Progress Reporting

USAID publishes two annual reports on FTF's progress: the Strategy Implementation Report and the FTF Progress Snapshot Report.<sup>19</sup>

- **Strategy Implementation Reports:** The GFSA directed the President to submit to Congressional committees an annual Strategy Implementation Report describing the progress made in implementing the Strategy.<sup>20</sup> USAID, to which the President delegated this responsibility,<sup>21</sup> has publicly issued four Strategy Implementation Reports, in calendar years 2017 through 2020. These reports provide information on FTF programs, priorities, and future plans; describe agencies, stakeholders, and countries' involvement in FTF; and outline budget data and FTF-wide data on some project indicators.
- **FTF Progress Snapshot Reports:** USAID has continued to issue annual FTF Progress Snapshot Reports. These reports, issued every calendar year from 2012 to 2020, include data through the prior fiscal year. According to USAID officials, USAID continued to issue these reports once the Strategy Implementation Report was required because the FTF Progress Snapshot Reports are concise and useful to the public. For example, while both the FTF Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation Reports include the same FTF-wide project

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<sup>18</sup>USAID officials stated that they work with their implementing partners to determine which indicators are applicable for their projects. Similarly, they stated that the other FTF partner agencies determine which indicators are applicable to their projects.

<sup>19</sup>The latter report was called the FTF Progress Report through 2016, and the FTF Progress Snapshot Report starting in 2017.

<sup>20</sup>See 22 U.S.C. § 9307(a).

<sup>21</sup>See 81 Fed. Reg. 76,483 (Nov. 2, 2016).

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indicator data, the FTF Progress Snapshot Reports include more photos, graphics, country spotlights, and anecdotal narratives.

In addition to these two annual reports, FTF uses its website to publicly report its progress. This website includes country web pages that provide some data at the project, zone of influence, and national levels for target countries.<sup>22</sup>

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### Lack of Performance Goals and Few Indicators with Key Attributes Limit Agencies' Ability to Monitor the Initiative's Progress

USAID and the FTF partner agencies are limited in their ability to monitor the initiative's progress because they have not set FTF-wide performance goals and only a few of the FTF-wide indicators meet the key attributes of successful performance indicators—linkage to goals and measurable targets. FTF has broad strategic objectives and an overarching goal; however, it lacks measurable performance goals, which would help track the progress of FTF projects or other efforts. Further, although all of the FTF indicators that we determined were performance indicators are clearly linked to FTF's overarching goal, about one-third of them do not have clearly explained linkage to its intermediate results or strategic objectives. Only a few indicators had measurable FTF-wide targets.

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### Feed the Future Lacks Measurable Performance Goals to Monitor Progress toward Its Strategic Objectives and Overarching Goal

The FTF Interagency has not set performance goals for the initiative that allow for meaningful monitoring of progress based on what the initiative aims to achieve. OMB guidance states that performance goals define specific, near-term achievable results that help assess progress toward longer-term strategic objectives and overarching goals.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, OMB Circular A-11 states that a performance goal is a measurable and quantifiable statement of the level of performance to accomplish within a time frame.<sup>24</sup> As such, a performance goal includes a performance indicator, target, and time frame that are used to track progress by comparing actual performance against expected results. Additional indicators that have a logical connection to the performance goal, such as outcome, output, or input indicators, can also be used to monitor progress toward performance goals (see fig. 4).

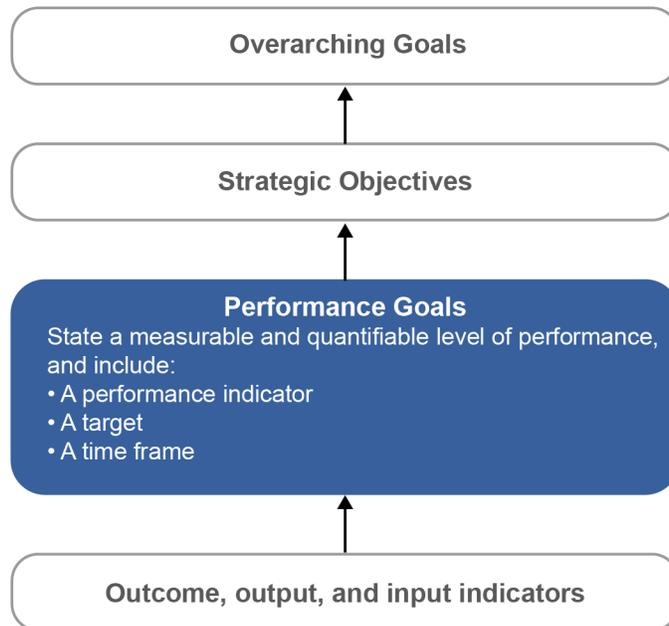
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<sup>22</sup>The country web pages also provide information on strategies, approaches, specific activities, and selected achievements in those countries. (<https://www.feedthefuture.gov>)

<sup>23</sup>The FTF Interagency uses the term "overarching goal," which OMB guidance considers a strategic goal.

<sup>24</sup>OMB Circular A-11 guidance specifies that when it is not feasible for a performance goal to be quantifiable, an alternative form of performance goal may be used. For example, agencies can use milestones to show if progress is being made.

**Figure 4: Performance Goals and Their Role in a Performance Monitoring Framework**



Source: GAO analysis of Office of Management and Budget guidance. | GAO-21-548

Note: The Feed the Future initiative uses the term “overarching goal”, which Office of Management and Budget guidance considers a “strategic goal”.

The FTF Interagency created a performance monitoring framework that includes an overarching goal, strategic objectives, and intermediate results, but did not develop performance goals that meet the OMB definition. This FTF Results Framework includes, for example, an overarching goal to “sustainably reduce global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.” This overarching goal states that by September 30, 2021, FTF will exhibit an average reduction in the prevalence of poverty by 26 percent and of stunting by 35 percent across FTF zones of influence,

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since the beginning of the initiative in FY 2010.<sup>25</sup> USAID identifies this as a performance goal in reporting for USAID–State’s Joint Agency Priority Goal, but does not identify it as such in any FTF documents. Further, this overarching goal does not meet the definition of a performance goal. While the overarching goal includes a measurable and quantifiable statement within a time frame, changes in poverty and stunting cannot be directly linked to the actual performance of FTF’s projects or other efforts, according to USAID officials.

There are several reasons why USAID cannot determine the contribution of FTF’s projects to reductions in poverty and stunting across FTF zones of influence, which USAID does not address in its current use of the poverty and stunting data. These reasons include lack of data, the related efforts of other organizations, and external factors. For example:

- USAID officials explained that in order to determine how FTF projects contributed to zone of influence–level results, a building block to assessing initiative-wide results, they would need other data, such as FTF projects’ coverage within the country’s zones of influence. The officials stated that they have attempted to determine this for certain countries, but found that FTF projects did not have enough coverage to have contributed to changes in zone of influence indicators, or that they did not have enough data to make this determination.<sup>26</sup> As a result, USAID officials did not consider it possible to assess how FTF projects contributed to initiative-level results.
- USAID officials also stated that other donors, governments, and local organizations are involved in efforts to address poverty and

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<sup>25</sup>For Phase 1 of FTF, the FTF Interagency set targets for two of the three zone of influence impact indicators that track progress toward this overarching goal. The full indicator names are *Prevalence of poverty: Percent of people living on less than \$1.90 per day at 2011 purchasing power parity* and *Prevalence of stunted children under 5*. Stunting is a height-for-age measurement that is a reflection of chronic undernutrition, as defined by a height for age Z score of less than -2. According to USAID officials, the original targets for these indicators were to see a 20 percent reduction by 2017, which the FTF Interagency extended to 2019 because of delays in data availability from the final Phase 1 zone of influence surveys. In 2019, the FTF Interagency used projected trends from the poverty and stunting indicators to extend and increase the targets for Phase 1. USAID officials stated that the FTF Interagency plans to set targets for Phase 2 of FTF for the three zone of influence impact indicators once data from the initial Phase 2 zone of influence surveys are available. As of January 2021, USAID officials expected all survey data to be collected by the end of 2022.

<sup>26</sup>In particular, USAID officials stated that they did not have enough data on which households participated in FTF projects. They told us that they plan to capture information on this in future household surveys in FTF’s zones of influence.

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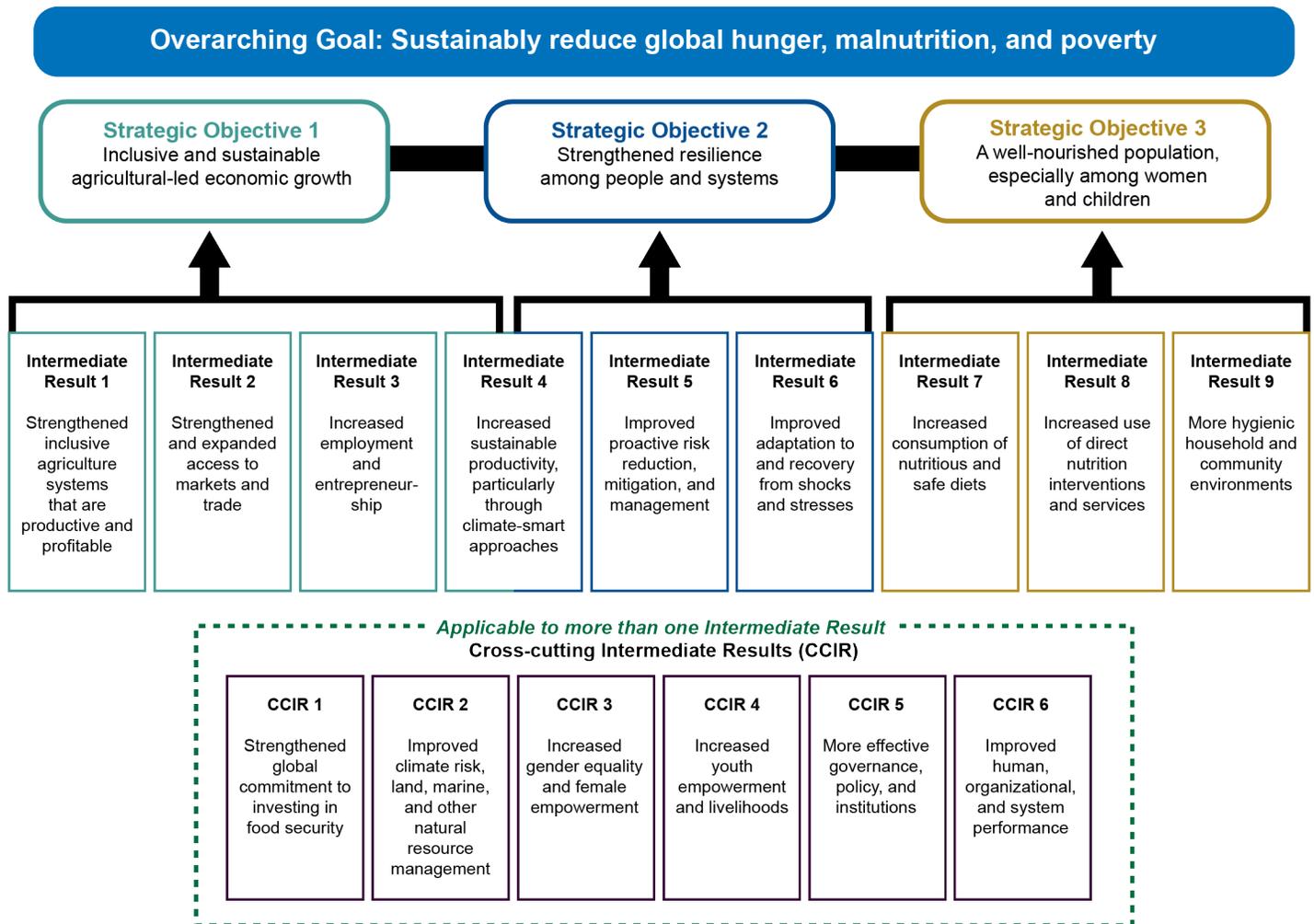
malnutrition in areas where FTF works. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between the influence of FTF projects and that of other efforts.

- Finally, many external factors outside the scope of FTF's projects can influence poverty and stunting in a region or country, such as gender inequality, drought, and civil unrest.

Because of these limitations in determining FTF's contributions to changes in poverty and stunting, USAID officials explained that they use these data to monitor trends, such as if a country is on track to reach its poverty or stunting target. However, without ties to FTF's projects and other efforts, these data do not demonstrate FTF's performance. While strategic objectives and an overarching goal are helpful to show the broader mission of an initiative, lower-level performance goals logically linked to the strategic objectives and overarching goal can demonstrate how FTF efforts contribute to that progress. In particular, performance goals can help establish linkages from factors more within FTF's control—the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the initiative's efforts—to FTF's higher-level strategic objectives and overarching goal.

As part of the FTF Results Framework, the FTF Interagency has also identified nine intermediate results and six cross-cutting intermediate results (applicable to more than one intermediate result) that contribute to achieving its strategic objectives (see fig. 5). Although these could be at the appropriate level for performance goals, the intermediate results do not meet the definition of performance goals because they are too broad to be measurable and do not include a quantifiable level of performance to achieve within a specific time frame.

Figure 5: Feed the Future's Results Framework



Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

USAID officials stated that it is difficult to set meaningful FTF-wide goals, in particular because the initiative covers hundreds of projects implemented in country-specific conditions. Instead, USAID officials stated, it is more appropriate to monitor results at the project and country levels. For example, the FTF Interagency monitors the performance of individual projects and zones of influence in countries with its performance indicators to see if they are meeting targets or achieving certain results, such as benefiting vulnerable groups like women. However, without FTF-wide performance goals that establish linkages

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between performance data and the strategic objectives, the FTF Interagency is currently unable to determine how project or zone of influence-level data align with and support FTF's strategic objectives and overarching goal.

While setting FTF-wide performance goals can be challenging, our prior work offers several strategies that the FTF Interagency can use to establish and measure meaningful performance goals.<sup>27</sup> These strategies include disaggregating goals for distinct target populations, redefining the scope of a goal to focus on a more narrow range of activities, and selecting a mix of outcome goals over which the initiative has varying levels of control.

- The FTF Interagency could create performance goals for distinct populations, such as target countries, to aggregate at the initiative level. In order to implement this strategy across the initiative, the FTF Interagency would need to select supporting performance indicators that are applicable across target countries and could have available data and targets. These could include existing, revised, or new indicators. Based on our prior work, other interagency efforts have been able to develop performance indicators and targets across their countries of focus and various efforts.<sup>28</sup>
- The FTF Interagency could emphasize realistic goals by narrowing the scope of FTF's performance monitoring framework to what can be

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<sup>27</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Measuring Program Results That Are Under Limited Federal Control*, [GGD-99-16](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 1998).

<sup>28</sup>GAO, *Combating Wildlife Trafficking: Agencies Are Taking a Range of Actions, but the Task Force Lacks Performance Targets for Assessing Progress*, [GAO-16-717](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2016). In this report, we recommended that the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, which includes the Departments of the Interior, Justice, and State, develop performance targets related to their counter-wildlife trafficking efforts. In response, the agencies established meaningful, measurable, and representative indicators. The agencies ultimately developed a set of 11 indicators measuring inputs, outputs, or outcomes of U.S. government-supported actions for which it could set targets against which to monitor the Presidential Task Force's performance, including across its portfolio of 28 focus countries. [GAO-16-717](#) also reported about a separate presidential task force, responsible for addressing species conservation of pollinators, that identified a target that encompasses, among other things, international partners, long time periods, and factors outside the control of the U.S. government. See Federal Pollinator Health Task Force, *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* (Washington, D.C.: May 19, 2015).

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meaningfully monitored across the initiative.<sup>29</sup> FTF's current Results Framework includes broadly stated intermediate results and strategic objectives. For example, one of FTF's intermediate results reads, "Strengthened inclusive agriculture systems that are productive and profitable." A related performance goal would demonstrate what progress toward that broad statement would specifically look like, such as a certain percentage of women, youth, and other marginalized groups supported in agriculture across the initiative within a specified time period.<sup>30</sup> Supporting performance indicators for this goal could build off existing project and zone of influence indicators that measure benefits to vulnerable populations. Defining specific achievements or markers of success would help the FTF Interagency create meaningful performance goals with supporting performance indicators.

