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## *FEWS NET Strategy for Strengthening Food Security Networks, 2014-2016*

Increasingly, information to identify and address food insecurity, even in a rural village, comes from a mix of local, regional, and international sources. In an inter-connected world of globalized markets, climate change, terrorism, and population growth, progress on food security requires local evidence understood in the context of external events and trends. The price of rice in Thailand, the impact of a La Nina weather pattern, political instability with a trading partner, a new highway in a neighboring state— these are all examples of dynamics that influence local food security.

Most food insecure countries rely on a range of governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor, analyze, respond to, and find long-term solutions to food insecurity. In some environments, these actors function as a network; in other places, they operate more independently. Yet, in both cases, their effectiveness depends largely on access to reliable information and data. The effort to track and analyze this information is generally not easy or cheap, particularly when governments have many competing priorities. Inevitably, the greatest gains come from networks that recognize their mutual interdependence, share responsibilities, and exchange data, analysis, and expertise.

Since its creation in 1985, FEWS NET's value-added has been its objective, evidence-based approach, with structured, integrated analysis of a range of factors driving food insecurity. Central to the methodology is a reliable flow of high-quality remote sensing imagery, international and regional price data, and detailed local information on livelihoods, markets, rainfall, crop production, nutrition, conflict, refugee movements, humanitarian response, etc. Without that data, FEWS NET would not function.

USAID and FEWS NET acknowledge the critical importance of durable, effective, and sustained information environments in food-insecure countries. As part the project's current five-year contract with USAID, FEWS NET seeks to cultivate these environments by expanding support of partner networks. Simply stated, the vision for this strategy is:

*FEWS NET contributes measurably to improved food security by enhancing the ability of local networks to access data and produce evidence-based analysis that will influence, inform, and inspire action.*

This strategy seeks to elaborate on the vision and outline how, specifically, FEWS NET might contribute to the network.

## I. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

This strategy takes a new tack on what traditionally is called *capacity development*, favoring, instead, the concept of *network development*.

In an effort to move away from hierarchical donor-recipient relationships, the network development concept considers food security actors—whether national or international, governmental or nongovernmental—as a group of peers linked by information-driven processes. Varying by country, the “core” food security networks are likely to comprise: national ministries and agencies, multi-stakeholder committees, regional bodies, national and international non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, universities or research groups, and others. While donor governments often play a financial and/or technical role in these networks, the expectation is that their activities will diminish over time as national and regional institutions drive, fund, and manage their own networks.

The network development perspective seeks to inject vitality in traditional approaches to capacity development. It suggests that training of personnel, alone, is not sufficient to create capable, sustained food security institutions and information flows. It acknowledges that food security institutions thrive not because of “bricks and mortar” but because of relevant, information-driven processes that occur even when the cast of participants changes. Rather than concentrate on the inner workings of a single agency, this approach seeks to leverage cross-cutting information needs and analytical processes as a means to strengthening a core group of institutions.

The network concept also implies a crucial dynamic of close partnership, coordination, and shared responsibility. Invariably, participants in the network have finite resources and a limited opportunity to affect major change on their own. FEWS NET, for example, has limited resources and specialized expertise that does not apply in all situations. Through network coordination, however, partners can work together to leverage resources and address as many needs as possible.

## II. STRATEGY ASSUMPTIONS

This strategy is grounded in these assumptions:

- FEWS NET’s network participation is defined by its own competencies. When FEWS NET does not have expertise to meet a particular need, it will work with the network to identify others who can provide support.
- FEWS NET’s network development work will take place in countries where the project has a presence.<sup>1</sup> In addition, FEWS NET will continue to participate in global-level initiatives, such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) committees, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN), and the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) community of practice—groups that are themselves models of multistakeholder networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic opportunities to support FEWS NET remote-monitoring countries will be addressed as they arise based on regional capacity. For example, the Latin America and Caribbean region, which has just two presence countries, may be able to undertake more activity in remote monitoring countries.

- Given the geographical specificity of food security and the diverse institutions responding to it, work plans will be tailored to the needs and circumstances of each country.

