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THE OFFICE OF FOOD FOR PEACE FOOD ASSISTANCE AND FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMATIC LEARNING AGENDA

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COVER PAGE PHOTO: From the FFP funded Nobo Jatra Activity parents attend cooking demonstrations as part of an effort to improve equitable food security, nutrition and resilience of vulnerable people within the Khulna and Satkhira districts in Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

To support its goal of improving and sustaining the food security and nutrition of vulnerable populations, the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) has developed a food assistance and food security learning agenda. The FFP learning agenda seeks to identify and reach consensus around critical knowledge gaps and potentially high impact research and learning opportunities that could improve the quality of design and implementation of emergency and non-emergency food security programming.

USE OF THE FFP LEARNING AGENDA

The FFP learning agenda is intended to address knowledge gaps surrounding both emergency and non-emergency programming through a narrative format outlining six different thematic areas of strategic learning importance for FFP, and key lines of inquiry under each. Specific research and learning questions can be formulated under themes and lines of inquiry, and pursued through a variety of approaches ranging from research and formal studies, evaluative learning, documentation and desk review, and experiential learning.

The learning agenda is intended to be a dynamic living document that can be used by multiple groups within FFP and the broader food security and nutrition community. This includes a host of actors working at global, regional, country or activity level, as donors, implementing partners, academic researchers, or technical specialists. Purposely non-directive, FFP envisions that each user or community of users would identify their own priority topics from amongst the themes and key lines of inquiry, and, within those, develop relevant and appropriate research/learning questions and approaches based on their programming context.

This effort to build consensus across the food security and nutrition implementing community around key knowledge gaps will, ideally, align the decentralized design and management of individual research and learning efforts, while simultaneously facilitating more coordinated and cohesive application of what is learned across organizations, contexts, and teams.

FFP LEARNING AGENDA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The thematic areas for the learning agenda emerged from the FFP 2016-2025 Food Assistance and Food Security Strategy (FFP Strategy) development process and have been subsequently refined during extensive stakeholder consultations. Under each theme, key lines of inquiry or sub-topics, have been gathered from and validated with a variety of sources including FFP staff in Washington, D.C. and field missions, USAID and other donor colleagues, the implementing partner community, and key academic, and research partners. The resulting narrative was vetted in a consultative process with FFP staff. The learning agenda is aligned not only with the FFP Strategy, but also with the 2019 USAID Policy Framework: Ending the Need for Foreign Assistance, and its underlying approaches to fostering self-reliance through advancing country progress, investing for impact and sustaining results.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE FFP LEARNING AGENDA

FFP and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance are looking forward toward the future Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance. The FFP learning agenda will be used as a foundation for what will be an expanded effort to address knowledge gaps in humanitarian response and transition more broadly as the two offices merge.

FFP LEARNING AGENDA THEME MATRIX

THEME	LINES OF INQUIRY
WORKING WITH CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working in conflict situations• Addressing long-term displacement• Protection of civilians• Emergency response in urban settings• Social and behavior change in crisis-affected populations
RESILIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening resilience capacity• Social protection systems: local, national; urban/rural• Social cohesion• Food/cash for assets – infrastructure
SUSTAINED RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity intensity and coverage• Resource transfers• Service delivery models• Local engagement and handover• Community ownership and agency
STRATEGIC INTEGRATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The optimal package of interventions• Joint action• Responding to both acute and chronic need
MODALITY CHOICE AND EFFECTIVENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nutrition-specific effectiveness• Conditionality and restrictions• Impact on market systems• Modality choice and social dynamics• The influence of household decision-making
ACCESS AND INCLUSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Targeting strategies• Social accountability• Women’s empowerment/integrating gender• Youth empowerment

THEME ONE: WORKING WITH CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

FFP's emergency programs reached over 68 million crisis-affected individuals in Fiscal Year 2018, providing life-saving assistance and supporting recovery in programs totaling over \$3 billion.¹ FFP's development programs also respond to the needs of vulnerable populations facing recurrent crises, as well as those coping with more acute shocks. A multitude of context-specific drivers of humanitarian crises, from violent conflict to natural disasters, present unique challenges and require different programming approaches. Crisis-affected populations also have different needs based on the nature of the shock or crisis, other contextual factors, and different trajectories for positive change.