- The FTF Interagency could establish performance goals for FTF-wide efforts over which the initiative has more control, such as the level and type of coordination within the FTF Interagency or with multilateral institutions, private companies, and other governments.<sup>31</sup> This approach would allow the FTF Interagency to focus on the goals of the initiative itself, rather than the individual projects and programs of the agencies involved. For example, FTF works to apply science, technology, and other innovative approaches to food security efforts, which the FTF Interagency could use as the basis for initiative-level performance goals.<sup>32</sup>

Creating meaningful FTF-wide performance goals would allow the FTF Interagency to better use performance data to gauge the initiative's actual

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<sup>29</sup>In relation to developing performance goals supported by performance indicators, prior GAO work has indicated that agencies with successful performance management had performance indicators that are limited to the vital few and provide useful information for decision-making ([GAO-03-143](#)).

<sup>30</sup>This is a hypothetical example of a performance goal based on the theory of change for this strategic objective in the Strategy. We are providing it as a means to show how a potential performance goal can show achievement toward a strategic objective.

<sup>31</sup>The Strategy discusses several approaches, including strengthening interagency coordination, integrating development and humanitarian approaches, working toward policy reform, and building local capacity and country ownership. The Strategy states that these approaches involve coordination and collaboration with other food security actors, including U.S. agencies, multilateral institutions, the private sector, and host governments.

<sup>32</sup>This is a hypothetical example of an area for a performance goal based on various food security approaches in the Strategy. We are providing it as a means to show how other FTF efforts could be used for performance goals.

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performance and progress toward its longer-term strategic objectives and overarching goal.

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### Few Indicators Meet Key Attributes of Performance Indicators, Limiting USAID’s Use of Related Data

FTF needs performance indicators to track progress toward performance goals; however, we found that only three of FTF’s 40 current performance indicators have both key attributes of successful performance indicators we evaluated them against. While FTF’s *Indicator Handbook* defines 53 indicators as performance indicators, we determined that 13 of these do not assess performance based on leading practices from GAO’s body of work on performance monitoring and therefore did not evaluate those against the key attributes (see app. II).<sup>33</sup> These attributes are:

- **Linkage:** how the indicators align with the initiative’s performance goals, strategic objectives, and overarching goal; and
- **Measurable targets:** whether the indicators have quantifiable, numerical targets or other measurable values.<sup>34</sup>

**Linkage.** We determined that all 40 performance indicators are relevant to FTF’s overarching goal; however, 12 of these 40 indicators do not have clearly explained linkage to specific FTF strategic objectives or intermediate results. Specifically, FTF performance documentation does not explain how these 12 indicators—one multi-level and seven project indicators under FTF’s cross-cutting intermediate results and four other

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<sup>33</sup>According to leading practices, performance indicators should measure outcomes, outputs, or processes and track progress toward a goal or target (see [GAO-11-646SP](#)). We determined that 13 of the 53 FTF indicators are not performance indicators, because they either measure higher-level changes at the national level that have not been clearly linked to program performance, or can be affected by many factors beyond FTF performance that have not been accounted for by FTF. As a result, we did not consider as performance indicators those that FTF designates as national or impact indicators. According to OMB Circular A-11, such non-performance indicators provide additional information, which could help the FTF Interagency understand the context and trends related to the initiative. USAID officials stated that they are considering categorizing national indicators as “tracking” indicators, rather than performance indicators, because they do not directly relate to the contributions of FTF’s projects.

<sup>34</sup>Our prior work establishes nine attributes of successful performance measures: linkage, clarity, measurable targets, objectivity, reliability, core program activities, limited overlap, balance, and government-wide priorities ([GAO-03-143](#)). Our work further identifies three foundational attributes from this list, without which the other attributes would be less relevant or important: linkage, measurable targets, and clarity ([GAO-19-216](#)). Based on this, we selected two of the three foundational attributes—linkage and measurable targets—to evaluate the extent to which FTF-wide performance indicators met them. We examine indicator clarity later in this report in our analysis of key stakeholders’ ability to use FTF indicator guidance.

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project indicators—link to specific intermediate results or strategic objectives.<sup>35</sup> For example, documentation for one indicator—*Percent of U.S. government–assisted organizations with improved performance*—does not specify any linkages aside from one of the cross-cutting intermediate results, so it is unclear how the FTF Interagency can use data from this indicator to monitor progress to specific strategic objectives or intermediate results. As part of the Strategy, the FTF Interagency developed the eight indicators under the cross-cutting intermediate results and four other project indicators to contribute to more than one objective, without specifying which ones. In contrast, FTF documentation clearly links the other 28 indicators to specific strategic objectives or intermediate results within FTF’s Results Framework.<sup>36</sup> Our prior work shows that aligning each performance indicator with specific performance goals and strategic objectives can encourage greater usefulness of performance data, as these linkages show how the performance of FTF’s outputs and lower-level outcomes connects to higher-level strategic objectives and the overarching goal.<sup>37</sup>

USAID and the FTF partner agencies are limited in their ability to use these data to monitor initiative performance without clear linkage from indicators to specific FTF strategic objectives, intermediate results, or performance goals. Performance indicators should support FTF-wide performance goals and have clearly explained linkage to those goals; however, not all of FTF’s current indicators need to be linked to the FTF Results Framework. Rather, the FTF Interagency could select indicators that would be most meaningful to those performance goals, and the required data collection and performance monitoring across the initiative would then focus on those indicators. In this way, not all of FTF’s current

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<sup>35</sup>FTF’s multi-level indicator is *Milestones in improved institutional architecture for food security policy achieved with U.S. government support*. Data for this indicator can be collected at the sub-national, national, regional, or international levels.

<sup>36</sup>According to the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, several of these indicators are linked to more than one strategic objective. For example, *Percent of households below the comparative threshold for the poorest quintile of the Asset-Based Comparative Wealth Index* is affiliated with FTF’s first and second strategic objectives. While these linkages are specifically stated in the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, linkages for the indicators associated with the cross-cutting intermediate results are not specified. Clearly explaining how the indicators link to FTF’s performance goals would allow USAID and the FTF partner agencies to logically support how FTF’s outputs and outcomes for these specific indicators contribute to achieving those goals.

<sup>37</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Enhancing Agency Use of Performance Information for Management Decision Making*, [GAO-05-927](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2005).

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performance indicators would need to be required FTF-wide, only the indicators that would align with FTF's performance goals, so that they could meaningfully be used to monitor the initiative's performance.<sup>38</sup>

**Measurable targets.** Only four of the 40 performance indicators had FTF-wide targets, with three of these four indicators also having clearly defined linkage to specific FTF strategic objectives or intermediate results. According to USAID officials, they developed FTF-wide targets for these four project indicators to meet OMB requirements for USAID's Agency Priority Goal, but they do not use those targets for any other purposes. These key indicators include:

- *Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with U.S. government assistance;*
- *Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving U.S. government assistance;*
- *Number of children under 5 reached with nutrition-specific interventions through U.S. government-supported programs; and*
- *Value of new U.S. government commitments and private sector investment leveraged by the U.S. government to support food security and nutrition.*<sup>39</sup>

USAID officials stated that they do not set FTF-wide targets for any other project performance indicators because doing so is challenging and of questionable utility. As one challenge, these officials stated that they cannot set FTF-wide targets by adding up project-level targets because some FTF partners cannot provide annual targets in advance for the FTF-funded portion of their projects, while others have difficulties setting

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<sup>38</sup>The FTF Interagency could continue to monitor other performance indicators at other levels, such as for individual projects or countries, but not require them for applicable projects FTF-wide.

<sup>39</sup>This fourth indicator is linked within FTF's Results Framework to a cross-cutting intermediate result and therefore does not have a specified linkage to specific strategic objectives or intermediate results, as previously discussed.

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targets.<sup>40</sup> USAID officials also noted that the more aggregated and higher level the target, the less useful the target is for assessing progress. For example, they explained that comparing FTF-wide data on its current project indicators to FTF-wide targets is not productive for the USAID officials because such aggregated information does not distinguish if some projects missed their targets while others exceeded them. Instead, they stated, it is more meaningful to compare data to targets at the individual project or country level, which USAID often does.<sup>41</sup>

Although USAID officials do not consider FTF-wide targets for project indicators to be meaningful, USAID and the FTF partner agencies decided to require that all performance indicators be collected for any related projects to allow for monitoring and aggregation of FTF-wide data. USAID officials stated that requiring the collection of these indicators is useful for other purposes besides performance monitoring, such as for FTF-wide reporting and other communications. However, indicators that are not used for performance monitoring are not performance indicators, and presenting them without clear differentiation from performance indicators could make it difficult to discern their usefulness. Further, without targets or clear linkages to performance goals, performance indicators cannot adequately demonstrate whether USAID is effectively making progress toward its overarching goal.<sup>42</sup>

As previously discussed, meaningful performance goals with supporting performance indicators and targets are a fundamental element in

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<sup>40</sup>According to USAID and Treasury officials, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program—multilateral institutions that receive contributions from Treasury and other donors—provide FTF results data prorated by the portion of the annual U.S. government contribution. Because the amount of contributions from all donors is not known until the end of the year, these institutions cannot provide prorated indicator targets in advance. Smaller agencies can also find target setting a challenge, according to USAID officials. For example, Inter-American Foundation officials stated that they had difficulties setting targets for FTF projects for individual fiscal years because its grantees typically have multi-year targets.

<sup>41</sup>USAID assesses performance against targets, when available, for individual projects or for zones of influence within countries. In particular, all USAID missions and implementing partners in all focus groups we spoke to found FTF indicator data useful for their own performance management at the project or zone of influence levels.

<sup>42</sup>For example, in FTF's 2020 reports, USAID reported that more than 300,000 individuals received nutrition-related professional training through U.S. government-supported programs in FY 2019. Without a target set for this indicator and included in the reports, readers do not have enough information to interpret whether this is an excellent, neutral, or insufficient result, which limits the meaningfulness of reporting indicator data.

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measuring progress. In particular, FTF-wide targets for indicators that are useful for FTF-wide performance monitoring can assess progress toward performance goals to show whether the initiative is meeting expectations and setting appropriate and reasonable goals. We have highlighted in our past work strategies that agencies can use for target setting. In particular, once the initiative has meaningful performance goals at an appropriate level, USAID and the FTF partner agencies can set realistic targets for the associated performance indicators.<sup>43</sup> Without FTF-wide targets, USAID and the FTF partner agencies cannot assess their progress toward FTF's performance goals.

Overall, FTF's lack of performance goals and few indicators with clear linkages and targets limit USAID and the FTF partner agencies' ability to assess the overall performance of FTF in a meaningful way. The FTF Interagency has collected data on a large number of indicators that it has made required as applicable. However, it cannot use data on these indicators to monitor progress toward its desired intermediate results, strategic objectives, or overarching goal. Creating meaningful performance goals, evaluating which performance indicators are useful for monitoring across the initiative, and ensuring that those indicators meet leading practices of linkages and targets would provide USAID and the FTF partner agencies valuable information on FTF's progress toward achieving its strategic objectives and overarching goal.

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## USAID Provided Support That Generally Helped Data Collection, and Has Made Efforts to Address Some Complex Indicator Requirements

FTF stakeholders found USAID's support helpful for understanding and executing many of the data collection requirements for their projects' performance indicators. However, some of these stakeholders found certain indicator requirements complex and difficult to implement, which limited their ability to provide consistent, quality data on these indicators. In response to stakeholders' concerns, USAID has provided additional resources and training on these indicators.

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## Stakeholders Found USAID Support Generally Helpful for Data Collection

According to stakeholders we interviewed in our sample countries of Bangladesh, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda, USAID guidance, training, communication, and quality assurance processes generally helped their

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<sup>43</sup>[GGD-99-16](#); [GAO-16-717](#); and [GAO-19-216](#).

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data collection on FTF's current project performance indicators. Federal standards for internal control state that agencies should communicate quality information, such as to ensure that stakeholders have the necessary information to collect performance indicator data.<sup>44</sup> Stakeholders that collect data on project indicators include FTF partner agencies and implementing partners for USAID and USDA.<sup>45</sup> In particular, USAID provides the following types of support:

- **Guidance.** USAID publishes several guidance documents for current performance indicators within the FTF Results Framework that provide information on definitions, collection methodologies, and reporting responsibilities. For example, USAID published the *FTF Indicator Handbook*, which is the main guidance for entities reporting on the 26 project indicators.<sup>46</sup> Implementing partners in all focus groups and one discussion group and almost all of the FTF partner agencies stated that the *FTF Indicator Handbook* provided detailed and helpful guidance on most indicator definitions and methodologies.<sup>47</sup>
- **Training.** USAID/RFS and USAID missions provide a variety of training sessions on the performance indicators, which implementing partners in many focus groups, one discussion group, and almost all partner agencies reported were useful. For example, USAID/RFS provides an annual webinar for FTF agencies and their implementing partners for each reporting period. USAID/RFS has also conducted other webinars and additional training on the FTF monitoring, evaluation, and learning system, such as more detailed discussions

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<sup>44</sup>GAO-14-704G.

<sup>45</sup>When we refer to FTF partner agencies in this section, we are referring to the FTF programmatic partner agencies that contributed results on FTF project indicators for FY 2019 and earlier. These FTF programmatic partner agencies are USDA, Treasury, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Peace Corps, and U.S. African Development Foundation. As a programmatic agency, the Inter-American Foundation began contributing indicator data in FY 2020.

<sup>46</sup>In addition to the 26 project indicators, the *FTF Indicator Handbook* includes guidance for the 20 zone of influence indicators, six national indicators, and one multi-level indicator. It also discusses how implementing partners and USAID missions can develop additional custom indicators that are, respectively, project or country specific. Unless otherwise specified, all references to indicators in this section refer to the FTF project indicators.

<sup>47</sup>When discussing the five FTF partner agencies we interviewed and the five focus groups with implementing partners, we refer to 5/5 as "all," 4/5 as "almost all," 3/5 as "many," and 2/5 as "a couple." For more information, see app. I.

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on the requirements for certain indicators. In addition, all USAID missions we spoke to host their own workshops with implementing partners to address data collection concerns.

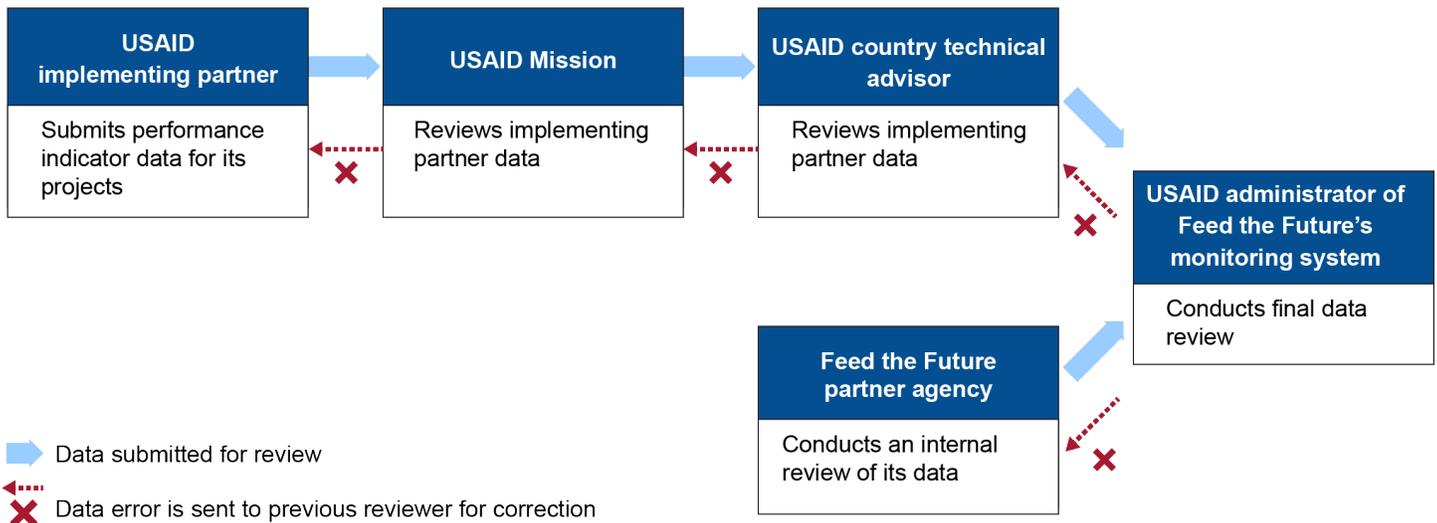
- **Direct communication.** Implementing partners in all four USAID focus groups and many of the FTF partner agencies stated that they appreciated direct communication with USAID.<sup>48</sup> For example, implementing partners in all USAID focus groups discussed working with USAID mission officials to determine which indicators their project should report and to approve a monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan for their projects. Many of the partner agencies stated that direct contact with USAID monitoring specialists was useful to answer any questions about data reporting.
- **Quality assurance processes.** Officials in all of the USAID missions we spoke with stated that they conduct regular reviews of their implementing partners' data to assess reliability and address any concerns, both during data collection and after annual reporting.<sup>49</sup> For example, all the USAID mission officials discussed conducting quarterly field visits and periodic data quality assessments to review implementing partners' indicator data and address any issues, such as making sure field staff develop sound methodologies for data collection. According to officials at one of these missions, following data quality assessments, they provide recommendations to implementing partners and monitor to ensure that the implementing partner addresses any gaps. USAID officials stated that after implementing partners, USAID missions, and FTF partner agencies submit their annual indicator data, RFS and mission officials conduct a multilayer review process before finalizing FTF data for publication and use, which can identify and address common issues (see fig. 6).