### III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles guide the strategy:

- Partner-driven: The needs of national partners should guide joint consultative processes to set priorities and plan and implement activities. In some cases, memoranda of understanding may be helpful in structuring cooperation.
- Collaborative: To leverage resources and maximize results, FEWS NET will collaborate with the network particular to each country, as well as with the range of international agencies and regional bodies working to support it.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the country, the international and regional bodies would include, for example: USAID, FAO, WFP, and FSIN, along with NEPAD, SADC, IGAD, and ECOWAS. Over the long-term, in countries where FAO, WFP, and FEWS NET are all present, FSIN is expected to play a central role in coordinating donor efforts and facilitating effective delivery of support to the networks. This joint approach may be piloted in Yemen and West Africa.
- Sustainable over the long-term: FEWS NET's limited financial resources will be dedicated to building sustainable processes that do not depend on external support. The design of activities should include planning for sustaining long-term resources.
- Results-oriented: Activities should be designed to achieve measurable, short-term results that also contribute to the country's long-term food security goals. FEWS NET activities should align with USAID's country and/or regional strategy, as well the USAID Forward initiative<sup>3</sup>.
- Realistic about limitations: Despite the breadth of food security goals in many countries, activities must be "right-sized." Partners should communicate openly about expectations.

### IV. WHAT FEWS NET HAS TO OFFER

FEWS NET contributions will be most effective when they are rooted in what the project itself does best: integrated, livelihoods-based food security analysis using scenario development. While the project is well known for early warning analysis, its work is also relevant to concurrent efforts to address chronic food insecurity and build household resilience.

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<sup>2</sup> In most countries, FEWS NET has long-established relationships with this network; collaboration here addresses capacity building, specifically.

<sup>3</sup> This agency-wide initiative centers on new partnerships, investments in innovation, and an emphasis on results-driven development.

### *Core competencies*

For the purposes of enhancing the food security network's analytical capacity, FEWS NET's core competencies translate into three main areas of support. Depending on local circumstances, partners may choose to focus on one or more of the following:

- Establishing a food security knowledge base: improving data collection/management and strategic planning for food security monitoring. Specifically:
  - Creating or strengthening market information systems
  - Developing and monitoring trade flow maps
  - Conducting livelihood zoning and profiling
  - Managing and interpreting agroclimatology data on rainfall, climate trends, crop production, etc.
  - Managing and interpreting nutrition data
  - Developing national monitoring and reporting plans
- Using scenario development for food security analysis: with support for building capacity in developing assumptions and conducting integrated analysis of these sectors:
  - Agroclimatology, emphasizing tools specific to key food security drivers, e.g: rainfall, vegetation index, water availability, etc.
  - Market and trade behavior, including price projections and cross-border trade flows
  - Livelihoods (Household economy approach)
  - Nutrition
- Enhancing food security communications: ensuring that analysis is accessible and available in products that empower decision-makers to act on food security. With specific focus on:
  - IPC 2.0
  - Plain language reporting
  - Supporting and engaging decision-makers
  - Managing internal and external communications during food security crises

Along with FEWS NET's home office technical advisors and field staff, US science partners, particularly the US Geological Survey, will be integral to designing and supporting initiatives related to agroclimatology.

### *Forms of support*

This initiative anticipates activities at the country level, led by national teams with strong support from regional offices and key home office staff. To begin defining FEWS NET's specific contribution to the network, FEWS NET regional and technical managers (RTMs and NTMs) will undertake a process of internal discussion and external consultation. The scope of this process will be left to the discretion of RTMs, NTMs, and partners, but its aim is to:

- Identify one or more "gaps" or in analytical performance or data availability;

- Determine the range of inputs, interventions, or activities that will enable the network to fill that gap;
- Catalyze planning with network partners on who is best able to fill a specific gap;
- Identify what (if any) products are needed in order to communicate with decision-makers;
- Identify opportunities for strengthening engagement with decision-makers; and
- Set specific, measurable goals.

In practice, the FEWS NET team may identify a number of short-term projects, each requiring a few months of work. In other cases, they may identify a multidimensional task that will require the remaining three years of the project. Both approaches are acceptable: the overriding issue is quality, not quantity.

The scope and duration of activities will vary from country to country. FEWS NET will take a “toolbox approach,” undertaking a variety of interventions depending on local circumstances and opportunities. The interventions are likely to fall in four main categories:

- Data collection, availability, and utilization: Interventions could support, for example: the establishment or strengthening of monitoring systems; digitization or modernization of data collection and management; updating/revision of key data sets; improved mapping; and consultative processes to facilitate agreements on sharing data. These activities are likely to include an information technology component that capitalizes on new, innovative tools for data collection, management, and interpretation.

