

Localization

U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy Activity Design Guidance

This is one of several Activity Design Guidance documents for implementing the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy. The full set of documents is at www.feedthefuture.gov and www.agrilinks.org.

Introduction

The sustainability and long-term success of agricultural development assistance requires local ownership and strong capacity of local actors to produce locally led and valued development outcomes. Accordingly, the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) outlines an approach to Feed the Future that “empowers individuals and communities in the design, implementation, execution, and ownership of development activities aimed at sustainably reducing global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.”

To realize the full benefits of a local approach, we must proactively and intentionally include people from marginalized and underrepresented groups, which may include, but are not limited to, women and girls; persons with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people; displaced persons; migrants; Indigenous Peoples; youth and the elderly; nondominant religious groups; nondominant racial and ethnic groups; people in lower castes; and persons with mental health needs. When a diverse group of people come together to make sense of a complex and dynamic situation, they are in the best position to identify solutions that meet their community's needs.

Advancing this approach requires a commitment from all staff and implementing partners (IPs) to shift more leadership and decision-making to the local people and organizations who possess the capability, connectedness, and credibility to drive change in their own countries and communities. Accordingly, this guide defines [localization](#) and highlights how to leverage three localization programming practices—locally led development, local systems practice, and local capacity strengthening—within the context of Feed the Future.

Terminology and Context

Localization may mean different things to different people and communities. In the context of Feed the Future, we have adopted the following definition:

- **Localization:** The set of internal reforms, actions, and behavior changes that we are undertaking to ensure our work puts local actors in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities. It can be supported in a variety of ways, including:
 - Adapting our policies and programs to foster [locally led development](#) that is tied to each country's unique political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions, including through [local systems practice](#) and [local capacity strengthening](#).
 - Shifting power to local actors, including, with an [inclusive development](#) lens, those from marginalized and underrepresented groups, and promoting space for them to influence and exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design and implementation, and measuring and evaluating results.

- Channeling a larger portion of funding directly to local partners while ensuring accountability for the appropriate use of funds and achievement of development and humanitarian results.
- Serving as a global advocate and thought leader, using our convening power, partnerships, voice, and other tools of development diplomacy to catalyze a broader shift toward locally led development.¹

In our programming, we support localization through three mutually reinforcing practices, which are identified in the first line of effort above and defined below:

- **Locally Led Development:** The process by which a diverse group of local actors set their own development agendas; develop and implement solutions; use their capacities, leadership, and resources to promote equitable change; and ensure that positive outcomes can be sustained by local people, for local people.²
- **Local Systems Practice:** The lens we use to understand development results and suggest interventions to achieve sustainability. Improving development and humanitarian results requires strengthening system performance by developing local capacities, deepening interrelationships between local actors, improving equity, and aligning the incentives that shape the system. A local system refers to a set of interconnected actors who jointly produce a particular development outcome. The “local” in a local system refers to actors in a partner country. As these actors jointly produce an outcome, they are “local” to it.³
- **Local Capacity Strengthening:** A strategic and intentional investment in the process of partnering with local actors—individuals, organizations, and networks—to jointly improve the performance of a local system to produce locally valued and sustainable development outcomes. Capacity encompasses the knowledge, skills, and motivations, as well as the relationships that enable an actor—an individual, an organization, or a network—to take action to design and implement solutions to local development challenges, to learn and adapt from that action, and to innovate and transform over time.⁴ Please note that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) acknowledges the diversity of existing local capacities in our partner countries and is intentionally shifting its use of terminology away from “capacity building” or “capacity development” toward “capacity strengthening.”

Designing Activities

Aligning Feed the Future activities with the programming approaches and principles to support [locally led development](#), apply a [local systems](#) perspective, and strengthen [local capacity](#) (for USAID staff only) is important for ensuring that our programming contributes to our overall vision for localization. Each of these programming approaches helps us work more equitably with local actors to support them in setting their own development agendas, designing and implementing solutions, and bringing their capacity, leadership, and resources to promote positive change and sustainable development outcomes. The programming approaches are highlighted in more detail below.