ADDRESSING LONG-TERM DISPLACEMENT

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a record 70.8 million individuals were living as a result of being forcibly displaced by the end of 2018,² representing nearly 1% of the world's total population. While nearly 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returned to their home country over the course of 2018, the others, 67.9 million, remained displaced.³ Addressing the needs of those who remain displaced, some for years and others for decades, raises questions around new models and new approaches to the delivery of assistance.

One starting point is to better understand the potential for more durable food security solutions and increased self-reliance for those in situations of long-term displacement. This could come through better understanding of livelihood strategies relevant to displaced populations, and through better understanding the dynamics of camp versus non-camp populations, including coping strategies and absorptive and adaptive capacities. Other questions arose around preparing populations for return and determining, based on context, the capacities that should be strengthened.

WORKING IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Conflict is increasingly a factor to consider in FFP programs. It is a direct contributor to the ever-increasing levels of forced displacement globally, and a driver of the increasing number of Level 3 emergencies⁴ straining the resources of the international humanitarian response community. The conflict context also poses unique challenges to the design, implementation, and oversight of programs.

Limited access to populations and communities in need reduces our ability to identify the most vulnerable. It also compromises our ability to monitor and be accountable for the distribution of program resources. Questions have arisen around the best approaches for assessing and monitoring in the case of hard-to-reach populations.

Questions have also arisen around how food assistance can be used in a way that is conflict-sensitive: assistance that not only avoids exacerbating conflict but also contributes to social cohesion at the

¹ USAID Office of Food For Peace Fiscal Year 2018 Fact Sheet. "Food Assistance: Fiscal Year 2018 Fact Sheet." May 8, 2019. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/FY_2018_factsheet.pdf.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report. "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018." June 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>. p.2.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report. "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018." June 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>. p.3.

⁴ Level 3 or L3 emergencies is the global humanitarian system's classification for the response to the most severe, large-scale humanitarian crises. <https://www.wfpusa.org/stories/understanding-l3-emergencies/>

community level. This could involve inquiry around what kinds of social networks persist in the face of conflict and how they can be strengthened.

There are questions around the kinds of livelihood interventions most appropriate in conflict situations, based on context, and what kind of adaptation will then be appropriate in a post-conflict situation. And as preventive factors, there are questions around the effectiveness of various approaches for social accountability in fragile contexts, and of youth empowerment where violent extremism is a threat.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

FFP is committed to ensuring the protection of civilians in crisis-response, and to the extent possible, ensure that there are no unintended negative impacts to gender equity, household or community dynamics, safety and security, or markets. This includes questions around the targeting, distribution, and intra-household sharing of food assistance, which all merit further inquiry.

New questions have arisen around mental health, psycho-social needs, and their relation to vulnerability and food insecurity.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN URBAN SETTINGS

According to UN Habitat, rapid urbanization has left more than one billion people living in urban slums. These populations often lack access to clean water, sanitation and health care, and can be vulnerable to political, economic, environmental, and health shocks.

While FFP's development programs remain focused on rural hunger, when crisis strikes, FFP responds to acute food insecurity needs in urban contexts. There are many questions, however, around understanding how food insecurity manifests differently in urban versus rural settings and how these differences affect optimal program design.

The urban food insecure can sometimes be heavily disenfranchised populations that do not participate in the formal economy, are not registered with the government, and lack ready access to service delivery systems or family or social networks. This complicates their identification and targeting as well as ongoing community outreach.

Much of our analysis and forecasting of food insecurity is based on rural livelihood models. In order to better analyze and project needs in an urban setting, new approaches and tools are needed for understanding the economic drivers, market dynamics, and local food systems at play in urban environments. New thinking is also needed around how to redefine vulnerability in terms of resilience and access to other resources and services in an urban context.