Examples
<i>Guatemala 2004: FEWS NET worked the National Institute of Seismology, Volcanology, Meteorology and Hydrology (INSIVUMEH) to digitize 34 years’ worth of meteorological data stored in paper reports in a basement. Once digitized, the historical data was made available online and for download, greatly increasing the ability of researchers to do computer modeling and other forms of climate analysis.</i>
<i>West Africa 2006: FEWS NET worked with CILSS<sup>4</sup>, World Food Program, national market information systems, and a few NGOs on an in-depth process to strengthen market and trade knowledge across the region. Along with market assessments and studies on structure, conduct, and performance, a key output of the collaboration was the production of commodity flow maps showing surplus and deficit areas and principal markets. This information is fundamental to analyzing market effects on food security.</i>

- Technical support and collaboration: Some of FEWS NET’s most successful interventions have been the result of daily interaction and collaborative work on analytical products. These activities range from joint field work (crop assessments, market surveys, livelihoods zoning exercises) to group analysis and report-writing to coordinated briefings for decision-makers. In practice, support could take many forms: short-term technical assistance, shared office space, accommodating seconded

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<sup>4</sup> Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel or Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel.

partner staff, FEWS NET home office or regional office internships, and formal “peer review” of analysis and information products.

Examples
<i>Somalia: To enable close interaction and joint analysis, FEWS NET’s team is based in the offices of the partner organization, Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit of Somalia.</i>
<i>Rwanda: As part of ongoing collaboration with the National University of Rwanda, three university staff members are seconded to the FEWS NET office. They spend 65 percent of their time working with FEWS NET analysts on field assessments and analysis.</i>
<i>Guatemala/El Salvador: To expose them to all aspects of food security monitoring, local staff from WFP El Salvador did internships in the FEWS NET regional office in Guatemala.</i>

- **Participatory management of food security monitoring:** Linked to the joint activities described above, participatory management involves a sustainable system within the network for overseeing and planning national food security monitoring. This activity will not be appropriate in all countries, as many already have well-established multi-stakeholder or government-led committees. However, in some places, support for a collective structure, with rotating leadership and management responsibilities, will strengthen the skills of multiple network partners and distribute institutional knowledge among them.

Examples
<i>Zambia 2008: FEWS NET facilitated creation of an intergovernmental group to improve seasonal monitoring. The initiative brought together the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the Meteorology Service, along with WFP, to share information, develop monitoring and data management systems, improve seasonal weather bulletins and crop monitoring reports, and identify data gaps. Drawing on newly available satellite data and new analytical skills, the group was able to compare data and use yield models to develop reliable estimates of crop production.</i>
<i>Kenya 2010: In a complex food security environment that hosts many national and international agencies and relief organizations, FEWS NET worked with key partners to ensure coordination, reduce duplication and wasted resources, and promote transparency. The result was formation of the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG), a joint body recognized in the region for high quality analysis of food security, vulnerability, and drought management. KFSSG is active in field assessments, collaborative analysis, and information products for decision-makers.</i>

- **Supplementary training:** Training will be provided as part of a set of integrated activities tied to the larger information goal; seldom will it be a stand-alone activity. Training will be delivered by FEWS NET, a contracted provider, or other network members such as FAO or WFP. Collaboration across countries, and with national or regional groups such as CILSS, SADC or IGAD, will be encouraged.

Examples
<i>The Guatemala digitization experience included a training initiative to ensure that key network partners knew how to use and maintain the data base. FEWS NET staff provided this training.</i>

*The Zambia seasonal monitoring group required GeoWRSI training in order to raise the technical skills of all participants. The USGS regional scientist provided this training, enabling the group to run historical data in the GeoWRSI model.*

*To ensure the strong technical ability of KFSSG, FEWS NET supported training for district level analysts and other key staff on food security and response analysis; remote sensing; geographic information systems and mapping; and market profiling.*

As the examples above illustrate, FEWS NET already has experience in these areas. What is new, now, is a comprehensive project-wide effort to deliver such lasting results in all FEWS NET presence countries.