Locally Led Development

Locally led development refers to the extent to which local actors drive decision-making throughout the development process. It is not a single approach. Rather, it reflects a range of ways that USAID, IPs, and local communities can work together to shift agenda-setting and decision-making power into the hands of local actors and partners. This shift includes supporting local actors and partners to lead priority setting, design, management, measurement, and other processes through which development assistance

contributes to the achievement of development outcomes for the improvement of local systems. A few ways that Feed the Future can integrate locally led development practices into programming are shared below:

- A [listening tour](#) is an approach that prioritizes hearing from a broad range of local actors. It emphasizes the inclusion of voices that are typically not heard and provides an important opportunity to listen to actors in the local system to understand their priorities and development challenges, and to gain a deeper understanding of the local context. A listening tour involves Feed the Future staff or IPs listening to local actors with an open mind and without judgment, listening to learn, respecting all voices, and valuing relationships.
- Pause and reflect with local actors using the [Locally Led Development Spectrum and Checklist Tool](#). The Locally Led Development Spectrum reflects a continuum of practices to support locally led development that range from “less locally led” to “more locally led,” while the Locally Led Development Checklist can be used to facilitate discussions with local actors and partners to support partner countries meeting their own development and humanitarian assistance challenges, while also ensuring that Feed the Future investments produce sustainable, long-term development outcomes.
- [Co-creation](#) with local communities brings development actors and partners together to collectively produce a mutually valued outcome, using a participatory process that assumes some degree of shared power and decision-making. It is a time-limited process that focuses on generating a specific outcome, but can be used throughout the Program Cycle—from design and solicitation through award, administration, implementation, work planning, and closeout. Co-creation can be conducted with a single stakeholder or many stakeholders. Engaging local actors directly in the design of development programming can help strengthen local ownership of activities and their results.

Local Systems Practice

A focus on local systems is rooted in the reality that achieving and sustaining any development outcome depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors. Strengthening the capacity of a single actor or strengthening a single relationship is insufficient. Rather, the focus must be on the system as a whole: the actors, their interrelationships, and the incentives that guide them; realizing that improved development outcomes emanate from increasing the performance of multiple actors and the effectiveness of their interactions. Sustaining development outcomes depends on the sustainability of the local system—specifically, its built-in durability and adaptability that allows actors and their interrelationships to accommodate shocks and respond to changing circumstances. Here are a few examples of how Feed the Future can integrate local systems practice into programming:

- **Participatory systems analysis** involves Feed the Future staff, local actors and partners, and international actors and partners coming together to jointly make sense of and understand how the local system functions, its strengths and existing capacities and resources, the behaviors of and relationships among actors, and the rules, incentives, and norms of the context in which actors exist. Some tools to visualize complex dynamics in a local system include systems mapping, social network analysis, and the [5Rs Framework](#), as well as others found in the [Tool Finder](#) developed by Feed the Future Innovation Lab partners.
- [Facilitation](#) is an approach to project implementation that minimizes direct provision of goods and services and instead focuses on catalyzing behaviors, relationships, and performance as a way to support local systems.
- [Local leadership councils or advisory boards](#). One way to improve the responsiveness of

programming to the local context is to build ways for local communities to share feedback about programming based on their knowledge of the local context into the design of projects and activities. Establishing feedback loops and feedback cadence that establishes when and how local actors can share feedback helps build partnerships based on mutual respect and trust.

Local Capacity Strengthening

Sustainable development depends on local actors leading efforts to improve their communities and working inclusively and collectively to see those efforts through. For this reason, local capacity strengthening—reflected in the GFSS Results Framework as Crosscutting Intermediate Result 8: Improved human, organizational, and institutional performance—is and has been a foundational component of Feed the Future programming. While local capacity strengthening must align with Feed the Future strategic priorities, it should also be programmed in a way that builds on the existing strengths of local actors and systems and responds to dynamic country and regional contexts. This means that approaches to local capacity strengthening will vary. Thus, to ensure that local capacity strengthening is integrated effectively across Feed the Future programming and supported through equitable partnerships, GFSS countries should commit to listening to the local system, strengthening capacities through diverse approaches, and planning for and measuring performance in collaboration with local partners.