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE (SBC) IN CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Crisis-affected populations can be found in both development and emergency settings. In emergency responses, there has been little study of the effectiveness of SBC efforts complementary to food distributions, the best approaches for SBC given the context, or whether changes in social norms and individual and household behaviors are sustained.

More broadly, in responding to acute food insecurity in development settings, questions have arisen as to how behaviors and norms may change in the face of a crisis, for better or worse, and whether (and how) traditional SBC approaches may need to be adapted.

THEME TWO: RESILIENCE

Coping with shocks such as floods, droughts, death of a household head, or severe or chronic illness can exhaust the minimal resources of impoverished households, leading to food insecurity and sometimes poverty traps when productive assets are depleted in coping with the impacts of a crisis. Strengthening household, community, and institutional resilience to shocks and stressors is an important part of not only achieving and maintaining food security, but also helping to minimize the need for future humanitarian assistance.

To help achieve strengthened resilience, there is a need to learn more about the variety of risks that FFP program beneficiaries are likely to face. It would be beneficial to study ways in which development and humanitarian assistance can work together to promote resilience, the complex factors that affect resilience, and how to foster resilience in different contexts and at household, community, and institutional levels so that communities and households can withstand shocks even after FFP programs withdraw.

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE CAPACITY

Three sets of capacities are fundamental to building resilience: the ability to absorb the impacts of shocks and stressors without resorting to negative coping strategies that compromise future well-being, the ability to adapt in ways that do not negatively impact future well-being, and the ability to transform in the face of shocks and stressors in ways that lead to more positive trajectories for change. The concept of resilience capacity is largely context-specific.

Questions consistently arise over whether there is a core set of interventions that contribute to resilience to shocks/stressors in multiple contexts, and how to better understand risk and resilience capacity in context. This includes understanding best approaches for strengthening resilience capacities:

- at different levels of the system, whether individual and household, community, or institutional.
- for different population groups, such as understanding gender and youth dynamics in the context of resilience, strengthening the resilience of crisis-affected populations, including the long-term displaced, and addressing the needs of other vulnerable groups.
- in response to different kinds of risk (whether chronic or acute) and including natural hazards or climate, fragility, and governance issues; pandemic disease and other health issues; economic shocks; and idiosyncratic, household-level shocks.

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS: LOCAL, NATIONAL; URBAN/RURAL

Social protection aims to protect the chronically poor, prevent the vulnerable from being overwhelmed by shocks, and promote livelihoods of those with the capacity to work. Effective social protection systems are risk management systems. They can help governments, communities, and households manage shock. When populations are better able to meet predictable or chronic needs themselves, the need for external food assistance is also reduced.

An overarching question is the extent to which FFP's emergency and development programs are strengthening existing safety net systems, how they are doing so, and the effectiveness of these efforts.

There are a number of social protection interventions that, short of strengthening national safety net systems, can improve resilience at the household and community level. Questions include how to work with local actors to ensure that such efforts are embedded in local structures and institutions, as well as how to link with private sector actors and increase the commercial viability for interventions such as index-based crop or livestock insurance.

Strengthening early warning and increasing government and local capacity to better predict a shock is at the foundation of social protection efforts. Questions remain around the best mechanisms and conditions to engage governments and other stakeholders in early warning activities, and how to better understand vulnerability and anticipate tipping points that would flip non-emergency populations into emergency caseloads.

SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion encompasses social capital, social mobility, and social inclusion. Together, these represent a community's ability and willingness to cooperate with one another for improved social outcomes.

A growing body of evidence has demonstrated that bonding, bridging, and linking social capital can work to strengthen household and community resilience to social, economic, and political shocks. Meanwhile, there is strong consensus that interventions supporting social cohesion, such as village savings and loans or the use of participatory planning techniques, can mitigate sources of conflict within and between communities, create a sense of ownership for all community members, and give a kick-start to cooperative efforts around positive change.