In addition, FEWS NET will seek to use information technology to maximize reach and establish a central repository of material accessible to the public. Two such activities include:

- E-learning center: a user-friendly forum on [www.fews.net](http://www.fews.net) for sharing success stories, guidance documents, training materials, video segments, or other content related to FEWS NET work.
- Online knowledge base: in the spirit of the US government's Open Data Initiative, FEWS NET will expand the availability, accessibility, and usability of data sets used in its integrated analysis.

As this initiative evolves, another technology-related opportunity to consider is an online food security course designed with an existing global provider, such as Coursera, based on FEWS NET's use of scenario development and livelihoods-based analysis. In evaluating any opportunity, however, ample consideration must be given to supplementing—not duplicating—the work of other partners who have invested heavily in online training.

## **V. MEASURING PROGRESS**

Even after decades of international interventions to address food insecurity, humanitarian response and development actors struggle with strong, replicable methods for evaluating results.

In theory, the highest-level measure of success on an initiative such as this would be to connect interventions to improvements in household or area food insecurity. In reality, that measurement would be extremely challenging, and possibly, misleading: even with the best interventions, events beyond the network's control, from natural disasters to conflict to bureaucratic blockages, could impede progress on food security.

With that experience in mind, this monitoring and evaluation plan takes a practical but participatory approach. The plan is, simply, to tell a "before and after" story that captures change and identifies success (or failure). The substance and integrity of that story flows from a deliberate, semi-structured process to define needs, set goals, and evaluate results over time.

For regular contractual project reporting, NTMs will continue to report basic data related to activities, such as the numbers of institutions, agencies, and women/men participating in the networks and related

training; the data sets made accessible; and relevant products and briefings developed and communicated to decision-makers.

For the purposes monitoring and evaluation, they will engage in a defined process that revolves around three steps:

1. *Definition of network development goals within each country context.* This will include a process, probably aligned with the partner consultations described earlier, to identify goals and objectives for strengthening the existing information environment. It will require reflection on overarching questions such as: *How do we define success? What does success look like in our food security context? How will we know that we have succeeded?* From this, RTMs and NTMs will develop one or more indicators reflecting progress toward creating a strong network, a vibrant information environment, and evidence-based decision-making. Such indicators may involve:
  - Identifiable improvements in the integrity and/or rigor of “local” food security analysis
  - Institutionalized availability, maintenance, and use of data or other inputs in analysis
  - Identifiable impact on decision-making, response planning and policy

The indicators will be a mechanism for regular dialogue and reflection with network partners on achievements, blockages, failures, and lessons learned. The FEWS NET home office will work with RTMs and NTMs in developing project-wide activity descriptions to summarize goals, objectives, and indicators.

2. *Identification of measurement strategies.* Within each country context, FEWS NET staff will determine how best to measure the indicators. The approaches might range from qualitative engagement methods—such as key informant or group interviews to analyze changes in knowledge, attitudes, or practice—to simpler quantitative methods involving online surveys, website analytics, other data collection. Efforts will be made to identify new technologies that can integrate monitoring into ongoing work processes.
3. *Communicating results.* In line with the timeframe for delivering on activities, RTMs and NTMs will summarize their results in brief case studies outlining goals, results, lessons learned, and suggestions for refining their approaches. These will also be a tool for work planning and strategy revision in subsequent years. Annually, the home office will produce related collateral materials for public audiences, particularly USAID, network partners, and others.

Above all, the purpose of monitoring and evaluation will be to inform project implementation: specifically, which inputs are working, which are not, and what needs to be adjusted to ensure goals are fulfilled. Lessons learned on a goal not met will be as important as those learned when all goals are met.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Across regions and countries, food insecurity manifests itself with great complexity. The same may be said of the various institutions seeking to end it. In developing this strategy, considerable effort was made to create space for that diversity of expertise and need. Over the next three years, as FEWS NET seeks to realize the network development concept, change is inevitable. Flexibility and innovation will be the watchwords, not only with program implementation but also monitoring and evaluation. FEWS NET's regional and national staff will drive the change as they lead decision-making about how best to respond to local circumstances and unanticipated opportunities. However the strategy evolves, the prevailing hope is that activities will catalyze lasting gains and bolster the work of national, regional, and local agencies and institutions fighting food insecurity around the world.