- **Strength, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) Analysis** reflects an appreciative inquiry approach and an actor’s current position with their aspirations and goals for the future. The SOAR Analysis can be used to build and energize positive, forward-leaning, sustainable local systems change. By accompanying local communities to identify and leverage existing—but perhaps unrecognized or underappreciated—strengths and assets, this process can help local actors lead efforts to set their own agendas, develop solutions, and bring their capacities, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality. By building on existing strengths and assets, our support will contribute to more sustainable development outcomes.
- **Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis** is one approach that teams can use to support local capacity strengthening through equitable partnerships. Because few social interactions are ever power neutral, power and politics fundamentally matter for local capacity-strengthening outcomes. Before engaging with local actors, **reflect on the visible, hidden, and invisible power structures in a local system** and how these can manifest both among actors in a local system and in our own interactions with local partners. Paying attention to how power shapes decision-making and political or agenda setting can help us build partnerships that are based on mutual respect and trust and help balance power asymmetries through local capacity-strengthening programming.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Approaches

To measure progress on localization, Feed the Future countries are encouraged to use a variety of methods and metrics to monitor program performance, evaluate outcomes, and assess impact. Progress may be monitored with performance measurement tools or indicators following mutual agreement with local partners on the key areas to measure. Highlighted below are three standard foreign assistance indicators that are particularly useful for measuring progress on local capacity strengthening and enhancing how we learn with local partners and local communities.

To align investments under the GFSS Results Framework, Feed the Future uses a range of associated indicators to track the progress of our programs. Across the Results Framework, at least one indicator is associated with each intermediate result, objective, and goal. While the full list of standard Feed the Future indicators—including their definitions and how they are associated with the components of the

Results Framework—can be found in the [Feed the Future Indicator Handbook](#), here are three, crosscutting standard foreign assistance indicators related to capacity strengthening:

- **CBLD-9** measures whether U.S. government-funded capacity-strengthening efforts have led to improved organizational performance in organizations receiving organizational capacity-strengthening support.
- **CBLD-10** measures the value (in U.S. dollars) of nondonor resources mobilized for local development priorities. Data reported for this indicator contributes to an understanding of the catalytic effect of USAID investments for unlocking the resources of other development actors and enhances the ability to monitor progress on promoting local ownership and sustainable outcomes.
- **CBLD-11** monitors the number of organizations pursuing their own performance-improvement priorities with U.S. government capacity-strengthening support. As an output-level indicator, it serves a complement to CBLD-9 in that the value reported for CBLD-11 can also be the denominator for CBLD-9.

Additional information and resources on USAID’s approach to measuring progress on localization may be found at: <https://www.usaid.gov/localization/measurement>.

Programming in Practice

Setting Localization Targets and Approaches at the USAID Mission in Nepal: To support locally led development and more sustainable outcomes, USAID/Nepal’s senior leadership team established an ambitious target that 40 percent of funding will either directly support local partners or government by the end of 2025. To prepare for this transition, the Mission conducted a strategic portfolio review to start identifying risks and needs related to localization. Each technical office identified opportunities for new local and government to government (G2G) awards, discussed barriers to localization, and identified steps to mitigate those challenges. Following these sessions, the Mission developed an adaptive management plan largely focused on the actions that the Mission will need to take to make localization successful, and the Mission will continually revisit the plan. Next, the Mission held a series of co-creation sessions to define their localization approach, give all staff a voice in the process, and define individual and office roles in the process. In parallel, the Mission formed a design team to conduct 67 nongovernmental organization consultations and 11 Government of Nepal consultations, and drafted a scope of work for a new \$25 million support contract to strengthen capacity for new local partners, support G2G awards, and provide a range of services from preaward through implementation.