Key questions remain around identifying interventions with the most potential to strengthen community cohesion broadly, the most effective approaches to build on existing social networks and structures, and how context affects the appropriateness of interventions and the strategy around their implementation. Also, an issue meriting focused inquiry is emerging evidence that bonding social capital has the potential to reduce community-wide social cohesion if the groups that are bonding are not, themselves, inclusive.

FOOD/CASH FOR ASSETS - INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure developed under Food or Cash for Assets (FFA/CFA) programming has the potential to not only protect communities against shocks, but also to bring about transformative changes in health, agriculture, or market outcomes.

In the context of acute crises, there is recognized potential for FFA/CFA programming that can provide long-term benefits along with short-term life-saving assistance. But there are many questions about the types of infrastructure that are feasible and appropriate in crisis contexts, whether regarding timelines, the physical needs of crisis-affected populations, or the relation of such conditional programming in the context of what may be other unconditional emergency transfers.

An ongoing question surrounding FFA/CFA programming in both development and emergency settings is around how to foster sustainability and ongoing maintenance of the infrastructure. This includes a look at what approaches have been used to engage local government, private sector, or other actors to help ensure ongoing technical assistance and/or maintenance for infrastructure developed.

THEME THREE: SUSTAINED RESULTS

FFP's 2016-2025 Strategy enshrined FFP's long-standing commitment to sustainability with a goal-level aspiration of improved and sustained food and nutrition security for vulnerable populations. In the context of non-emergency programs, this calls for strategies to ensure that benefits achieved will continue after FFP resources are withdrawn. In the context of emergency programming, this calls for the stabilization and protection of nutritional status and other wellbeing outcomes. The Strategy recognizes the value and central role of local engagement in achieving sustained results.

Given the body of evidence generated through the FFP-funded Sustainability and Exit Strategies effort,⁵ there is a wealth of both generalizable and context-specific lessons and recommendations that can be applied and tested in program design and implementation. The conceptual framework for sustainability developed through this work, identifying the importance of sustained resources, motivation, capacity and, sometimes, linkages, provides a new lens through which local systems can be better understood, and strengthened program planning, analysis, and measurement can be applied.

ACTIVITY INTENSITY AND COVERAGE

One critical finding of the Sustainability and Exit Strategies research was that “the strategies used to achieve short-term impacts can actually undermine the likelihood of producing lasting results.”⁶ This sets up an inherent temporal conflict in efforts to improve the lives and livelihoods of the world's most vulnerable. Increasing an activity's intensity or coverage could result in reaching more individuals, households, and communities in the near-term, but change may be less likely to be lasting over the long-term. In comparison, efforts to strengthen local capacity for ownership, management, and resourcing of desired change may reach fewer of the more vulnerable at the outset, but provide more lasting results. The desired combination of impact, sustainability of results, and cost will differ across sectors, and depend on the degree of humanitarian need and opportunities in the local system. More research is needed.

RESOURCE TRANSFERS

Resource transfers can provide life-saving nutritious food, serve as a foundational asset that enables further investment in productive activities, or provide a motivator for encouraging uptake of desired practices or behavior change. However, the evidence is clear that once resources are withdrawn, all too often, the uptake of positive practices or utilization of services plummets. Thus, resource transfers lie at the heart of sustainability, threatening local ownership of change processes, and potentially creating inappropriate incentives for dependency models. At an operational level, more research is needed

⁵ Rogers, Beatrice Lorge; Coates, Jennifer. “Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects.” FANTA III: FHI 360. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University. December 2015.