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<sup>48</sup>USDA implementing partners communicate directly with their own monitoring specialists within USDA, who can address any performance monitoring questions to USAID, if needed.

<sup>49</sup>One of the USAID missions we spoke to has a monitoring, evaluation, and learning contractor that provides support services to implementing partners, such as conducting data quality assessments, in addition to USAID mission staff. When referring to the USAID missions we interviewed, we consider 4/4 as "all," 3/4 as "almost all," and 2/4 as "half."

**Figure 6: Feed the Future Review Process for Performance Indicator Data**



Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents and interviews with the Feed the Future Interagency officials. | GAO-21-548

Note: For fiscal year 2020 data, one of the multilateral institutions to which the Department of the Treasury contributes (International Fund for Agricultural Development) followed the process above by submitting data to Treasury, while the other (Global Agriculture and Food Security Program) submitted its data directly to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs follows a process similar to that of Feed the Future partner agencies. According to USAID officials, the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs performs its own internal review processes.

## USAID Has Made Efforts to Address Some Complex Indicator Requirements

Stakeholders said that collecting data for some of FTF's current performance indicators was difficult due to complex requirements. These challenges with certain indicators led to some instances of incomplete and inaccurate data. USAID has made efforts to clarify and resolve these challenging indicator requirements through training sessions and other online resources.

Implementing partners and FTF partner agencies face difficulties with several complex indicator requirements, including calculating agricultural yields and sales, obtaining financial information, and identifying project participants.

- Calculating agricultural yield and value of sales.** Implementing partners in almost all focus groups and USDA officials stated that the agricultural indicators on yield and annual sales were difficult and technical to collect and report. According to USAID/RFS officials, outcome indicators like these are complex to collect data on because they require technical calculation, may involve surveying participants,

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and have many disaggregates.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, implementing partners in almost all of the focus groups discussed issues with the timing of data collection and reporting for agricultural yield and value of sales. Because the FTF reporting season does not always align with the timing of harvests, these implementing partners stated that their reporting on these indicators can rely on memory recall, such as by surveying participants months after harvest to ask their total yield for a specific crop.<sup>51</sup>

- **Obtaining financial information.** Implementing partners in almost all of the focus groups and almost all of the missions discussed challenges with obtaining accurate financial information from participants and the private sector because of participants' hesitancy to disclose such information or the indicators' reliance on participant recall.<sup>52</sup> USAID/RFS officials stated that this is a common challenge for entities that work with market systems and the private sector. For example, World Food Program officials identified this as a challenge for their own food security projects, stating that they had difficulties tracking private sector investments.
- **Identifying project participants.** Officials in all the missions in our sample countries and implementing partners in almost all focus groups discussed difficulties with identifying project participants, including indirect participants for projects following a market systems

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<sup>50</sup>Disaggregates are required for all indicators and refer to component parts or smaller units of FTF performance indicators for which implementing partners, partner agencies, and USAID missions submit data to USAID. For example, disaggregates of indicators can reflect demographic characteristics, such as sex and age, or break down the data in other ways, such as by type of business or commodity. USAID/RFS officials stated that for the agricultural indicators that can require a high number of disaggregates, they are considering ways to improve the annual reporting process. For example, USAID is considering simplifying the organization of the many disaggregates in the electronic reporting system.

<sup>51</sup>USAID officials stated that they are aware of challenges with collecting yield data for FTF indicators, and are developing methods to use satellite data for estimating data on zone of influence indicators like crop yield. USAID has already used high-resolution satellite imagery to demonstrate changes in vegetative "greenness" following water infrastructure interventions in Tigray, Ethiopia. USAID anticipates being able to use this technology more in the next several years for its monitoring needs.

<sup>52</sup>Implementing partners and FTF partner agencies are required to collect financial information for several indicators, when relevant to their FTF projects. Examples include *Value of new U.S. government commitments and private sector investments leveraged by the U.S. government to support food security and nutrition*, *Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving U.S. government assistance*, and *Value of agriculture-related financing accessed as a result of U.S. government assistance*.

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approach.<sup>53</sup> For example, mission officials in Mali stated that it is difficult for implementing partners to identify whether to count participants by number of individuals or households.<sup>54</sup> They also stated that it was challenging for implementing partners to collect disaggregated data for their indicators, such as age and sex, for participants with whom a project does not interact directly. Although the *FTF Indicator Handbook* has some information on identifying project participants, it acknowledges that accurate tracking of participants with whom a project does not interact directly is inherently challenging.

USAID officials stated that stakeholders' difficulties with complex indicator requirements, particularly for the indicators described above, led to certain instances of inaccurate data. For example, USAID officials in half of the missions in our sample countries explained that some implementing partners did not have reliable data or needed to provide estimates for the agricultural yield and value of sales. USAID officials also stated that some implementing partners do not have a clear understanding of how to identify participants, which can lead to inaccurate counting. According to USAID officials, USAID's multiple layers of review of FTF data allow it to find or address many instances of unreliable data. USAID officials stated that when they determine data are unreliable and cannot be fixed, they omit data from that implementing partner for that indicator, preferring to under-report rather than use data that could be unreliable.

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<sup>53</sup>During FTF Phase 2, some projects take a market systems approach, which focuses on improvements across interconnected value chains and market actors, including the private sector and the policy environment. Value chains refer to the activities that bring agricultural products from production to consumption. Such activities can include the processing, storage, and transportation of agricultural products. In market systems projects, the *FTF Indicator Handbook* states, indirect participants should be included in the number of participants for indicators like *Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving U.S. government assistance*. Specifically, participants should include both firms directly reached by U.S. government assistance and other firms and producers buying or selling from those firms for projects following a market systems approach, but the latter may be difficult to collect data on because they do not interact directly with the project.

<sup>54</sup>Officials referred to particular confusion with reporting on the indicator *Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with U.S. government assistance*. For example, if implementing partners provide training to the head of the household, they sometimes count the entire household as one participant. However, the *FTF Indicator Handbook* states that if more than one participant in a household applies an improved practice or technology, each participant should be counted.

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USAID officials described how they have tried to be responsive to stakeholders' concerns about these indicators and worked to clarify them. According to USAID officials, they issued clarifications on these complex indicators, mostly through training sessions and online resources. For example, USAID offered multiple webinars on how to calculate agriculture yield and value of sales, collect financial information from participants, and identify and report the number of participants. In addition, USAID posts information on affiliate websites, including links to webinars and blog posts that discuss missions' and implementing partners' experiences and lessons learned with collecting indicator data.<sup>55</sup> Further, according to USAID officials, they use online webinars to learn about stakeholder concerns so they can determine what additional clarifications or resources may be needed to further improve data collection on FTF indicators.

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## USAID's Public Reports Include Some Data on Feed the Future's Projects, but Contain Unclear and Unsupported Statements on the Initiative's Progress

USAID's public reports include some data aggregated across FTF's projects, but the reports do not clearly communicate FTF's overall progress. Further, USAID's reports contain statements about FTF's impact that USAID's data do not support. USAID's publicly issued 2017–2020 Strategy Implementation reports and FTF Progress Snapshot reports include baseline and trend data and discuss data limitations, in accordance with two of the four relevant leading practices on performance reporting.<sup>56</sup> However, USAID's reports do not describe how the limited performance data presented align with and can be used to assess progress toward FTF's objectives—another leading practice.<sup>57</sup> Further, the reports do not outline performance targets so actual performance data could be compared with the targets, also a leading practice. Lastly, although USAID's reports state that FTF's efforts have led to certain impacts, such as decreases in poverty and childhood

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<sup>55</sup>USAID uses a series of websites that provide resources for food security and development professionals on a variety of topics. For example, [agrilinks.org](http://agrilinks.org), [marketlinks.org](http://marketlinks.org), and [resiliencelinks.org](http://resiliencelinks.org) offer information on agriculture, markets, and resilience, respectively. These websites provide links to many types of resources, such as documents, events, and blogs on a variety of related topics. In addition, for any online webinar USAID officials provide on FTF indicators, a recording of the webinar is generally available afterward on one of these websites.

<sup>56</sup>GAO, *Leading Practices for Managing for Results in Government*, [https://www.gao.gov/key\\_issues/managing\\_for\\_results\\_in\\_government/issue\\_summary](https://www.gao.gov/key_issues/managing_for_results_in_government/issue_summary). We selected four leading practices from GAO's body of work that we identified as most directly relating to the type of performance data we reviewed in FTF's public reports and for which we could apply clear decision rules.

<sup>57</sup>In this section of the report, we use the term "objectives" broadly to refer to FTF's overarching goal, strategic objectives, and/or any performance goals that might be set.

stunting, USAID’s data do not support these statements. As a result, USAID’s public reports do not communicate a clear picture of FTF’s progress against its objectives.

**USAID Followed Two of Four Leading Practices but Did Not Communicate a Clear Picture of Feed the Future’s Progress against Its Objectives**

USAID followed two of the four leading practices for performance reporting, by including baseline and trend data and discussing data limitations. However, USAID did not follow the other two leading practices: aligning data with objectives and including performance targets and actions to meet targets (see fig. 7).

**Figure 7: U.S. Agency for International Development Public Reporting of Feed the Future’s Progress, Measured against Leading Practices**

Leading Practice 1	Reporting includes baseline and trend data	✓ Followed
Leading Practice 2	Reporting discusses data limitations and actions to address them	✓ Followed
Leading Practice 3	Reporting describes how performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward the initiative’s objectives	✗ Did not follow
Leading Practice 4	Reporting compares actual performance results against planned performance targets, and discusses planned actions for unmet performance targets	✗ Did not follow

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future Strategy Implementation reports and Snapshot Reports 2017-2020. | GAO-21-548

Note: Baseline data and trend data are useful to measure progress over time. Baseline data are used as a starting point for measuring progress, while trend data depict a measurement of data over time.

**Reports Include Baseline and Trend Data for Performance Indicators and Discuss Data Limitations**

In the reports we reviewed, USAID followed the leading practices that its reports should include baseline data and trend data, and discuss data limitations along with actions to address them. Baseline data, which provide a starting point, and trend data, which present multiple years’ worth of data, are useful for assessing performance over time. USAID included both baseline and trend data for the performance indicators included in the progress reports.

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The reports include data tables on eight to 12 FTF-wide project indicators, depending on the year.<sup>58</sup> All of the FTF Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports include data for these indicators that serve as the baseline data for measuring progress. As noted in the *FTF Indicator Handbook*, the baseline for these indicators can be 0 or is the data point collected in the first year of the program.

All Strategy Implementation reports from 2017 to 2020 and the FTF Progress Snapshot reports in 2017 and 2018 provide trend data, when available, starting from 2011 on all indicators that were included in the reports.<sup>59</sup> While the FTF Progress Snapshot 2019 and 2020 reports do not include trend data for these indicators, these reports provide a link that directs readers to an FTF website that includes 2011–2019 trend data for these indicators.

In all the reports, USAID also followed the leading practice that reports should discuss data limitations and, when applicable, actions to address them. Some of the data limitations outlined in the reports centered on revisions to indicator methodologies, as was the case for numerous indicators that were included in the 2019 reports. For example, the Strategy Implementation 2019 report explains that some performance data are likely underestimates because some projects were transitioning to reporting results for a new set of indicators. Therefore, some projects were reporting on old indicators while others reported on updated indicators. As another data limitation example, two reports state that data disaggregated by sex were not available for an indicator on the value of agricultural loans due to a change in the definition for female-owned firms.<sup>60</sup> The reports state that data disaggregated by sex for this indicator would be included in future reports. In describing actions to address data limitations, the reports describe how future reports will modify how they

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<sup>58</sup>These eight to 12 project indicators are a subset of FTF’s full list of indicators, which include project, zone of influence, and national indicators. Projects that started before USAID introduced new indicators can continue to report on older—dropped or changed—indicators. As a result, in a given year there can be data available for other indicators that are not in the most recent *FTF Indicator Handbook*.

<sup>59</sup>The Strategy Implementation 2019 report outlined trend data starting in 2011 for three out of eight indicators included in the report. The remaining five indicators did not have trend data because they were new or revised indicators. As a result, comparable trend data for multiple years were not available for those five indicators.

<sup>60</sup>For this indicator, ownership of the firm receiving the loan was previously classified as female if a majority of a firm’s ownership was female. The definition of the female disaggregate was changed to classify ownership as female only if all proprietors of the firm receiving the loan are female.

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Reports Do Not Align  
Performance Data with  
Objectives and Do Not Include  
Targets to Meaningfully  
Illustrate Progress or Gaps

present some indicator data to provide more clear or specific information on the indicator. For example, one report explains that an indicator on the value of agricultural sales previously measured increases in sales from the adjusted baseline, whereas that report and future reports will instead measure total annual sales to provide a clearer picture of producers' and firms' revenue.

While USAID met the two leading practices above, it did not follow the leading practice that reporting should describe how FTF performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward the initiative's objectives. USAID also did not follow the leading practice that reporting should compare actual performance results against planned performance targets, and should discuss planned actions for unmet performance targets.

**Lack of alignment with objectives.** USAID did not follow the leading practice that reporting should describe how FTF performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward the initiative's objectives. None of the reports describe how any of the performance data included in the reports link to FTF's objectives, nor do the reports describe how the data can be used to assess progress, even though our analysis shows that the majority of performance indicators are linked to specific FTF strategic objectives, intermediate results, or both, as discussed earlier. For example, we determined that eight of 10 of the indicators reported in the 2020 Strategy Implementation report are specifically linked to an intermediate result, yet none of the linkages are specified in the report. USAID officials stated that the FTF *Indicator Handbook* outlines how these data are aligned to the FTF Results Framework. While the FTF *Indicator Handbook* is publicly available, it is a lengthy, dense document that the public might not know how to access or interpret. Without describing how performance data align with and can be used to help USAID assess progress against FTF's objectives, USAID's reports do not clearly communicate to readers how progress on these performance indicators can help FTF reach these objectives.

**Lack of performance targets.** USAID also did not follow the leading practice that reporting should compare actual performance results against planned performance targets, and should discuss planned actions for

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unmet performance targets.<sup>61</sup> Depending on the year, the public reports include FTF-wide performance data on eight to 12 indicators. However, these reports do not list any performance targets for any of these indicators, even though these reports include data on the four performance indicators for which FTF-wide targets have been set, as discussed earlier. USAID officials stated that they did not include FTF-wide performance targets in the reports because they do not believe these targets are useful in general or in the context of the progress reports.

