

A photograph of three women standing in a field of tall green crops, likely corn. They are dressed in traditional African attire, including colorful headwraps and patterned dresses. They appear to be engaged in agricultural work, with one woman holding a wooden staff. The background shows a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

CARE **Feed the Future** Gender Recommendations

Introduction

In 2016, Congress passed the Global Food Security Act (GFSA). The GFSA authorizes the U.S. government's flagship food security program, Feed the Future (FtF), which was launched in 2010 and has lifted more than 23 million people out of poverty.

Feed the Future demonstrates America's continued commitment to tackling the root causes of hunger. It does so by promoting agricultural productivity, incomes and livelihoods of small-scale producers, including women. Feed the future works across agricultural value chains, expanding farmers' access to local and international markets, with a focus on improving nutrition within its programming. FtF envisions overcoming barriers that keep people in all kinds of circumstances from participating in agriculture to advance food security, including by closing systemic barriers to women's participation in agriculture.

In 2022-2023, GFSA will be reauthorized, presenting the opportunity to significantly strengthen the impact of Feed the Future programming. CARE's 75 years of programmatic evidence demonstrate the potential for even greater impact when food security interventions are centered on the needs and leadership of women and girls. Women play a critical role as food producers but are often excluded from agricultural decision-making, and frequently eat last and least.

If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent, potentially reducing the number of hungry people in the world by up to 150 million.

In anticipation of the GFSA's introduction, **CARE conducted a review of FtF programming** and its impact on women and girls through a desk analysis of FtF documents and project evaluation reports to determine both program successes and areas for improvement.

CARE's analysis shows that FtF has made an effort to incorporate gender elements within its programming, particularly at the initial research stage. However, more work remains to maximize efforts to support and include women and girls throughout the FtF programming cycle.

Key CARE Research Analysis Findings

FtF Accomplishments

- **85% of FtF projects reviewed reported having a gender strategy, showing a clear plan to incorporate gender from the beginning and throughout the project cycle, which will help reduce barriers for women and enhance women farmers' participation in Feed the Future.**
- Recognizing the severe impact that gender-based violence (GBV) can have on women farmers' ability to participate in programming activities and access necessary resources to increase their production, indicators for **assessing changes in GBV** have been included in some FtF projects. The findings indicate that the vast majority (above 95%) of both women and men perceived that gender-based violence such as physical or verbal abuse against women by men decreased over the project period. Similarly, an equal proportion (97%) of both women and men witnessed a decrease in the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and girls' early marriage over the project period (three years). The programming also resulted in a change in attitude and perception about gender roles among the participating households, which led to husbands sharing household chores with their wives and women participating in household decision making at an increased rate from 8.7% to 60.7%.



Jake Lyell/CARE



Josh Estey/CARE

- **FtF has strengthened capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote gender-sensitive consultative processes.** This includes identifying aspects of policies relevant to agriculture, resilience and nutrition that have different implications for women and men. It also includes advocating for women's needs in agriculture with evidence to convince policymakers of the importance of closing existing gender gaps in the agriculture sector.

Areas for Improvement

- Despite FtF's overarching vision, **CARE's review found considerable variation in how much a focus on women and girls was actually included** within different FtF projects, despite existing guidelines being provided by the USG's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS). Most of the projects primarily focused on activities that benefit women rather than addressing the root causes of gender inequality such as discriminatory lending practices for women farmers.
- While 85% of FtF projects have a gender strategy, **these strategies varied widely in format and were often not formally documented or properly implemented.** For example, although a gender strategy was included in most of the project design, no consistent efforts were made to ensure analysis is broken down by sex in order to understand the root causes of inequity that hold back women farmers and heads of households.
- There appears to be **limited connection between research studies and applying research findings into FtF's planning and implementation processes.** For instance, in some cases, when evaluation findings indicated lower female participation in activities than planned, project teams did not appear to have reflected on why this had occurred, and whether the activities they promoted met female participants' needs.

Key CARE Policy Recommendations

Congress

Congress should improve on GFSA by reauthorizing Feed the Future in a manner that builds on past FtF successes and focuses on making improvements in the following key areas:

- Overall, the Global Food Security Act should help FtF shift its focus **from simply aiming to ‘benefit’ women to addressing structural issues** that hold women back from participating equitably in agricultural systems, benefitting equitably from the food they produce and sell, and enjoying equal decision-making power over resources important to food security and nutrition.
- GFSA should ensure that in addition to building women’s agency through training and capacity building activities, **FtF will focus on addressing harmful social norms and structural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in FtF agricultural programming. These social norms and barriers include lack of childcare, limited access to resources including land and finance, transportation, unfavorable attitude and perception of household and community members and service providers towards women farmers.**
- GFSA should focus on **strengthening the voice and economic benefits of women who participate in FtF by increasing their participation in group activities (for example, women’s collectives and Village Savings and Loan Associations)** to enhance women’s status and lead to greater participation in decision-making around food security.
- GFSA should recommend that FtF programming **engage with men and boys early on** and work with them as allies in promoting gender equality, such as efforts to increase shared responsibility for household nutrition to improve children’s nutritional outcomes.

- GFSA should include language on **improving integration of nutrition into FtF programming**, including through increased reporting requirements on gender-disaggregated data and through programming designed to **expand women’s role as key household decision-makers and educators around nutrition.**
- GFSA should **increase support within Feed the Future programming for small-scale farmers, including women.** This support may include increasing equitable access to resources such as land, water, inputs (such as seeds, fertilizer and other tools), markets, training and credit, and any additional support that is determined to be helpful in consultation with local partners.

Administration

- **USAID should ensure that the consideration of gender norms is proactively included from the beginning in all FtF projects.** USAID should move beyond making gender analysis mandatory and towards **ensuring gender is included through the entire project cycle**, from gender assessment to gender transformative monitoring/evaluation/learning.
- FtF should do more to **strengthen and connect planning, adaptive management and monitoring/evaluation/learning (MEL) processes** to ensure gender integration is not siloed.
- FtF should **conduct reviews on how to address existing gender imbalances** at the farm and community level.
- FtF should **emphasize and magnify gender equality as an outcome or impact area** in its results framework and theory of change.

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