⁶ Rogers, Beatrice Lorge; Coates, Jennifer. “Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects.” FANTA III: FHI 360. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University. December 2015. P.3.

across contexts to understand how best to apply facilitation models and/or “smart subsidies” that may enable a gradual withdrawal of external resources.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Donor resources often enable direct service delivery that can result in important well-being outcomes to vulnerable communities in the short-term, but such service delivery could be threatened when resources are removed at activity end. More needs to be understood about when such direct service delivery is warranted based on need, and how best to minimize the potential negative impacts on local mechanisms in establishing new or parallel systems for service delivery. In many sectors, self-financing approaches hold promise, particularly in creating a continued source of needed resources, but more needs to be learned about the sustainability of such models based on context, available linkages, specific services being delivered, and incentivizing communities to pay.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT AND HANDOVER

Ensuring a continued source of resources, capacities and motivations, the foundation of sustainable results, requires engagement with and commitment from local or higher level institutions. Where service delivery relies on community-level workers, sustained results rely on the continued resourcing, capacity, and motivation of these workers. Evidence has shown, however, that many donor-funded activities lack adequate strategies for engagement with local actors who can enable sustained resources for or capacity building of community workers, much less mechanisms to incentivize such workers. New research could shed light on feasible solutions.

The best models for handover will be context-specific and may be based on factors, such as the degree of government decentralization, strength of civil society organizations, or presence of private sector actors. Citizen trust in and the perceived legitimacy of institutions are also factors. In low resource environments, where institutional capacity, or even the existence of formal institutions is limited, there is a need to better understand how to enable increased local ownership and management of sustained results. Appropriate pathways may be through 1) improved linkages to formal institutions in other settings that can serve as a source of ongoing resources, capacity building or incentives, or 2) capacity building of formal and informal institutions in the local context. In all cases, more needs to be understood about how to strengthen government or private sector motivations to take on a deliberate role in supporting service delivery.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND AGENCY

Communities themselves may well be the most important catalysts for self-perpetuating change. FFP programs often strengthen community capacity through the formation and functioning of community groups that work to identify and address community needs and strengthen community assets, and through participatory approaches that enhance the sense of ownership and stewardship over community-level change.

For several years, the USAID/Zimbabwe Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience (HAR) Office has examined factors for the sustainability of community groups, including the degree to which community members felt tangible benefits arising from their involvement, the health of the governance structures associated with the group, and the sense of psychological safety of participants in the group. This body of research highlights the value of further exploring social and group dynamics, cultural practice, and

other contextual factors, such as surrounding governance structures and their collective influence on community groups and the achievement and sustainability of results.

THEME FOUR: STRATEGIC INTEGRATION (SEQUENCING, LAYERING AND INTEGRATION)

Given the complex dynamics of improving food and nutrition security, FFP has long engaged in multi-sectoral integration at the household and community level to create more synergistic and mutually reinforcing efforts that address key drivers of food insecurity. These interventions are often also sequenced within an activity to ensure appropriate targeting and response based on need and allowing for incremental change. Because FFP plays a relatively unique role in working with the most vulnerable populations, in communities and with households that cycle into and out of crisis, FFP also layers and sequences interventions addressing acute and chronic need, respectively, within and between mechanisms and resource flows.

Increasingly, FFP investments are also designed to be strategically layered and sequenced with interventions implemented by other organizations in targeted areas to strengthen the response to multiple interrelated barriers to food security.

THE OPTIMAL PACKAGE OF INTERVENTIONS

In an environment of widespread chronic vulnerability, the appropriate balance between focused stand-alone interventions and comprehensive integrated programs can be difficult to find. There are clear knowledge gaps about the optimal package of interventions based on context: how interventions will interact with one another and whether they will achieve the desired synergy at the household and community level. This is especially critical in terms of negative unintended consequences, such as increased levels of gender inequity or adverse impacts on household diets.

This line of inquiry also includes questions around the optimal number of interventions. There are trade-offs and potential dilution of impacts through too broad an array of intervention areas. Questions around lack of time among participants in general, and more specifically, the absorptive capacity within a household for new messages and the adoption of new practices across many intervention areas. While needs assessment in intervention areas has a strong evidence-base, in many respects, the design of integrated packages in response does not.

JOINT ACTION

For integrated, layered, or sequenced activities to have impact, a complex system of process-oriented interactions is necessary not only as intentions at the design stage, but also implemented in a coordinated manner across technical and organizational boundaries throughout the program cycle. This may include joint targeting strategies that may involve using different targeting criteria or looking at different populations groups at different times and different geographic locations; facilitating movement of beneficiaries between sequenced interventions; cross-intervention communication; and managing inter-dependencies across interventions in terms of timing, quality and effectiveness.