Similarly, as discussed earlier, USAID officials stated that they have not set FTF-wide targets for all indicators in the reports because they consider doing so challenging and of questionable utility. Specifically, with regard to reporting FTF-wide targets, these officials also stated that FTF-wide targets for future years that show a decreasing trend over time could suggest to readers that FTF has set less ambitious targets. Instead, USAID officials stated, the decreasing trend might reflect that each subsequent year includes fewer current projects as projects end and new ones have not yet started.

Although USAID officials stated that lower-level data are more informative to assess progress, USAID selected FTF-wide performance data to include in its public reports because these reports are intended to provide information on FTF-wide progress. However, FTF-wide performance data included without measurable targets leave readers unable to discern how the reported data compare with FTF's expectations for initiative-wide progress within that year. Without including targets for all performance data in the public progress reports, USAID cannot present a clear picture in the reports of how FTF is progressing toward its objectives and how much more work is needed to achieve these objectives.

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## Reports Contain Statements on Feed the Future's Impact That USAID's Data Do Not Support

The FTF Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports contain statements on FTF's impact that USAID's data do not support. Narrative sections of the reports suggest that FTF efforts have led to certain impacts, such as estimated decreases in the prevalence of poverty and the prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age in FTF's zones of influence—two FTF-wide indicators. For example, the 2018–2020 reports state that poverty decreased by an estimated 23 percent and

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<sup>61</sup>GAO's body of work on managing for results in government, such as *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO/GGD-96-118](#) (June 1996), and *GPRA Performance Reports*, [GAO/GGD-96-66R](#) (Feb. 14, 1996).

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stunting decreased by an estimated 32 percent from 2010 to 2017 in FTF’s zones of influence. The language introducing the poverty and stunting data varies by report, but seven of the eight 2017–2020 reports we reviewed, including the most recently issued 2020 reports, contain statements that tie the data to FTF’s progress, such as “FTF is making an impact” and “FTF has helped an estimated 23.4 million more people rise above the poverty line.” However, USAID’s estimates of poverty and stunting data do not support the reports’ statements on FTF’s impact in these areas. As discussed, these data do not allow USAID to identify FTF’s impact for reasons that include, among other things, weaknesses in FTF’s performance monitoring framework and limited coverage of FTF projects in the zones of influence. The reports also include statements on FTF’s impact, initiative-wide and in specific countries, for other indicators, such as hunger and women’s empowerment. For example, some of the reports state that FTF led to an estimated 5.2 million more families living free from hunger. However, this decrease in hunger cannot be attributed to FTF projects for the same reasons that apply to the poverty and stunting data.

USAID officials agreed that measuring FTF’s impact on poverty and stunting is challenging because numerous factors external to FTF influence these data. They added that the reports should clearly state that while FTF is designed to contribute to larger efforts to decrease poverty and stunting, such decreases cannot be attributed to FTF projects. USAID officials noted that this is especially true when other donors, governments, or local organizations are involved in efforts to address poverty and malnutrition in areas where FTF works. Nonetheless, USAID officials stated that the progress reports include these estimates of poverty and stunting because of reader demand for information on FTF’s overarching goal of reducing poverty, malnutrition, and hunger.

In addition to difficulties with using the data to identify FTF’s impact, the poverty and stunting estimates might not be accurate because USAID calculated these estimates by projecting trends for up to 2 years before and 2 years past when USAID completed most of its surveys of poverty and stunting.<sup>62</sup> USAID officials stated that they projected trends in those years because they wanted to provide estimates from FTF’s inception in 2010 to 2017—the year for which the targets had initially been set—even

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<sup>62</sup>For more information on how USAID calculated its estimates of poverty and stunting at the FTF-wide level and the country level, see app. III.

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though most of the baseline data were collected in 2012 or 2013 and no related data were collected in 2017.

GAO's body of work on managing for results states that credible performance information is essential for accurately assessing agencies' progress toward achieving their objectives—the cornerstone of performance reporting.<sup>63</sup> By including unsupported statements on FTF's impact, some of FTF's public progress reports suggest to readers that FTF efforts have led to decreases in poverty and stunting, when USAID does not have the data to make such a statement.

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## USAID Developed a Graduation Assessment Process That Has Not Clearly Indicated Country Progress, and USAID Has Not Shared the Assessments with Key Stakeholders

USAID/RFS, in consultation with USAID missions and FTF partner agencies, developed a process using scorecards to annually assess target countries for graduation from FTF, but the scorecards do not provide a clear indication of countries' progress. Further, USAID/RFS has not shared the annual assessments with FTF stakeholders. As a result, key stakeholders are hindered in their ability to both make informed decisions to help target countries advance toward graduation from FTF assistance and to ensure the continued validity of the graduation assessment process.

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## USAID Developed a Process to Annually Assess Target Countries' Graduation Potential

In response to the GFSA requirement to develop criteria and methodologies for graduating target countries from global food security assistance, USAID/RFS, in consultation with USAID missions and FTF partner agencies, outlined a process to annually conduct graduation assessments in the May 2018 Feed the Future Target Country Graduation Policy and Review Process.<sup>64</sup> According to this policy document, the purpose of the graduation assessment process is to evaluate a nation's readiness to transition from target country status, not necessarily to stop all related assistance. The U.S. government would not terminate food security assistance to a country upon its graduation, but instead would consider what types of assistance, such as policy or trade promotion, are appropriate. According to USAID/RFS officials, graduation should be a core aim of FTF's work in a country, and a country's progress

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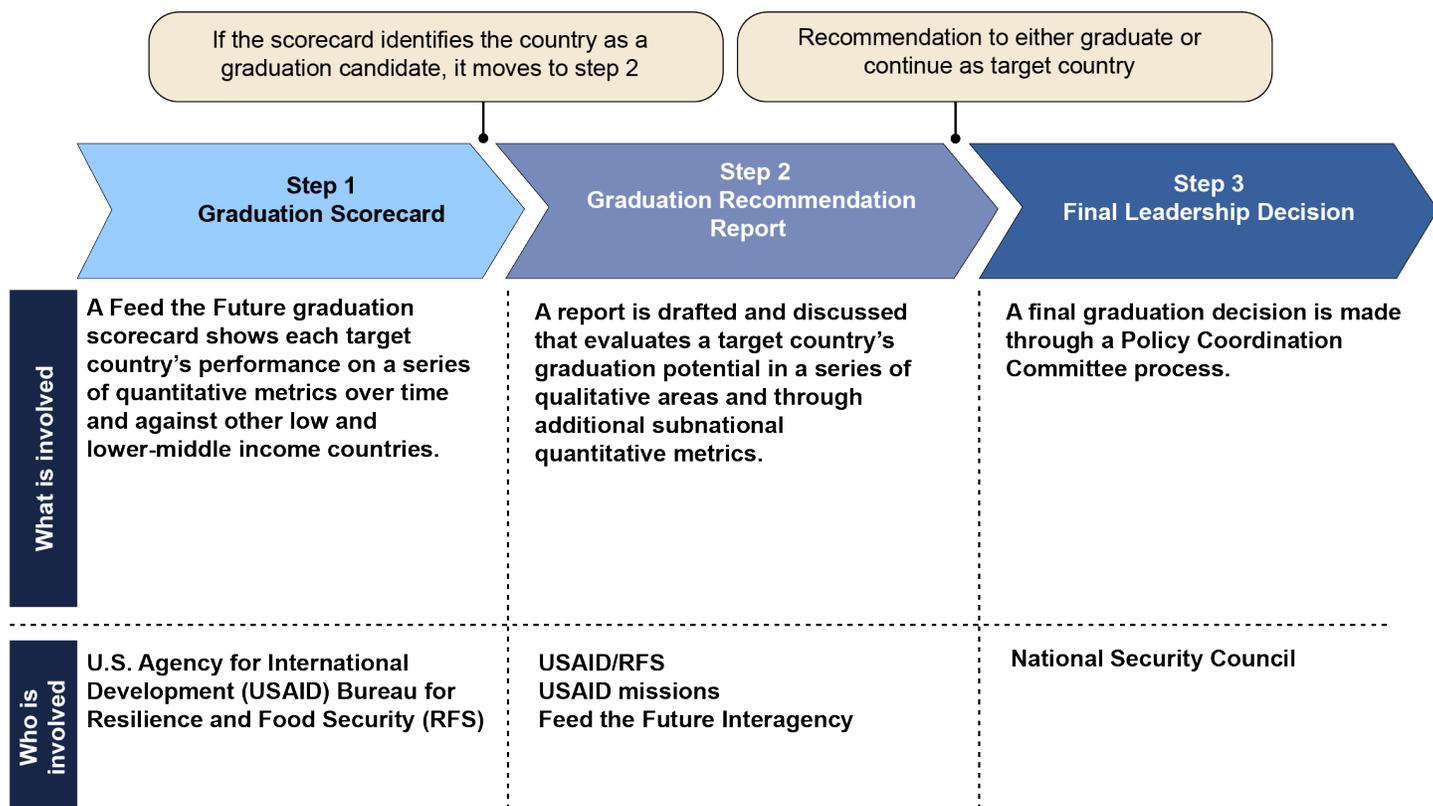
<sup>63</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Challenges Agencies Face in Producing Credible Performance Information*, GAO/GGD-00-52 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 4, 2000).

<sup>64</sup>For a full copy of this policy, see <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/graduation/>.

toward graduation should influence programming decisions for that country.

The graduation assessment process has three steps: (1) a quantitative review conducted through a scorecard, (2) a more in-depth qualitative and quantitative report, and (3) a National Security Council determination (see fig. 8). USAID/RFS annually assesses each target country based on the scorecard. When a target country passes one step, it should proceed to the next step that same year.

**Figure 8: The Three Steps in the Feed the Future Graduation Assessment Process**



Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: While USAID/RFS is responsible for creating the step 1 graduation scorecards, the FTF graduation policy indicates that the USAID missions and the FTF partner agencies should also review and discuss the scorecards.

In the first step, USAID/RFS is responsible for creating graduation scorecards to assess each target country on 11 indicators across three categories: development achievement, capacity, and commitment, as

shown in table 2. Under a USAID research grant, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) assisted in developing the scorecard methodology and prepared the initial scorecards. According to USAID/RFS officials, they decided that the scorecards should include national-level data available from third-party sources because those data are publicly available and comparable across low- and lower-middle-income countries.

**Table 2: Indicators Tracked in Feed the Future Target Countries’ Graduation Scorecards, by Category**

Scorecard category	Scorecard indicator	Indicator definitions
Development achievement	Extreme poverty	Prevalence of people living on less than \$1.90 per day at 2011 purchasing power parity
	Hunger	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity
	Stunting	Prevalence of children under 5 with a height for their age more than two standard deviations below the median
	Wasting	Prevalence of children under 5 with a weight for their height more than two standard deviations below the median
	Humanitarian aid	Dollars per capita requested in appeals for international humanitarian aid
Capacity	Agricultural gross domestic product	Agricultural value-added per capita in constant 2010 U.S. dollars
	Government effectiveness	Index measuring perceptions of the quality of public services and policies, the degree of the civil service’s independence from political pressures, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to effective policies
	Civil society capacity of the rural poor	Index measuring the quality of the policy and legal framework for rural organizations and the level of dialogue between government and rural organizations
Commitment	Government investment in agriculture	National government’s agriculture expenditures, as a percentage of total government expenditures
	Agriculture enabling environment	Index measuring regulations that impact how markets function in the agriculture and agribusiness sectors
	Business environment	Index measuring a country’s entrepreneurial environment, business infrastructure, barriers to innovation, and labor market flexibility

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

The scorecards show the target country’s own performance and how that country compares to all low- and lower-middle-income countries for each

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indicator as well as a composite score for each of the three categories.<sup>65</sup> According to the policy, to advance to step 2 of the graduation assessment process, a country's scorecard that year must show that the country exceeded the median score of all low- and lower-middle-income countries for each of the three categories for at least 3 years in a row, using the 2017 median performance level for each category as the standard.<sup>66</sup> According to USAID/RFS officials and IFPRI representatives, the scorecards will continue to measure target countries against the 2017 median performance level because 2017 was the year FTF Phase 2 began and they did not want to shift the threshold from year to year.

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## USAID Scorecards Have Not Clearly Indicated Countries' Progress toward Graduation

From 2018 to 2020, USAID/RFS annually developed scorecards to assess the target countries for graduation, but changes in the scorecards' assessments from year to year do not clearly indicate whether countries are progressing toward graduation based on improved performance. The scorecards identified an increasing number of graduation candidates each year due to several factors other than improved performance during those 3 years. For instance, most of the countries had partially met the scorecard criteria to be graduation candidates when they were selected as Phase 2 target countries. Further, several countries became eligible to be considered as graduation candidates in 2019 and 2020 as a result of a change USAID/RFS made in the assessment process, as well as revised data that improved some countries' scorecards. One country—Honduras—saw a scorecard assessment change from 2019 to 2020 due to improved prior year performance on the scorecard indicators.

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<sup>65</sup>To determine which countries are low- or lower-middle-income, USAID/RFS uses these categories as defined by the World Bank, based on gross national income per capita. USAID/RFS and IFPRI had also considered other peer groups to use for comparison, such as only comparing the FTF target countries against each other's performance or separately comparing low-income countries only with other low-income countries and lower-middle-income countries only with other lower-middle-income countries. According to IFPRI, the latter approach would have lowered expectations for low-income countries.

<sup>66</sup>The scorecards include data on the individual indicators and composite scores since 2010. To be a graduation candidate in the 2018 scorecards, for example, a country needed to exceed the 2017 median performance level of all low- and lower-middle-income countries across all three categories in 2015, 2016, and 2017. USAID/RFS and IFPRI had also considered other thresholds, such as exceeding the levels of three-quarters of peer countries or absolute thresholds for certain indicators, such as below a certain level of national poverty. According to USAID/RFS officials and IFPRI representatives, identifying absolute thresholds for multiple scorecard criteria would be complex and comparing each country's progress against the median level for other countries should show meaningful progress in each category.

In 2018, the pilot year scorecards indicated that two of the 12 FTF target countries were graduation candidates because they exceeded the 2017 median level for all three scorecard categories. In addition, the scorecards showed that most of the 12 countries had exceeded this level for at least one of the three scorecard categories when they were selected as target countries. Specifically, IFPRI prepared the 2018 scorecards using data available through 2017—the year the countries were selected as target countries. The 2018 scorecards showed that six countries exceeded the 2017 median level in the capacity category, eight in the commitment category, and five in the development achievement category, as seen in table 3.

**Table 3: Feed the Future Target Country Assessments on the 2018 Graduation Scorecards, by Category**

Target country, by score		Category		
		Capacity	Commitment	Development achievement
Countries that scored above the threshold for graduation consideration in all 3 scorecard categories	Guatemala	●	●	●
	Senegal	●	●	●
Countries that scored above the threshold for graduation consideration for 2 of 3 scorecard categories	Ghana	●	○	●
	Honduras	○	●	●
	Kenya	●	●	◐
	Nigeria	●	●	○
	Uganda	○	●	●
Countries that scored above the threshold for graduation consideration for 1 of 3 scorecard categories	Bangladesh	○	●	○
	Nepal	○	●	○
	Niger	●	○	○
Countries that scored above the threshold for graduation consideration for 0 of 3 scorecard categories	Ethiopia	○	○	○
	Mali	○	○	○

Legend: ● = above threshold; ◐ = at threshold; ○ = below threshold

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: The 2018 Feed the Future graduation scorecards assessed the 12 target countries against the 2017 median performance level of all low- and lower-middle-income countries based on data available from 2010 to 2017. Target countries had to exceed that median level in all categories for at least 3 consecutive years through 2017 in order to meet the scorecard criteria for graduation consideration in the 2018 scorecards. All countries were at the same level shown here as compared to the threshold for between 3 and the full 8 years assessed.

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The number of target countries that passed at least one scorecard category in the first year of the scorecards reflects similarities between the criteria for target country selection and the criteria for advancing toward graduation. In particular, the criteria for target country selection and the graduation scorecards both favor countries with higher levels of capacity and commitment. Related to capacity, for target country selection, the FTF Interagency looked for countries that had potential for agricultural-led growth, opportunities for partnership, and opportunities for regional economic integration. Related to commitment, the FTF Interagency looked for target countries that actively prioritize food security and nutrition investments and policy reforms.<sup>67</sup> According to the Strategy, these target country selection criteria were meant to focus FTF investments where they could have the greatest potential to achieve sustainable improvements in food security and nutrition.<sup>68</sup> For the third scorecard category—development achievement—the criteria for graduation are distinctly different from the related criteria that the FTF Interagency had considered for target country selection. Specifically, for target country selection the FTF Interagency considered countries’ level of need, selecting countries with high levels of food insecurity, poverty, and malnutrition. In contrast, for the graduation assessment scorecards, the target countries would need to show relatively lower need than other countries by scoring above the 2017 median level in development achievement to pass that category. Overall, criteria favoring target countries with higher levels of capacity and commitment led to many of the FTF target countries already having passed at least one of these scorecard categories on the 2018 scorecards by having exceeded the 2017 median performance level of low- and lower-middle-income countries, at the time of target country selection.

The 2019 and 2020 scorecards showed an increasing number of countries eligible to be considered as graduation candidates each year, mostly because of two factors: an adjustment USAID made in the assessment process to broaden eligibility, and revisions to third-party data (see fig. 9). One country—Honduras—saw an assessment change

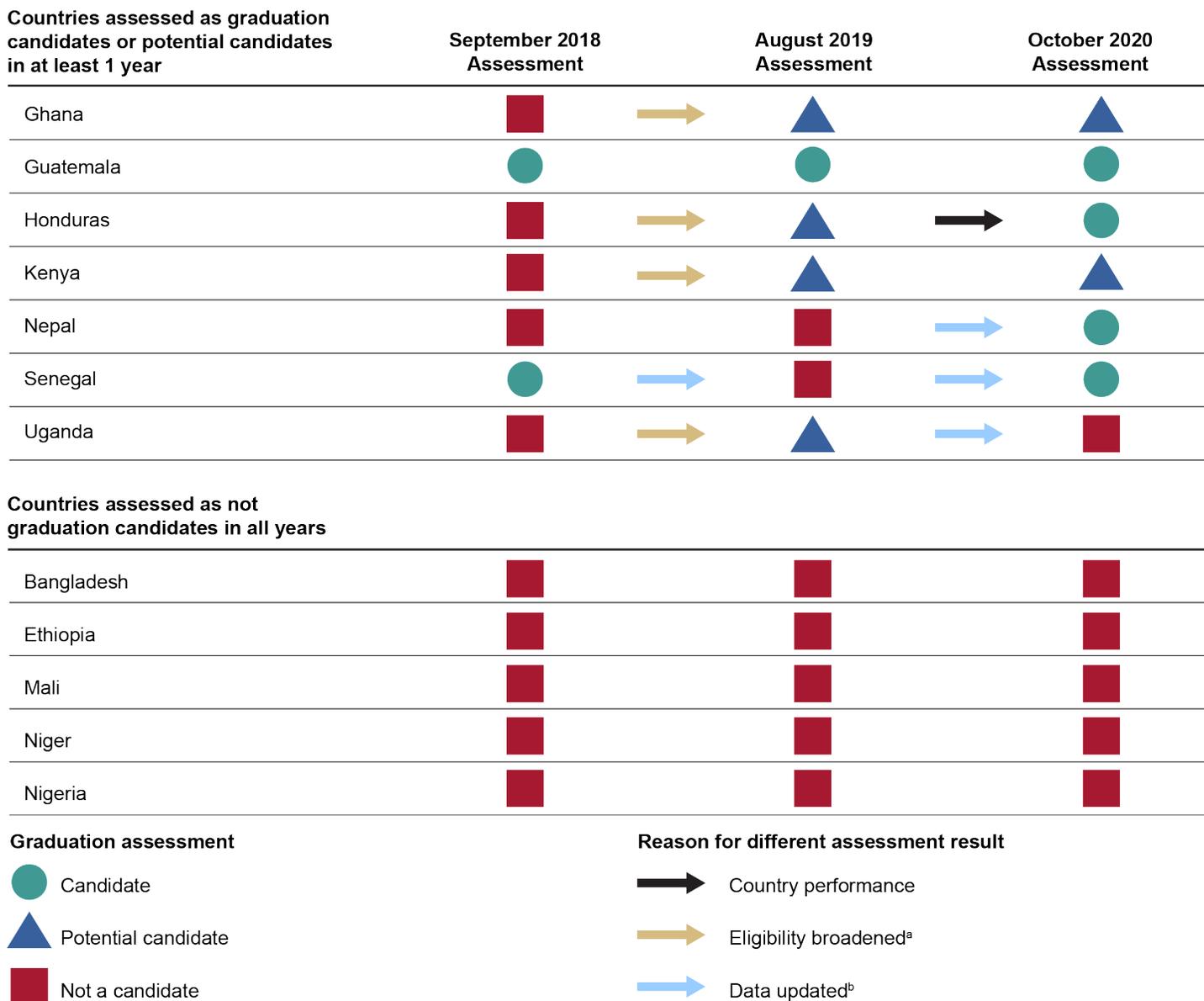
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<sup>67</sup>The FTF Interagency also considered a sixth factor in its FTF target country selection that is unrelated to any of the graduation scorecard criteria: U.S. government resource availability.

<sup>68</sup>The Strategy also states that target countries did not need to meet all six criteria to be selected, and provided an example of when all of the criteria need not be met—fragile states, which may have the highest need for assistance but may have weak government commitment.

from 2019 to 2020 based on its actual performance on the scorecard indicators.

**Figure 9: Feed the Future (FTF) Target Country Graduation Scorecard Assessments, 2018 to 2020, and the Reasons for Any Changes in Assessment Results between Years**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) documents. | GAO-21-548

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Note: Each scorecard includes the most recent data available through the prior calendar year. As a result, the 2020 scorecards do not include data reflecting any changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic or any natural disasters that occurred in 2020, such as hurricanes in Guatemala and Honduras and a locust invasion of East Africa. Countries are assessed as graduation candidates by meeting the graduation scorecard criteria for each of its three categories: capacity, commitment, and development achievement, for at least 3 years in a row. According to the FTF graduation policy, USAID should then work with the FTF partner agencies to develop a step 2 graduation recommendation report for graduation candidates.

<sup>a</sup>In 2019, USAID broadened eligibility for passing the graduation scorecards by creating a new assessment score for potential graduation candidates. A country can achieve this score by meeting the graduation scorecard criteria for two of the three categories. According to USAID officials, the FTF Interagency can then decide whether to develop a step 2 graduation recommendation report for potential graduation candidates.

<sup>b</sup>Data updates of two types led to different scorecard assessments from year to year. First, an international organization whose indicator USAID used as part of the scorecard assessment updated its process for calculating that indicator. Second, USAID officials updated data they found to have been inaccurate in prior-year scorecards.

Specifically, the causes of any changes in countries' graduation scorecard assessments from 2018 to 2020 include the following.

- **Adjustment in the assessment process to broaden eligibility.** Starting with the 2019 scorecards, USAID/RFS, in consultation with the FTF partner agencies, determined that a target country could be a potential graduate if it passes any two of the three categories for at least the 3 most recent years, instead of having to pass all three categories for this period. According to USAID/RFS officials, for a country to be a potential graduation candidate, its score in the category for which it is below the 2017 median level would have to be within 0.05 of that median level for the 3 most recent years. The FTF Interagency could then determine whether a potential graduate should move on to the second assessment step based on a consideration of factors that may prevent the country from exceeding the 2017 median level in the third category, according to USAID/RFS officials. The USAID/RFS officials stated that this process change helps address potential limitations of the scorecard indicators, including not taking into account relevant context. For example, Ghana was considered a potential graduate on the 2019 and 2020 scorecards because it had exceeded the 2017 median level for many years in the development achievement and capacity categories but was slightly below or at the 2017 median level in the commitment category. According to USAID/RFS officials, Ghana had not passed the median level in commitment due to one indicator on the percentage of the government's investment in agriculture, which Ghana is unlikely to exceed due to the size of the country's agriculture sector.
- **Third-party data revisions.** Data updates to some scorecard indicators have changed certain countries' scorecard assessments.

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For example, when creating the 2020 scorecards, USAID/RFS officials realized that the International Fund for Agricultural Development had updated its rural voice and accountability index, which is used as a capacity indicator. USAID decided not to include prior-year data on this indicator because the agency determined that those data were not comparable. As a result, the scorecards for all countries had only 1 year of data for this indicator, from 2017, the most recent available. Including the recalculated data in Nepal's and Senegal's assessments helped them become graduation candidates in the 2020 scorecard when they had not been candidates the prior year. Nepal's and Uganda's assessments were also affected by updated data on the level of food insecurity in their countries that had been inaccurate in prior year scorecards.

- **Change in country performance.** Honduras improved from being a potential graduation candidate on the 2019 scorecard to being a candidate on the 2020 scorecard because it maintained its score in the capacity category above the median level for the third year in a row.<sup>69</sup> In particular, Honduras' capacity score had increased in 2017 due to an increase in the country's real per capita agricultural gross domestic product and had remained above the median level since then.

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### USAID Has Not Communicated Assessments or Annually Reviewed the Process with Key Stakeholders

The May 2018 graduation policy states that USAID should annually lead the FTF Interagency, with input from the agencies' in-country representatives, in conducting a graduation assessment for each target country and in reviewing the overall process used to assess target countries for graduation. However, USAID/RFS has not fully followed either of these annual processes. USAID/RFS shared a selection of the 2018 scorecards with the FTF partner agencies, but not with the USAID missions, and it has not shared the 2019 or 2020 scorecards with any key FTF stakeholders due to competing priorities. As a result, the FTF Interagency has not created and discussed a graduation recommendation report for any of the seven countries whose scorecards identified them as

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<sup>69</sup>Other countries' performance changed on individual indicators within the scorecard that were insufficient to change their score within a full category. For example, from the 2018 to 2019 scorecards, Mali improved in the development achievement indicators for stunting and wasting, but continued to remain below the 2017 median for low- and lower-middle-income countries in this category due to a high prevalence of poverty, for which the most recent data were from 2009. On the other hand, Mali's score decreased for the enabling the business of agriculture indicator in its 2020 scorecard but Mali continued to exceed the median for low- and lower-middle-income countries for the commitment category because of the high percentage of the Malian government budget invested in agriculture.

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ready to advance to the second step in the graduation assessment process.

- **2018 scorecards:** USAID/RFS shared samples of the 2018 scorecards with the FTF partner agencies in June 2019, but did not share them with the USAID missions. As initially designed in the policy, the FTF Interagency would review each target country's graduation scorecard during the annual FTF portfolio review for that country; however, IFPRI, on behalf of USAID/RFS, developed the first graduation scorecards in September 2018, months after the 2018 portfolio reviews were completed.<sup>70</sup> Further, USAID/RFS officials stated that they had decided not to share these scorecards with USAID's target country missions because mission officials were busy with work to establish FTF Phase 2, and USAID/RFS officials did not want a premature discussion of graduation assessments to confuse the missions.<sup>71</sup> USAID/RFS instead shared examples of the 2018 scorecards and discussed the graduation assessment process during an FTF Interagency meeting in June 2019. According to USAID/RFS officials, these discussions identified multiple lessons learned, including that (1) the graduation assessment process should coincide with an annual country programming review, like the FTF portfolio reviews, and (2) the USAID missions should be involved as the graduation assessment process moves forward.
- **2019 scorecards:** USAID/RFS did not share the 2019 scorecards because it was focused on reorganizing USAID's bureau structure that oversees FTF from the former Bureau for Food Security to the broader RFS, according to USAID/RFS officials. Further, during this year, USAID/RFS redesigned its annual portfolio review into a strategic review that would examine all focus areas of the RFS bureau; in addition to FTF, the reviews would cover other resilience, water, and sanitation programming.<sup>72</sup> As a result, USAID did not lead any portfolio reviews in FY 2019; USAID piloted one strategic review in FY 2020.

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<sup>70</sup>In FY 2017 and 2018, USAID called the portfolio reviews "performance reviews." Despite the different name, both were similar in their focus on FTF progress, challenges, and any needed course corrections.

<sup>71</sup>Work to establish Phase 2 in each target country included the finalization of target country plans, establishing zones of influence, and signing declarations of partnership with each FTF target country.

<sup>72</sup>The template and guidance for the new strategic review process do not mention the FTF graduation assessment process or scorecards.

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- **2020 scorecards:** USAID/RFS did not share the 2020 scorecards, because the USAID missions and FTF partner agencies were focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and because the scorecards included data that did not reflect any effects from the pandemic. According to USAID/RFS officials, they did not want a discussion of target country graduation to distract USAID missions in particular from their pandemic response work, or to send the wrong message to host country governments, missions, implementing partners, and external FTF stakeholders given the significant projected increases in extreme poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, since the 2020 scorecards include data available through the prior calendar year, they do not include data reflecting any changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, USAID/RFS officials decided not to share these scorecards that reflected a pre-pandemic reality.

As of May 2021, USAID/RFS officials had not determined when FTF strategic reviews would next occur or whether FTF graduation assessments would be discussed during the strategic reviews.

As a result of USAID/RFS' competing priorities in 2019 and 2020, USAID/RFS has not followed the graduation assessment process and key FTF stakeholders are not informed about that process. For example, when we interviewed USAID mission officials in our four sample countries in summer 2020, they were not familiar with the graduation scorecards or process. In particular, officials at two of the missions received copies of the scorecards in advance of our meeting, with no explanation from USAID/RFS on how to interpret them. These officials told us they did not understand the scorecard data or how they should be used. Officials from the other two missions were unaware of the graduation scorecards or the graduation process more generally. USAID mission officials in target countries have key roles in designing and implementing FTF assistance in their countries, as do FTF partner agency officials for their agency's projects. Federal internal control standards state that quality information should be communicated in a timely manner to help achieve objectives and address any related risks.<sup>73</sup> USAID/RFS officials have stated that, because graduation is a core aim for FTF target countries, a country's progress toward graduation should influence programming decisions for that country. Without better knowledge of the graduation process and scorecards, USAID missions and FTF partner agency officials are limited

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<sup>73</sup>[GAO-14-704G](#).

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in their ability to make programming decisions that would help move target countries toward graduation.

By not sharing the annual scorecards or engaging key FTF stakeholders in any discussions of the graduation process, USAID/RFS has also not initiated annual reviews of the graduation process itself with the FTF partner agencies or USAID missions since June 2019. The May 2018 target country graduation policy document states that the FTF Interagency will review the graduation policy and process each year to determine whether to make changes based on lessons learned, external feedback, and other relevant policy considerations. In particular, the graduation policy states that an annual review of the graduation scorecards should focus on the indicators in the scorecard to ensure they provide valid information directly relevant to the target countries' development achievement, commitment, and capacity. USAID/RFS initiated one such review by sharing the results of samples of the 2018 scorecards with its partner agencies in a June 2019 meeting during which the agency officials discussed questions about the validity of the scorecard process and assessments. However, by not engaging with the FTF partner agencies or USAID missions about the graduation scorecards since then, USAID/RFS has not had the benefit of these stakeholders' country- and program-specific expertise to validate that the current scorecard methodology and indicators are indicative of a country's potential to graduate from FTF target country status.

Without ensuring that the scorecards are a valid first step in this assessment process, the FTF Interagency risks unnecessary burden or misallocating resources. In particular, if the scorecards pass countries through the first step of the process even when the countries are unlikely to ultimately graduate from target country status, then the FTF Interagency would be unnecessarily burdened with creating and reviewing the more in-depth step 2 assessment reports. On the other hand, if the scorecards prevent some countries that might merit eligibility from being considered for graduation, more FTF resources would continue to be allocated to those countries that could be used elsewhere.