FFP has yet to fully explore the degree to which these planned interactions are taking place within activities (across sectors), between activities, and across organizations through a look back at programs

designed in an integrated manner. Part of this exploration is to better understand the management systems and approaches most effective at facilitating and monitoring the necessary coordination.

RESPONDING TO BOTH ACUTE AND CHRONIC NEED

With expertise in both emergency response and in large-scale, multi-year and multi-sectoral food security programs, FFP is able to address needs and opportunities in areas of acute crisis, in areas emerging from crisis, and in areas subject to recurrent shocks. FFP delivers life-saving assistance when needed, while working to strengthen individual and household resilience capacities, and to transform and strengthen formal and informal institutions for more transformative change.

In many contexts where FFP operates, populations are subject to both acute and chronic shocks simultaneously, so focusing only on one or the other may be detrimental. Implementation research is needed to understand how development and emergency programs play off each other in positive and negative ways in countries with recurrent shocks. What are potential unintended negative outcomes that might arise?

While FFP has developed a body of experience with the layering of emergency response onto ongoing development programming when need arises, there has not been adequate exploration of the processes involved or the program adaptations needed. Issues calling for further dialogue and focused inquiry include identifying the best models for ensuring immediate access to staff with the required skills in emergency response, or the implications of targeting populations for short-term lifesaving assistance versus longer-term development results. Also requiring better exploration are the issues surrounding needed program adaptations in contexts of more acute need, e.g., the appropriateness of specific FFA/CFA interventions in emergency settings, adjustment to targeting criteria, or the need to shift from one modality or one commodity to another.

THEME FIVE: MODALITY CHOICE AND EFFECTIVENESS

There is a growing and well-documented evidence base around the positive impacts of both food and cash transfers on food and nutrition security; however, many questions remain about the appropriateness, relative benefits, and cost-effectiveness of different modalities of assistance in different contexts, as well as the indirect impacts, unintended consequences and relative sustained impact of each. These modalities can take different forms with the primary ones being cash, vouchers, or U.S. in-kind or local and regional procurement of commodities. Cash and vouchers for food can be delivered via several different mechanisms, but generally either via paper or electronically through delivery systems, such as mobile money or e-vouchers. Cash transfers are unrestricted, whereas vouchers are restricted, in that they can only be used in selected locations where they can be exchanged for either a pre-specified monetary *value* of goods or a predetermined *quantity* of specific foods.

As indicated in the [USG Modality Decision Tool](#)⁷, a number of factors can determine the most appropriate modality in a given context including the density and functioning of markets, the diversity and affordability of goods in the markets, the cost of implementation/delivery, and whether program participants and other stakeholders prefer one modality over another. An overarching consideration is whether the primary objective is related to increasing caloric intake, improving household dietary diversity or related to broader food security outcomes such as improving livelihoods or market systems.

⁷ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USG_MDT_Final_2017.pdf

Across the spectrum, there is more that needs to be learned in order to better harness potential positive and minimize potential negative impacts of resource distributions in vulnerable communities.

NUTRITION-SPECIFIC EFFECTIVENESS

Gaps in our understanding persist around the combinations of modalities/services that generate the best nutrition outcomes. Specifically, evidence shows that cash distributions alone are not as effective as when paired with appropriate complementary programming, but it is not yet clear what elements of complementary programming will increase the nutritional impact of the cash distribution most effectively. These suites of activities, which complement cash, are commonly referred to as Cash+.

With regard to child nutritional status, there are numerous factors influencing the impact of different transfer modalities, including the monetary value of the transfer in proportion to household expenditures and need; the frequency of the transfer; the nutrition composition of food baskets and specific products; the targeting of beneficiaries in terms of age, socio-economic status, or other factors; duration of the program; food acceptability and preference; and access to services and markets. Specific focus is needed on implementation research exploring some of these factors.