In addition, without regularly sharing the graduation scorecards and engaging in interagency discussions about how to move target countries toward graduation, the interagency lacks a common understanding of what graduation from the initiative would mean. Of the seven agencies we interviewed about the graduation process, only USAID plans to change its programming specifically in response to a country's graduation from FTF target country status. The other six stated that they would not because

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the agencies or the multilateral institutions Treasury contributes to have their own internal factors for selecting countries where their programs should operate. According to USAID/RFS officials, graduation from the initiative should also affect the other agencies' programming decisions, as indicated by the May 2018 target country graduation policy to which all agencies agreed. This policy states that graduation from target country status will mean a new assistance relationship with the U.S. government. In May 2021, USAID/RFS officials stated that the interagency needs to re-engage to come to an agreement on what graduation will mean. USAID engaging with its missions and the FTF partner agencies in regular conversations on the graduation process itself would help this process to remain relevant and considered in their decision-making.

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## Conclusions

Since 2010, the U.S. government has coordinated its efforts to address global food insecurity through the FTF initiative, which has taken on even more pronounced urgency due to increasing food insecurity from the COVID-19 pandemic. Monitoring the performance of this initiative is imperative to ensure that the FTF Interagency and its external stakeholders, including Congress, are aware of and can learn from FTF's progress. USAID, in consultation with the FTF partner agencies, has built a complex framework to guide performance monitoring for the initiative, collecting data on more than 50 indicators with the intent to inform progress across the initiative's three strategic objectives and overarching goal to sustainably reduce global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. However, by not setting performance goals for the initiative, USAID and the FTF partner agencies have not clearly defined what the initiative is trying to achieve in a way that allows for meaningful monitoring of progress. In particular, FTF's lack of performance goals have limited USAID and the FTF partner agencies' ability to analyze how FTF projects contribute to the initiative's performance. Further, not all FTF performance indicators have a clearly explained link to FTF's strategic objectives or intermediate results, and few have initiative-wide targets, which prevents effective FTF-wide use of these indicators. As a result, USAID and the FTF partner agencies do not have clear indications of whether their efforts are contributing to these overall objectives, and cannot use the data they do collect to monitor initiative performance. By following leading practices for successful performance monitoring, USAID and the partner agencies would have a better understanding of initiative performance and be able to meaningfully monitor the contributions of all U.S. government agencies toward FTF's strategic objectives and overarching goal.

Public reporting of FTF's progress is a key purpose of collecting initiative-wide data, yet FTF public reports do not always present these data

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clearly. The FTF reports do not provide information needed to interpret the performance data, such as performance targets and how the data should inform progress toward the strategic objectives and overarching goal. Further, the reports' unsupported statements on reductions in poverty and stunting could mislead readers to believe that these reductions were due to the initiative even though many factors may influence these changes, and weaknesses in the FTF performance monitoring system prevent USAID from establishing connections between FTF projects and the poverty and stunting data. By more clearly communicating in these reports what the initiative aims to achieve compared to what it is actually achieving, USAID would better inform Congress and the public on FTF's progress and its challenges.

USAID collaborated with its missions and the FTF partner agencies to develop a process to assess target countries for graduation from the initiative, as Congress mandated, but USAID has limited the usefulness and quality of this process by not annually sharing its results or reviewing the process with these key stakeholders. As a result, these key stakeholders cannot use the results or be sure of their validity. In addition, the FTF Interagency lacks a common understanding of what graduation from the initiative will mean. Through more regular communication and coordination with these key FTF stakeholders, USAID can help strengthen the graduation assessment process as well as the meaning of that process for any countries that ultimately graduate.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following eight recommendations to USAID:

The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should establish quantifiable and measurable performance goals for the initiative to assess progress toward FTF's strategic objectives and overarching goal. (Recommendation 1)

The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should (1) evaluate and revise, as necessary, which indicators should be required as applicable as performance indicators across the initiative to include only those that are used for FTF-wide performance monitoring; and (2) clearly and specifically explain the linkage of those FTF-wide indicators to the initiative's performance goals and strategic objectives. (Recommendation 2)

The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should establish FTF-wide targets for FTF-wide performance indicators required as applicable across the initiative. (Recommendation 3)

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The Administrator of USAID should describe in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports how performance data included in those reports align with and can be used to assess progress toward FTF's performance goals and strategic objectives. (Recommendation 4)

The Administrator of USAID should, in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports, (1) include performance targets for all performance indicators included in the reports so these data can be used to meaningfully demonstrate progress or performance gaps, and (2) discuss planned actions for unmet performance targets. (Recommendation 5)

The Administrator of USAID should clearly state in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports the limitations of FTF impact indicator data, such as data on poverty and stunting. (Recommendation 6)

The Administrator of USAID should develop and implement a process through which USAID regularly shares its annual graduation scorecard assessments with its target country missions and the FTF partner agencies. (Recommendation 7)

The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with USAID missions in FTF target countries and FTF partner agencies, should review the graduation scorecard assessment process with the frequency that the FTF graduation policy outlines to ensure that the indicators included and the assessment process used provide valid information for assessing target countries' readiness to graduate, and that there is a common understanding about what graduation from the initiative will mean. (Recommendation 8)

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report for review and comment to the Departments of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury; the Inter-American Foundation; the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; the Peace Corps; the U.S. African Development Foundation; and USAID. We received formal comments from the Millennium Challenge Corporation and USAID, reproduced in appendixes IV and V, in which both agencies agreed with our recommendations.

While USAID agreed with all our recommendations, USAID provided additional comments related to its interpretation of, and its plans to implement, the second and third recommendations. In particular, in

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response to the second recommendation, to evaluate and revise the performance indicators required as applicable across FTF, USAID stated that it should be given flexibility to define performance indicators as “required as applicable” if they are deemed useful for communication and reporting purposes beyond performance management. In response to the third recommendation, to set FTF-wide targets for performance indicators required as applicable across the initiative, USAID stated that it does not consider FTF-wide targets for project-level indicators to be meaningful or useful for centralized performance management of FTF’s hundreds of individual projects. Further, USAID stated that it should be given flexibility to set FTF-wide targets only for the sub-set of performance indicators for which targets can be useful for centralized performance management.

In response to USAID’s letter, we clarified some of the findings in the body of our report and revised the second and third recommendations to clarify our intent. Specifically, the intent of these recommendations is to help ensure that performance indicator data that are required to be collected across the initiative are useful for FTF-wide performance monitoring. To be useful, it is important for these data to be part of an interconnected FTF-wide performance monitoring system—including meaningful performance goals and indicators, clearly explained linkages from indicators to those goals, and targets for those indicators, all of which informs FTF’s monitoring and communication of its performance. As stated in our report, any FTF data reported for indicators that do not align with performance goals and strategic objectives or that do not have targets are of limited utility for understanding FTF performance and would not be performance data. Further, we agree with USAID that FTF-wide targets should be set for performance indicators that would be meaningful to monitor across the initiative. For that reason, we recommend that USAID work with its FTF partner agencies to evaluate and revise which performance indicators are required as applicable across the initiative, to clearly identify FTF-wide indicators used for FTF-wide performance monitoring. This will help ensure that the FTF Interagency can meaningfully use and interpret performance indicator data to assess progress toward FTF’s performance goals, strategic objectives, and overarching goal. Moreover, we agree that USAID may supplement these indicators with other useful indicators, but should do so in a way that clearly differentiates them from performance indicators and adequately explains how these indicators are useful to supplement performance monitoring.

The Departments of State and the Treasury, the Inter-American Foundation, and USAID also provided technical comments, which we

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incorporated as appropriate. The Department of Agriculture, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, the Peace Corps, and the U.S. African Development Foundation had no comments.

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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretaries of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury; the Administrator of USAID; the Chief Executive Officer of the Inter-American Foundation; the Acting Chief Executive Officers of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, U.S. African Development Foundation, and U.S. International Development Finance Corporation; the Acting Director of the Peace Corps; and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or [KenneyC@gao.gov](mailto:KenneyC@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chelsa Kenney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sincerely yours,  
Chelsa Kenney  
Director, International Affairs and Trade

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# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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This report examines U.S. global food security assistance, focusing on the extent to which the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) assesses and reports on the progress of Feed the Future (FTF). In particular, we evaluated the extent to which USAID, in consultation with its FTF partner agencies, (1) monitors FTF's progress, (2) provides support for collecting FTF performance monitoring data, (3) reports publicly on FTF's progress, and (4) assesses countries' progress toward graduating from FTF assistance.

We reviewed FTF documents and data and interviewed officials from nine FTF agencies and multiple other FTF stakeholders. In particular, we interviewed officials at USAID and eight other FTF partner agencies that are responsible for the most funding, including the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), the Treasury, and State, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Peace Corps, the U.S. African Development Foundation, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, and the Inter-American Foundation. In addition, we interviewed representatives of or received written responses from the two multilateral institutions that receive the U.S. government's financial contributions overseen by Treasury: the International Fund for Agricultural Development and Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. We also interviewed officials of or received written responses from several international organizations that work in food security or related data collection, including the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) World Food Program, Children's Fund, and Food and Agriculture Organization. We selected four sample countries—Bangladesh, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda—based on several criteria, including geographic diversity, to select at least one country from Asia, West Africa, and East Africa, and overall food assistance funding, to select applicable countries with the highest levels of funding.<sup>1</sup> For our selected sample countries, we met with USAID missions and FTF partner agencies involved in programming assistance in fiscal year (FY) 2019 and earlier. We also organized five focus groups with selected implementing partners of USAID and USDA that also contributed results on FTF project

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<sup>1</sup>We excluded countries from our selection due to certain factors. First, we did not consider Guatemala and Honduras because of a suspension of U.S. foreign assistance to those countries at the time of our sample selection. Second, we did not consider Ethiopia or Kenya, which were experiencing locust invasions that could have diverted attention and resources away from food security programming.

indicators in FY 2019 and earlier.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we held two discussion groups with members of a food security working group within a consortium of nongovernmental organizations led by InterAction.<sup>3</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all meetings after March 2020, including the focus groups, via video or teleconference.

To evaluate monitoring of FTF's progress, we reviewed FTF's performance monitoring framework and how the agencies use it through review of FTF documentation and interviews with agency officials. Our criteria were Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on performance goals and indicators.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, we evaluated the extent to which the FTF Interagency had identified performance goals that met OMB's definition by reviewing the 2016 Global Food Security Strategy, *FTF Indicator Handbook*, and USAID's Annual Performance Reports for any documented goals and by interviewing USAID officials. We assessed whether FTF's performance indicators met the definition of performance indicators from GAO's body of work on performance monitoring.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we selected key attributes of successful performance indicators from this body of work.<sup>6</sup> For the performance indicators that met the definition, we examined whether FTF's performance indicators had

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<sup>2</sup>From each sample country, we selected implementing partners with ongoing global food security projects during this time period. We also coordinated with the corresponding USAID missions to verify our sample selection. Participating implementing partners included: Abt Associates, ACDI/VOCA, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, ARD Inc., AVSI Foundation, Catholic Relief Services, CARE, Chemonics International, Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, FHI 360, Helen Keller International, IntraHealth International, Mercy Corps, Michigan State University, Palladium, Tufts University, Winrock International, and World Vision Bangladesh.

<sup>3</sup>Participating InterAction members included: Action Against Hunger, Bread for the World, Catholic Relief Services, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Feed the Hungry, The Hunger Project, Lutheran World Relief, National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA, Oxfam America, RTI International, Save the Children, University of Notre Dame, and World Vision United States.

<sup>4</sup>OMB Circular No. A-11, *The Federal Performance Framework for Improving Program and Service Delivery*.

<sup>5</sup>GAO, *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011).

<sup>6</sup>GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 2002); GAO, *DNA Evidence: DOJ Should Improve Performance Measurement and Properly Design Controls for Nationwide Grant Program*, [GAO-19-216](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2019).

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linkage to the initiative's goals and measurable targets, which prior GAO work identified as foundational attributes.<sup>7</sup> In particular, we reviewed the stated linkages to FTF's performance monitoring framework documented for each performance indicator in the FTF *Indicator Handbook* and Strategy. We also reviewed FTF and USAID documentation and interviewed USAID officials to determine the extent to which FTF performance indicators had FTF-wide targets.

To evaluate the support FTF agencies provide for the collection of FTF performance monitoring data, we reviewed related FTF guidance, including the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, and other types of support provided to assist with FTF indicator requirements.<sup>8</sup> As previously mentioned, we held interviews and focus groups with FTF partner agencies, USAID missions, and implementing partners, where we asked about common facilitators and challenges they experienced with the FTF project performance data.<sup>9</sup> We then conducted a content analysis of their responses, using the qualitative analysis software NVivo, to identify common themes in their experience.

We took several steps to ensure that this content analysis was objective, accurate, and consistent. First, we developed a list of codes and definitions for the different kinds of facilitators and challenges stakeholders expressed. For example, stakeholders could have mentioned "guidance" or "direct communication" as a facilitator or challenge for data collection. In order to test the clarity of these codes, we had three analysts independently pretest the content analysis on three interviews and then meet to agree on how to apply the codes. As a result, we made minor changes to the category definitions for clarity. We had one analyst code all the interviews and focus groups using these codes to ensure consistent judgment of categories. One of two other analysts reviewed the applied codes and verified the results. Any disagreements

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<sup>7</sup>GAO-19-216.

<sup>8</sup>We reviewed all versions of the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, which the Feed the Future Interagency initially developed in 2011 and subsequently revised in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the FTF *Indicator Handbook* refer to the 2019 version. Feed the Future Interagency, *Feed the Future Indicator Handbook*, Sept. 2019.

<sup>9</sup>We focused on the collection of project indicator data because we determined that all the national indicators and many zone of influence indicators do not meet the definition we applied for performance indicators, as discussed in our report.

were resolved during this review process to ensure consistent application of the codes.

When describing in our report the themes the stakeholders discussed, we sorted them into categories—implementing partner focus groups, FTF programmatic agencies (USAID, USDA, Treasury, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Peace Corps, and the U.S. African Development Foundation), and the USAID missions in our four sample countries. In the report, we refer to them in the following ways. For the FTF programmatic agencies and implementing partner focus groups: 5 of 5 is considered “all,” 4 of 5 is “almost all,” 3 of 5 is “many,” and 2 of 5 is “a couple.” For the USAID missions, 4 of 4 is “all,” 3 of 4 is “almost all,” and 2 of 4 is “half.” We compared the stakeholders’ specific experiences with the support they received for collecting FTF project performance data to federal internal control standards for providing quality communications to internal and external stakeholders.<sup>10</sup>

To evaluate public reporting of FTF’s progress, we reviewed the Strategy Implementation Reports and the FTF Progress Snapshot Reports from 2017 through 2020. Both of these annual reports are intended to demonstrate FTF’s activities and progress. We assessed these reports against criteria from GAO’s body of work on managing for results.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, we identified four leading practices on performance reporting that are relevant to FTF’s public reporting. These leading practices state that reports should 1) include baseline and trend data; 2) discuss data limitations and actions to address them; 3) describe how performance data align with and can be used to assess progress toward goals; and 4) compare actual performance results against planned performance targets, and discuss planned actions for unmet performance targets.<sup>12</sup> We focused on these practices because they most directly relate to the type of performance information outlined in FTF’s public reports. We also could apply the criteria with clear decision rules, described below.

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<sup>10</sup>GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

<sup>11</sup>GAO, *Leading Practices for Managing for Results in Government*, [https://www.gao.gov/key\\_issues/managing\\_for\\_results\\_in\\_government/issue\\_summary](https://www.gao.gov/key_issues/managing_for_results_in_government/issue_summary).

<sup>12</sup>See GAO reports: *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GGD-96-118](#) (June 1996); *GPRA Performance Reports*, [GGD-96-66R](#) (Feb. 14, 1996); and *Performance Reporting: Few Agencies Reported on the Completeness and Reliability of Performance Data*, [GAO-02-372](#) (Apr. 26, 2002).

For each of the leading practices, we first identified any data in the reports that were linked to FTF performance indicators and reported at the FTF-wide level, and we focused our leading practice assessment on those data. One analyst first reviewed the reports as described below and determined the ratings, and then another analyst reviewed those ratings and noted any instances when the two analysts' ratings did not match. For the final ratings, both analysts came to an agreement using their professional judgment.