CONDITIONALITY AND RESTRICTIONS

Another aspect of effectiveness for further inquiry relates to the effectiveness of conditionality and restrictions on food assistance transfer modalities, particularly in the context of emergency programs. Questions relate to the degree to which conditionality and/or restrictions lead to sustained behavior change and other impacts or the degree to which conditional transfers can create unintended consequences whereby participants grow to expect ‘compensation’ for adoption of positive behaviors. In addition, there are time dimensions to measuring the cost-effectiveness of conditional versus unconditional programs, whereby immediate impacts may fade over time or, in the case of asset creation, heavy upfront expense may amortize over time while impacts continue benefiting the community. Ethical concerns also exist when individuals who do not meet criteria for conditionality are excluded, despite the potential benefits of the resource transfers.

IMPACT ON MARKET SYSTEMS

Local economy wide impact evaluation (LEWIE) studies are strengthening the evidence base of the market multiplier effects of various food assistance transfer modalities. This can tell us who, other than the recipient of the transfer, benefits from increased income as an indirect result. But more needs to be understood regarding the broader economic benefits of such programming, including access to and use of increased credit, labor participation rates, and creating increased opportunities for new small enterprises.

MODALITY CHOICE AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

At a community level, there are potential positive and negative impacts of resource transfers on social cohesion, e.g. exacerbating underlying tensions through targeting one group with cash or other distributions and not another, or an improvement in community relations when community members are able to repay debts or invest in local goods and services. At a household level, distributions have the potential to increase empowerment or, conversely, have the ability to increase gender-based violence. The selection of modalities and/or rations may also affect women’s time. These broader

impacts on social dynamics are not well understood and need more implementation research across contexts.

RESOURCE TRANSFERS AND HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

There is solid evidence that distributions, whether of cash, vouchers or in-kind, can be and often are, shared beyond the intended recipient, both within the household or with others in the community. This sharing may function as a form of debt repayment or barter, but also as broader community relations or an informal social safety net. What needs further illumination is the degree to which the level of sharing varies, whether there is any correlation with the modality chosen across contexts, or in what manner sharing has impacts on other intended outcomes of the resource transfer.

In addition, distributions, whether of cash, vouchers or food, can free up household resources to utilize in achieving other household priorities. There is an opportunity to better understand resource management and financial decision-making in poor households, including the dynamics around meeting short-term need versus long-term investments. A key element to this is understanding how the characteristics of the program itself (size of transfers, modality, objectives, resource labeling, program length, frequency, etc.) impact household decision making and outcomes. The predictability of resource transfers is a central concept with regard to ensuring dignity for vulnerable populations. More research is needed to understand the positive role that predictable resource transfers play in household decision making as well as whether and what kind of negative impacts may arise with regard to planning positive life choices, when resource transfers are not available when expected or needed.

THEME SIX: ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Increasing equitable access to opportunities is at the heart of FFP's work to improve food security for the most vulnerable. It is a pathway for improved outcomes for individuals, households, and communities and is foundational to building more resilient societies. Whether through increasing the voice, agency, and participation of marginalized groups, expanding social capital, or extending financial, physical, and social access to quality services, these opportunities can be transformative for the populations that FFP serves.

Inclusion is a pathway to increase access, and operates at multiple levels, in terms of 1) programmatic interventions and the targeting strategies employed, as well as 2) the degree to which marginalized population groups are able to participate in community governance and access appropriate and quality services.

TARGETING STRATEGIES

FFP and its implementer community are committed to improving food security among the most vulnerable; however, whether a function of the vulnerable being the hardest to reach, of elite capture, or of specific targeting strategies, evidence⁸ has shown that, in practice, it is not always the most vulnerable in a community that are reached through activity interventions. More exploration is needed to understand the disconnect between program design and implementation, and to better understand the obstacles to achieving FFP's goal.

⁸ Findings from FFP Mid-Term Evaluations of Development Food Security Activities, Bangkok KS Regional Meeting, Oct. 2-4, 2018; [presentation_Rashid](#); [presentation_Reinhart](#).

Programmatic objectives often provide the lens through which vulnerability is defined. Those individuals and households that are nutritionally vulnerable may differ from the population that is vulnerable to climate risk and still again from the extreme poor. More needs to be understood about how to ensure inclusivity and that targeting strategies provide the right balance of community-wide versus household-level interventions.

Approaches such as the graduation model target the extreme poor with a comprehensive package of interventions, including resource transfers, productive assets, skills training, access to savings, and intensive coaching. While the approach has shown great promise in improving food security and food consumption in target households, more evidence is needed in terms of whether and how the approach can better improve nutritional outcomes, particularly stunting. Given the high cost of the comprehensive package of interventions, there is also important exploration around the minimum package of support that will still achieve results.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Resource allocations, geographic access, and power dynamics and decision-making at the community, district, or national level all have the potential to exacerbate vulnerability to food insecurity. Social accountability is a means to empowering vulnerable and disadvantaged populations by strengthening their ability to demand opportunities that will allow them to improve their own food security, while facilitating greater transparency and responsiveness of institutions responsible for providing those opportunities. As part of the learning agenda, research and experiential evidence can help define the most effective practices for strengthening social accountability, across contexts, in both crisis and more transitional settings.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT/INTEGRATING GENDER

There is a strong evidence base around the importance of women's empowerment in efforts to improve food and nutrition security. Positive associations have been found between women's role in agriculture and improved productivity, between women's assets and household budget allocations, and, especially in poor households, between women's decision-making power and child nutritional status. Implementation research is still needed, however, to test strategies for empowerment, and to measure their effect on different domains of empowerment.

Additional questions relate to (1) the identification of those program components/approaches that best strengthen empowerment, for example, participation and leadership in group settings around food security interventions such as nutrition education, or livelihoods programming; modality choice; or degree of access to extension services; (2) the impact of men's and boys' participation in interventions; and (3) existing barriers to empowerment such as limited opportunities for pregnant and lactating women.

The issue of time poverty can serve as a barrier to women's empowerment as well as broader food security outcomes through a variety of pathways. More needs to be understood about the range of activities that lead to time poverty among women, and whether and how alleviating time poverty leads to improved food security and nutrition outcomes. More specifically, there are remaining knowledge gaps around the relation between women's workload both in and outside of the home with nutrition and health status, their role as mothers and/or caregivers, and their role as economic actors. In addition, there is room for further understanding around how to reduce the impact on women's workload of

common food security interventions such as irrigation, agriculture, microenterprise, income generation, homestead food production, maternal child health and nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Youth constitutes a diverse demographic with distinctly different needs. Sub-groups include adolescents/older youth; in school and out of school youth; adolescent parents, both male and female; and conflict-affected youth. While recent evidence has noted that positive youth development activities can be effective in cross-sectoral programming, more evidence is needed regarding optimal approaches, the appropriate combination of approaches, the length and intensity of interventions, and the best time during adolescence to intervene.

The potential of livelihoods interventions, in particular, to create transformative opportunities for youth has yet to be fully explored. This could include a focus on the optimal synergies between livelihood activities and cash transfers, as well as exploration of transformative, culturally acceptable livelihood options for young women. Youth in many countries are participating in labor migration, both within and outside their countries of origin. This is a key coping strategy for many rural households, and can result in remittances. There is a need to learn more about how to support labor migration so that the risks youth face are minimized and the positive outcomes increased. In addition, more needs to be understood about how to ensure that access to youth empowerment opportunities does not encourage or create incentives for leaving school early.

Delaying of pregnancy and childbearing can have important benefits for maternal and child health, and, particularly if family planning interventions are integrated with livelihood interventions, for broader food security outcomes as well. Questions remain around the most effective strategies to strengthen societal norms around access to and use of family planning, around how to best increase girls' comfort level in accessing such services, and the potential role of adolescent boys and men in family planning behavior change efforts.