For the performance data in the reports, we rated the extent to which USAID followed each leading practice in the FTF public reports as "followed," "inconsistently followed," or "not followed." For leading practices 1, 3, and 4 listed above, we rated the leading practice as "followed" if the reports included the necessary information for all or almost all (90 percent or more) of the performance indicator data presented; "inconsistently followed" if the reports included the necessary information for some (more than 10 percent and less than 90 percent) of the performance indicator data presented; and "not followed" if the reports included the necessary information for none or almost none (10 percent or less) of the performance data presented.

For leading practice 1, we reviewed each performance indicator data point and checked if baseline data, as appropriate, and trend data, as available, were presented for the performance indicator.<sup>13</sup> For leading practice 3, we reviewed each performance indicator data point and checked if the data's link to FTF's goals or objectives was explained in the reports. For leading practice 4, we reviewed each performance indicator data point and checked if (1) the report listed a performance target for that data point; and (2) if it did, if the report described planned actions for unmet targets.

For leading practice 2, on data limitations, we rated each report separately and then reviewed all of these reports' ratings in aggregate to determine an overall rating for the leading practice. For example, because all of the reports that we reviewed discussed data limitations and actions to address them, when applicable, we rated this leading practice overall as "followed." We rated a report as "followed" if data limitations for the performance data and actions to address the limitations were discussed.

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<sup>13</sup>Baseline data are used as a starting point for measuring progress, while trend data depict a measurement of data over time. As noted in the *FTF Indicator Handbook*, baseline data can be 0 or is the data point collected in the first year of the program. Also, if the indicator was new or revised, trend data might not be available.

We would have rated a report as “inconsistently followed” if data limitations and actions to address them were discussed in an uneven or irregular manner. We would have rated a report as “not followed” if data limitations were not discussed for the performance data.

In the course of our leading practices assessment, we also identified other data in the reports that USAID presented as demonstrating FTF’s impact. However, we did not assess these data against the leading practices described above for performance reporting because these indicators do not meet the definition we applied for a performance indicator, as discussed in our first objective. We discuss these issues in our report using criteria from GAO’s body of work on managing for results on including credible performance data in performance reports.<sup>14</sup> We did review the data used to estimate these impacts, and interviewed USAID officials about how these data were estimated. We also reviewed FTF documentation and interviewed survey implementers to understand how these data were collected. We found the individual data by country to be generally reliable for our reporting purposes, but raise questions in appendix III about how USAID used these data to estimate the overall impact of FTF, including by projecting trends to periods before and after USAID has data.

To evaluate how USAID, in consultation with the FTF Interagency, assesses countries’ progress toward graduating from FTF assistance, we reviewed the May 2018 *Feed the Future Target Country Graduation Policy and Review Process* to understand how the graduation assessment process should be carried out.<sup>15</sup> We also reviewed related internal guidance and presentations, and copies of scorecards, and the underlying data for those scorecards, that USAID or the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), under a USAID research grant, created in 2018, 2019, and 2020 to assess target countries’ progress. We interviewed USAID officials and IFPRI representatives to understand the development and implementation of this process, and officials at each of the FTF programmatic agencies and USAID mission officials in our sample countries regarding their involvement. Further, to understand the indicators the scorecards assess, we reviewed documentation describing

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<sup>14</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Challenges Agencies Face in Producing Credible Performance Information*, GAO/GGD-00-52 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 4, 2000).

<sup>15</sup>For a full copy of this policy, see <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/graduation/>. We also used federal internal control standards as criteria in evaluating implementation of this policy. See in particular the component on information and communication in GAO-14-704G.

the data and data collection processes for all indicators and interviewed or sent questions for written response to the organizations responsible for many of the indicators, including the UN Children’s Fund, World Bank, and UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2019 through August 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# Appendix II: Feed the Future Indicators

In the September 2019 version of the Feed the Future (FTF) *Indicator Handbook*, the FTF Interagency defines 53 indicators as performance indicators. Based on our analysis, 40 of these indicators meet the definition we applied, which states that performance indicators should measure outcomes, outputs, or processes and track progress toward a goal or target.<sup>1</sup> These 40 FTF performance indicators are listed in table 4.

**Table 4: Feed the Future Performance Indicators by Linkage to Specific Strategic Objectives and Intermediate Results in the Results Framework, as of September 2019**

Strategic objective or intermediate result	Performance indicator	Level <sup>a</sup>	Type <sup>b</sup>
Strategic objective 1: Inclusive and sustainable agricultural-led economic growth	Percent of households below the comparative threshold for the poorest quintile of the Asset-Based Comparative Wealth Index <sup>c</sup>	Zone of influence	Outcome
Strategic objective 2: Strengthened resilience among people and systems	Ability to recover from shocks and stresses index	Zone of influence	Outcome
Strategic objective 3: A well-nourished population, especially among women and children	Prevalence of healthy weight among children under 5	Zone of influence	Outcome
Intermediate result 1: Strengthened inclusive agriculture systems that are productive and profitable	Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Percent of producers who have applied targeted improved management practices or technologies	Zone of influence	Outcome
Intermediate result 2: Strengthened and expanded access to markets and trade	Kilometers of roads improved or constructed as a result of U.S. government assistance	Project	Output
	Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Value of agriculture-related financing accessed as a result of U.S. government assistance	Project	Output
Intermediate result 4: Increased sustainable productivity, particularly through climate-smart approaches <sup>d</sup>	Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Yield of targeted agricultural commodities within target areas	Zone of influence	Outcome

<sup>1</sup>See GAO, *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011). We discuss the extent to which the FTF indicators have targets in the body of this report.

**Appendix II: Feed the Future Indicators**

<b>Strategic objective or intermediate result</b>	<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Level<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Type<sup>b</sup></b>
Intermediate result 5: Improved proactive risk reduction, mitigation, and management	Number of host government or community-derived risk management plans formally proposed, adopted, implemented or institutionalized with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
Intermediate result 6: Improved adaptation to and recovery from shocks and stresses	Number of individuals participating in U.S. government-assisted group-based savings, micro-finance, or lending programs	Project	Output
	Percent of households participating in group-based savings, micro-finance, or lending programs	Zone of influence	Outcome
	Index of social capital at the household level	Zone of influence	Outcome
	Percent of households that believe local government will respond effectively to future shocks and stresses	Zone of influence	Outcome
Intermediate result 7: Increased consumption of nutritious and safe diets	Percent of female participants of U.S. government nutrition-sensitive agriculture activities consuming a diet of minimum diversity	Project	Outcome
	Percent of children 6-23 months receiving a minimum acceptable diet	Zone of influence	Outcome
	Prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding of children under 6 months of age	Zone of influence	Outcome
	Percent of women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity	Zone of influence	Outcome
Intermediate result 8: Increased use of direct nutrition interventions and services	Number of children under 5 reached with nutrition-specific interventions through U.S. government-supported programs	Project	Output
	Number of children under 2 reached with community-level nutrition interventions through U.S. government-supported programs	Project	Output
	Number of pregnant women reached with nutrition-specific interventions through U.S. government-supported programs	Project	Output
	Number of individuals receiving nutrition-related professional training through U.S. government-supported programs	Project	Output
Intermediate result 9: More hygienic household and community environments	Number of people gaining access to a basic sanitation service as a result of U.S. government assistance	Project	Output
	Percent of households with soap and water at a handwashing station on premises	Project	Outcome
	Percent of households with access to a basic sanitation service	Zone of influence	Outcome
	Percent of households with soap and water at a handwashing station on premises	Zone of influence	Outcome

**Appendix II: Feed the Future Indicators**

<b>Strategic objective or intermediate result</b>	<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Level<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Type<sup>b</sup></b>
No specific strategic objective or intermediate result <sup>c</sup>	Milestones in improved institutional architecture for food security policy achieved with U.S. government support	Multi <sup>f</sup>	Outcome
	Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies that promote improved climate risk reduction and/or natural resources management with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Percent of U.S. government-assisted organizations with improved performance	Project	Outcome
	Number of individuals participating in U.S. government food security programs	Project	Output
	Number of adults who perceive their tenure rights to land or marine areas as secure with U.S. government assistance	Project	Outcome
	Number of technologies, practices, and approaches under various phases of research, development, and uptake as a result of U.S. government assistance	Project	Output/ outcome <sup>g</sup>
	Value of new U.S. government commitments and private sector investment leveraged by the U.S. government to support food security and nutrition	Project	Output
	Number of individuals who have received U.S. government-supported degree-granting non-nutrition-related food security training	Project	Output
	Number of adults with legally recognized and documented tenure rights to land or marine areas, as a result of U.S. government assistance	Project	Output
	Number of U.S. government social assistance beneficiaries participating in productive safety nets	Project	Output
	Percentage of female participants in U.S. government-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources	Project	Output
	Percentage of participants in U.S. government-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources who are youth (15-29)	Project	Output

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future documents. | GAO-21-548

<sup>a</sup>FTF categorizes its indicators as project, zone of influence, national, or multi indicators, depending on the level at which the data are collected.

<sup>b</sup>FTF categorizes its indicators as output, outcome, or impact indicators, depending on what the indicator measures.

<sup>c</sup>According to the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, this indicator is affiliated with FTF's first strategic objective with cross-linkage to the second strategic objective.

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<sup>d</sup>The indicator linked to Intermediate Result 3, *Increased employment and entrepreneurship*, is a national impact indicator, and therefore does not meet the definition that we applied for a performance indicator.

<sup>e</sup>FTF performance documentation does not explain how these 12 indicators—one multi-level and seven project indicators under FTF's cross-cutting intermediate results and four other project indicators—link to specific intermediate results or strategic objectives. As a result, it is unclear how the FTF Interagency can use data from these indicators to monitor progress to specific strategic objectives or intermediate results.

<sup>f</sup>Data for this indicator can be collected at the sub-national, national, regional, or international levels.

<sup>g</sup>This indicator requires technologies, practices and approaches to be reported under each phase reached during the reporting year. Three of the phases related to research and development are reported as outputs, while the phase demonstrating uptake by the public or private sector is reported as an outcome.

According to leading practices, performance indicators should measure outcomes, outputs, or processes and track progress toward a goal or target.<sup>2</sup> We determined that 13 of the 53 FTF indicators are not performance indicators, because they either are national-level indicators, which measure higher-level changes at the national level that have not been clearly linked to program performance, or are indicators FTF designated as impact indicators, which can be affected by many factors beyond FTF performance that have not been accounted for by FTF. These other indicators are listed in table 5.

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<sup>2</sup>[GAO-11-646SP](#).

**Table 5: Indicators Used by Feed the Future That Do Not Meet the Definition of a Performance Indicator, as of September 2019**

Indicator	Level <sup>a</sup>	Type <sup>b</sup>
Prevalence of poverty: Percent of people living on less than \$1.90 per day at 2011 purchasing power parity	National	Impact
Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale	National	Impact
Prevalence of stunted children under 5	National	Impact
Percent change in value added in the agri-food system	National	Impact
Employment in the agri-food system	National	Impact
Value of targeted agricultural commodities exported at a national level	National	Outcome
Prevalence of poverty: Percent of people living on less than \$1.90 per day at 2011 purchasing power parity	Zone of influence	Impact
Prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale	Zone of influence	Impact
Prevalence of stunted children under 5	Zone of influence	Impact
Abbreviated Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index	Zone of influence	Impact
Depth of poverty of the poor: Mean percent shortfall of the poor relative to the \$1.90 per day 2011 purchasing power parity poverty line	Zone of influence	Impact
Prevalence of wasted children under 5	Zone of influence	Impact
Prevalence of underweight women of reproductive age	Zone of influence	Impact

Source: GAO analysis of Feed the Future (FTF) documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: In the September 2019 version of the FTF *Indicator Handbook*, the FTF Interagency defines all 53 indicators as performance indicators. Based on our analysis, the 13 FTF indicators in this table do not meet the definition we applied for a performance indicator, because they either measure higher-level changes at the national level, which have not been clearly linked to program performance, or can be affected by many factors beyond FTF performance, which have not been accounted for by FTF. As a result, we did not consider as performance indicators those that FTF designates as national or impact indicators. The FTF *Indicator Handbook* also lists 25 other indicators that the FTF Interagency defines as context indicators, which we did not include in the scope of our report.

<sup>a</sup>FTF categorizes its indicators as project, zone of influence, national, or multi indicators, depending on the level at which the data are collected.

<sup>b</sup>FTF categorizes its indicators as output, outcome, or impact indicators, depending on what the indicator measures.

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# Appendix III: How USAID Calculates Poverty and Stunting Changes in Feed the Future's Zones of Influence, and Related Data

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In its annual public reports from 2018 to 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) presents changes in poverty and stunting that are not directly measured, but instead are projected by assuming constant rates of change in the periods before and after USAID collected data.<sup>1</sup> The reports state that poverty dropped by an average of 23 percent from 2010 to 2017 in the areas where Feed the Future (FTF) works, which translated to 23.4 million more people living above the poverty line in FTF's zones of influence in its Phase 1 focus countries.<sup>2</sup> The reports also state that child stunting dropped by an average of 32 percent over the same time period in these areas, which translated to 3.4 million more children living free of stunting.

USAID's data on poverty and stunting are limited by the frequency and quality of data available in the FTF zones of influence. USAID gathered these data by sampling existing national surveys or by hiring monitoring and evaluation contractors to conduct surveys in the FTF zones of influence. As shown in tables 6 and 7, for the majority of FTF focus countries, baseline data were collected in 2012 or 2013, and interim data were collected by 2015. When USAID estimated 2010–2017 changes in poverty and stunting for its 2018 public reports, USAID had not completed the FTF Phase 1 end-line surveys.<sup>3</sup> Thus, USAID's estimates of changes from 2010 to 2017 are based on data largely from 2012 to 2015.<sup>4</sup> In addition, not all zones of influence are included; according to USAID, the data from one focus country, Mali, were unusable due to poor data quality.

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<sup>1</sup>See Feed the Future Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation Reports for 2018, 2019, and 2020. We also reviewed the 2017 reports, but focus on the reports from 2018 to 2020 in this appendix because they include the most updated estimates on changes in poverty and stunting.

<sup>2</sup>According to USAID officials, USAID performed this calculation for all its Phase 1 focus countries, even if they were no longer target countries for Phase 2, because the purpose of these calculations was to show changes during FTF Phase 1.

<sup>3</sup>As of June 2021, only Zambia had publicly available end-line data. USAID anticipated that additional end-line surveys would be publicly available in early 2021, but as of June 2021 no additional surveys were publicly available. Because USAID does not expect to have end-line data across FTF focus countries until 2022, it continued to report the same data in its 2018, 2019, and 2020 reports.

<sup>4</sup>USAID officials stated that they estimated changes in poverty and stunting from 2010 to 2017 because they wanted to provide estimates from FTF's inception in 2010 to the year—2017—for which the targets had initially been set.

**Appendix III: How USAID Calculates Poverty and Stunting Changes in Feed the Future's Zones of Influence, and Related Data**

**Table 6: USAID's Estimates of Changes in Poverty Varied Greatly between Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries, and Reflect a Limited Time Period**

FTF focus country	Baseline		Interim		Difference between baseline and interim	
	Year	Estimated percent living below \$1.25 per day in zones of influence	Year	Estimated percent living below \$1.25 per day in zones of influence	Difference (percent)	Difference statistically significant (p-value < 0.05)?
Bangladesh	2011	40.5	2015	34.0	-16.0	Yes
Cambodia	2009	11.7	2015	8.7	-25.8	Yes
Ethiopia	2013	39.9	2015	35.0	-12.3	Yes
Ghana	2012	22.2	2015	19.6	-11.7	Yes
Guatemala	2013	5.9	2015	4.2	-29.1	No
Haiti	2012	25.0	2016	21.9	-12.4	— <sup>a</sup>
Honduras	2012	45.8	2015	45.8	0.0	No
Kenya (North) <sup>b</sup>	2013	61.9	2015	58.5	-5.5	No
Kenya (South) <sup>b</sup>	2013	44.7	2015	46.9	4.9	No
Liberia	2012-2013	49.4	2015	39.8	-19.4	Yes
Mali <sup>c</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—
Malawi	2010-2011	66.7	2015	54.5	-18.3	Yes
Mozambique	2013-2014	62.0	2015	66.5	7.3	No
Nepal	2011	32.5	2013-2014	20.9	-35.7	Yes
Rwanda	2010-2011	67.0	2013-2014	62.0	-7.5	Yes
Senegal	2012-2013	34.3	2015-2016	40.5	18.1	No
Tajikistan	2013	8.8	2015	10.4	18.2	No
Tanzania	2010-2011	43.7	2014-2015	36.7	-16.0	No
Uganda	2009-2010	32.9	2012-2013	32.1	-2.4	No
Zambia	2010	88.0	2015	80.9	-8.1	Yes

Legend: FTF = Feed the Future; — = data not available

Source: GAO analysis of USAID data and documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: Changes from baseline to interim should be used for context only and cannot be linked to FTF programming. The years indicate when the surveys were conducted. USAID measures the prevalence of poverty as the percent of individuals living on less than \$1.25 per day. The \$1.25 per day poverty threshold is measured using local currency at 2005 purchasing power parity exchange rates, then adjusted for cumulative inflation from 2005 to the month and year the survey data were collected. Measurement is based on the value of average daily consumption expenditure per person. The statistical significance of the difference between baseline and interim is affected by the uncertainty of each country's baseline and interim results.

<sup>a</sup>Due to data limitations, USAID was unable to test whether the change from baseline to interim in Haiti was statistically significant.

<sup>b</sup>Kenya (South) refers to high rainfall and semi-arid areas in southern Kenya. Kenya (North) refers to arid and semi-arid regions in Northern Kenya.

<sup>c</sup>According to USAID, baseline and interim survey results for Mali were not usable due to poor data quality.

**Appendix III: How USAID Calculates Poverty and Stunting Changes in Feed the Future's Zones of Influence, and Related Data**

**Table 7: USAID's Estimates of Changes in Stunting Varied Greatly between Feed the Future Phase 1 Focus Countries, and Reflect a Limited Time Period**

FTF focus country	Baseline		Interim		Difference between baseline and interim	
	Year	Estimated prevalence of stunted children in zones of influence (percent)	Year	Estimated prevalence of stunted children in zones of influence (percent)	Difference (percent)	Difference statistically significant (p-value < 0.05)?
Bangladesh	2011	36.9	2014	32.3	-12.5	Yes
Cambodia	2010/11	44.0	2015	33.7	-23.4	Yes
Ethiopia	2013	49.2	2015	47.1	-4.3	No
Ghana	2012	36.1	2015	29.9	-17.2	Yes
Guatemala	2013	67.5	2015	60.6	-10.2	Yes
Haiti	2012	20.8	2016	23.0	10.6	— <sup>a</sup>
Honduras	2012	36.2	2015	25.3	-30.1	Yes
Kenya (North) <sup>b</sup>	2013	27.6	2015	26.3	-4.7	No
Kenya (South) <sup>b</sup>	2008-2009	35.1	2015	20.9	-40.5	Yes
Liberia	2010	43.1	2015	34.3	-20.4	— <sup>a</sup>
Mali <sup>c</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—
Malawi	2010	49.2	2015	42.3	-14.0	Yes
Mozambique	2011	51.6	2015	51.8	0.4	No
Nepal	2011	45.2	2014	47.0	4.0	No
Rwanda	2010-2011	46.3	2014-2015	39.7	-14.3	Yes
Senegal	2012-2013	23.1	2015-2016	25.8	11.7	No
Tajikistan	2013	30.7	2015	29.3	-4.6	No
Tanzania	2009-2010	48.3	2015-2016	35.2	-27.1	Yes
Uganda	2012	33.0	2015	29.2	-11.5	No
Zambia	2012	45.5	2015	38.4	-15.6	Yes

Legend: FTF = Feed the Future; — = data not available

Source: GAO analysis of USAID data and documents. | GAO-21-548

Note: Changes from baseline to interim should be used for context only and cannot be linked to FTF programming. The years indicate when the surveys were conducted. USAID measures the prevalence of stunted children as the percent of children 0-59 months with a height for age Z score below -2. Although different levels of severity of stunting can be measured, this indicator measures the prevalence of all stunting; that is, both moderate and severe stunting combined. The statistical significance of the difference between baseline and interim is affected by the uncertainty of each country's baseline and interim results.

<sup>a</sup>Due to data limitations, USAID was unable to test whether the change from baseline to interim was statistically significant.

<sup>b</sup>Kenya (South) refers to high rainfall and semi-arid areas in southern Kenya. Kenya (North) refers to arid and semi-arid regions in Northern Kenya.

<sup>c</sup>According to USAID, baseline and interim survey results for Mali were not usable due to poor data quality.

USAID estimated the average annual rates of change in poverty and stunting across the zones of influence of all 18 FTF Phase 1 focus countries for which data were available.<sup>5</sup> This calculation combines countries with a wide range of changes in poverty and stunting in their FTF zones of influence. For poverty, changes between baseline and interim surveys ranged from an increase of 18.2 percent from 2013 to 2015 in Tajikistan, to a decrease of 35.7 percent from 2011 to 2013–2014 in Nepal.<sup>6</sup> For stunting, changes between baseline and interim surveys ranged from an increase of 11.7 percent from 2012–2013 to 2015–2016 in Senegal, to a decrease of 40.5 percent from 2008–2009 to 2015 in Southern Kenya.<sup>7</sup>

According to USAID, USAID uses a method to estimate overall average changes in poverty and stunting that gives more influence to countries with larger populations or more years between surveys. As a result, USAID officials estimated an average annual rate of change of -3.7 percent for poverty and -5.3 percent for stunting across the 18 focus countries for which it had usable data.

In order to estimate how poverty and stunting changed from 2010 to 2017, USAID officials projected trends beyond the survey periods. Using a formula that accounts for compounding rates of change over time,<sup>8</sup> USAID officials applied the estimated average annual rates of change to the 2010–2017 period, assuming constant annual percentage changes in poverty and stunting from 2010 to 2017.<sup>9</sup> This estimation method projects these average rates of change for 2 years before and 2 years after USAID collected data on poverty and stunting from the majority of Phase

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<sup>5</sup>According to USAID, the average annual rate of change is calculated using a regression of poverty or stunting rates on the number of years between surveys. The regression is weighted by population.

<sup>6</sup>When considering compound percentage changes over time, this corresponds to an average annual rate of change in poverty of 8.7 percent in Tajikistan and -16.1 percent in Nepal.

<sup>7</sup>When considering compound percentage changes over time, this corresponds to an average annual rate of change in stunting of 3.8 percent in Senegal and -7.7 percent in Southern Kenya. Because there were fewer years between baseline and interim surveys in Honduras than in Southern Kenya, Honduras had a larger magnitude average annual rate of change for a reduction in stunting, at -11.3 percent.

<sup>8</sup>This formula is *total percent change* =  $1 - (1 + \text{average annual rate of change})^7$ .

<sup>9</sup>World Bank data on global poverty and stunting from 1990 to 2019 do not change at a constant annual percentage rate. However, the patterns of change in both poverty and stunting do vary greatly by region.

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**Appendix III: How USAID Calculates Poverty  
and Stunting Changes in Feed the Future's  
Zones of Influence, and Related Data**

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1 focus countries. Using this method, USAID estimated that poverty dropped by 23 percent and stunting by 32 percent in their zones of influence from 2010 to 2017. Estimates that assume constant rates of change to project trends for multiple years have the potential to be inaccurate. As we previously discussed, these changes should not be attributed to FTF because many external factors can affect poverty and stunting in each zone of influence.

# Appendix IV: Comments from the Millennium Challenge Corporation



DATE: August 3, 2021

TO: Judith Williams  
Assistant Director  
International Affairs and Trade  
U.S. Government Accountability Office

FROM: Mahmoud Bah  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
Millennium Challenge Corporation 

SUBJECT: MCC Management Comments on *Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance* (GAO-21-548)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's draft report, *Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance*. MCC is committed to interagency coordination, strategic integration as part of the coordination, and assessment of progress toward MCC strategic goals and objectives. Although the report does not identify a recommendation for MCC, MCC welcomes GAO's viewpoint and will assist in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other Feed the Future agencies included in the report.

I want to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which this audit was conducted and for the opportunity to provide additional information and feedback on the GAO draft report. MCC looks forward to continued engagement with GAO to improve its evaluation practices.

# Appendix V: Comments from the United States Agency for International Development



August 5, 2021

Chelsa Kenney  
Director  
International Affairs and Trade  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20226

Re: *Global Food Security: Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance* (GAO-21-548)

Dear Ms. Kenney:

I am pleased to provide the formal response of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to the draft report produced by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) titled, *Global Food Security: Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance* (GAO-21-548).

As responsible stewards of U.S. taxpayer resources, USAID and the Feed the Future (FTF) partner agencies understand the importance of managing FTF resources to ensure they are advancing our vision of sustainably reducing food insecurity, poverty and malnutrition and increasing resilience in the countries where we work.

Since the FTF Initiative was launched in 2010, we have invested considerable effort, resources and intellectual rigor to put in place a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system for this complex multi-agency, multi-sectoral and multi-year development initiative. As part of these efforts, USAID has recognized that reporting against a selected set of initiative-level targets can be useful. However, aggregated, initiative-level targets for *project-level* indicators are not useful. Setting targets at this level does not help the initiative to identify and share best practices, highlight problems and contextual issues, or adapt approaches. Instead, this learning is best done at country, sub-national, and project level. We have mechanisms such as performance reviews and evaluation syntheses that have allowed us to collect, consolidate and share best practices and programmatic adaptations across countries and projects.

In addition, while performance monitoring is a central purpose of the reporting against indicators, we also use indicator data and other information for broader communication purposes, including responding to Congressional and other stakeholder queries and updating the American public on progress in the areas where we work in general. These additional uses of monitoring data are critically important. Therefore, we do not agree that indicator selection should be strictly limited to only those indicators that are tied to a specific performance monitoring objective.

Our MEL system and the associated resources developed to support it are globally recognized as a leader in this space. We have incorporated many lessons learned as we've

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**Appendix V: Comments from the United States  
Agency for International Development**

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implemented the MEL system over time, and used them to increase data quality, rigor, utility and use while balancing the burden of data collection and reporting. The Agency also acknowledges that there is always room for improvement, and will address the recommendations presented by GAO.

I am transmitting this letter and the enclosed comments from USAID for inclusion in the GAO's final report. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report, and for the courtesies extended by your staff while conducting this engagement. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the complete and thorough evaluation of our performance management of the FTF initiative.

Sincerely,

*Colleen R. Allen*

Colleen Allen,  
Acting Assistant Administrator  
Bureau for Management

Enclosure: a/s

**COMMENTS BY THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON  
THE DRAFT REPORT PRODUCED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT  
ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE (GAO) TITLED, *GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY:  
IMPROVED MONITORING FRAMEWORK NEEDED TO ASSESS AND REPORT ON  
FEED THE FUTURE'S PERFORMANCE* (GAO-21-548)**

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) would like to thank the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) for the opportunity to respond to this draft report. We appreciate the extensive work of the GAO engagement team, and the specific findings that will help USAID achieve greater effectiveness in ensuring the Feed the Future (FTF) initiative contributes to reduced food insecurity, poverty and malnutrition in the countries where we work.

The draft report contains the following eight recommendations for USAID's action.

**Recommendation 1:** The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should establish quantifiable and measurable performance goals for the initiative to assess progress towards FTF's strategic objectives and overall vision.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation. We will establish quantifiable and measurable performance goals at the intermediate-result level of the FTF results framework. This aligns with Agency policy in Automated Directive Series 201. We will establish these performance goals once the evidence to quantify them is available from the majority of FTF target countries.

**Recommendation 2:** The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should evaluate and revise, as necessary, which performance indicators should be required as applicable across the initiative, including only indicators that are clearly and specifically linked to the initiative's performance goals and strategic objectives.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts the recommendation to evaluate and revise which performance indicators should be required as applicable across the initiative. The Agency regularly does this as part of the Department of State Office of Foreign Assistance's annual Standard Indicator Management Review. In consultation with FTF partner agencies, we also evaluate and revise our indicator framework when developing new FTF strategies in response to statutory requirements. Moreover, the Administrator should be given the flexibility to continue to include cross-cutting intermediate results and associated "required as applicable" performance indicators in our framework, as they capture essential and often foundational broad, multisectoral, and inter-related actions that do not lend themselves to being linked with only one objective or result. The Administrator should also be given the flexibility to define other performance indicators as "required as applicable" if they are deemed useful for communication and reporting purposes beyond performance management. For these purposes, defining the indicators as "required as applicable" is important to capture, to the extent possible, the universe of projects contributing to the indicator.

**Recommendation 3:** The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with FTF partner agencies, should establish FTF-wide targets for all FTF-wide performance indicators required as applicable across the initiative.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts the recommendation to set FTF-wide targets. However, establishing initiative-level targets for project (i.e. implementing mechanism)-level “required as applicable” performance indicators will not provide the Agency with improved performance and adaptive management capabilities. We do not consider FTF-wide targets for project-level indicators to be meaningful or useful for centralized performance management of the hundreds of individual projects reporting against them. We believe the appropriate level to analyze and use project-level indicator targets is at the country and individual project level, not at the initiative-level. Programmatic decisions and adjustments are made by Missions based on their understanding of the local context and information available within the operating unit. Therefore, the Administrator should be given the flexibility to set FTF-wide targets for the sub-set of performance indicators for which targets can be useful for centralized adaptive management.

**Recommendation 4:** The Administrator of USAID should describe in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports how performance data included in those reports align with and can be used to assess progress toward FTF’s performance goals and strategic objectives.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation to describe how performance data align with goals and objectives, including explanation that assists readers to understand the contribution of multi-sectoral cross-cutting results. The Administrator should be given the flexibility to include other indicator data in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation Reports to meet other communication needs of the initiative beyond performance management.

**Recommendation 5:** The Administrator of USAID should, in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports, (1) include performance targets for all performance indicators included in the reports so these data can be useful to meaningfully demonstrate progress or performance and (2) discuss planned actions for unmet performance targets.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation to include performance targets when reporting on the sub-set of performance indicators for which initiative-wide targets are set, and discuss proposed actions for unmet performance targets. USAID will also include aggregated targets for other “required as applicable” performance indicators for the fiscal year for which results are being reported in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports, noting that this aggregation will not represent all interagency partners who contribute results (actuals). For example, as noted in the GAO report, both the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), two multi-lateral partner organizations managed through the U.S. Department of the Treasury, are not able to provide targets since they report FTF results data prorated by the portion of U.S. government contribution, and that proportion is not known until the end of the reporting season. The Administrator should be given the flexibility to include other indicator data in the reports, for example, data on cumulative results, for which targets are not set at any level.

**Recommendation 6:** The Administrator of USAID should clearly state in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports the limitations of FTF impact indicator data, such as data on poverty and stunting.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation. USAID already states in Progress Snapshot and Implementation Reports when results reflect actual measured data and when results are based on estimates. We also strive to be clear that high level results such as poverty and stunting within the Zones of Influence data reflect changes in the areas where we work and to which we are contributing, but are not directly attributable to FTF. We have already redoubled our efforts to ensure this is clearly and consistently communicated in the Progress Snapshot and Strategy Implementation reports. We are in the process of submitting a closure request for this recommendation.

**Recommendation 7:** The Administrator of USAID should develop and implement a process through which USAID regularly shares its annual graduation scorecard assessments with its target country Missions and the FTF partner agencies.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation. We will implement a process to share graduation scorecards with target country missions and FTF partner agencies on an annual basis.

**Recommendation 8:** The Administrator of USAID, in consultation with USAID Missions in FTF target countries and FTF partner agencies, should review the graduation scorecard assessment process with the frequency that the FTF graduation policy outlines to ensure that the indicators included and the assessment process used provide valid information for assessing target countries' readiness to graduate, and there is a common understanding about what graduation from the initiative will mean.

**USAID Response:** USAID accepts this recommendation. We will implement an annual consultation with FTF partners and target country missions to ensure common understanding and identify any data or process improvements that can be made.

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# Appendix VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Chelsa Kenney, (202) 512-2964, [kenneyC@gao.gov](mailto:kenneyC@gao.gov)

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