Creating Opportunities for Local Applicants through Listening Tours—Liberia: USAID/Liberia and the Africa Trade and Investment (ATI) Program created an incubator to strengthen the capacity of local organizations and entrepreneurs and promote job creation, trade, and investment. To better provide demand-driven capacity support, the ATI Program contracted a local brand awareness company to run roadshows and spread awareness about the creation of the incubator. In each community where the roadshow occurred, a town hall was held for community members to share. Together, the roadshows and town halls provided ATI with opportunities to listen to and learn from rural communities about their aspirations, goals, and needs, as well as the barriers that individuals in those communities might face when applying for support from the program. In addition, radio talk shows highlighting the creation of the ATI Program Incubator aired. These radio talk shows kept a portion of the show for question and answer sessions, which provided the ATI Program with additional opportunities to listen and learn from local communities. Throughout this process, the ATI Program learned about several barriers facing potential

local applicants, which included the required length of the concept note and lack of Internet access. In response, the ATI Program simplified the concept note requirements and service centers were set up in each county to provide free Internet access for applicants. As a result, 148 concept notes were received, exceeding expectations. Furthermore, each of these listening tour activities were done before an IP was selected to run the incubator. A co-creation event was then held with 11 organizations interested in serving as IPs of the incubator. By having the awareness campaign and listening activities before the co-creation of the incubator, the potential IPs had substantial information provided by local communities, so that they could better design a successful program. For more information about the ATI Program and the incubator's activities, [read their blog on Agrilinks](#).

From Sub to Direct Award—Tanzania: Nearly 20 years ago, the Tanzania Horticultural Association (TAHA) was initially focused on specific technical components as a subgrantee to an international organization. Recognizing the potential role that TAHA, a small private sector membership organization, could play in the future development of the horticulture sector, USAID intentionally focused on strengthening the organization's capacity in monitoring and evaluation, management, budget, and bookkeeping, enabling TAHA to step up and become the prime for a transition grant in 2012. At that time, they received a four-year, \$4 million transitional grant. Recently, TAHA was awarded a [food security activity](#) after co-designing interventions to address major causes of postharvest loss. With a total budget of \$24 million over five years, this will be the largest locally implemented project in USAID/Tanzania's economic growth portfolio. With Feed the Future's support, TAHA has grown from 212 members to 700. With TAHA's local leadership, the horticulture industry has become the fastest-growing industry within the agriculture sector. Since 2004, yields of fruits and vegetables have increased by 200–300 percent, and exports have grown twelvefold—skyrocketing from \$64 million to over \$779 million (as of 2021). To learn more about the success of TAHA, [read their blog on Agrilinks](#).

Working through Local Consultants to Strengthen Capacity—Uganda: USAID/Uganda has made a concentrated effort to ensure all the consultants on Feed the Future Inclusive Agricultural Markets (IAM) activities are Ugandans. This is in recognition of the fact that partnering with local consultants not only strengthens the capacity of the consultants through experiential practice, but also encourages other local consultants to strengthen their skills to compete to provide such services. While the goal of the Feed the Future IAM is to increase incomes and improve livelihoods by promoting agriculture-led economic growth, an inclusive approach is implemented to develop a vibrant pool of local agricultural and market systems development consultants in Uganda. This is one approach through which USAID/Uganda has been able to partner with more local organizations, as nearly 75 percent of Feed the Future IAM partners (inclusive of direct grantees and subcontract partners) are organizations incorporated and owned by Ugandans.

Local Organizations Lead in Malawi: USAID/Malawi's investment in the nascent groundnut industry in the Agriculture Diversification (AgDiv) Activity has resulted in partners like Pyxus and Limbe Leaf investing in their own research and development programs, and establishing legume contract farming relationships with 8,000 smallholder farmers. In the area of access to finance, Community Finance Limited (CoFi) is linked to a network of partners—including input suppliers able to provide prefinancing for inputs on credit—and Village and Savings Loan Associations that successfully complete cash loan or capital injection programs are being linked to formal lending. Local communities are also showing capacity strengthening, with communities at the Chingoni Hills resilience site organizing governance of activities with 300 individuals participating each month.

Additional Resources and Tools

- [USAID's Localization Website](#).
- USAID. June 2023. [Moving Toward a Model of Locally Led Development: FY 22 Localization Progress Report](#).
- USAID. 2022. [Integrating Local Knowledge in Development Programming](#). USAID.
- USAID/Nepal. 2022. [Listening Exercise to Advance Locally Led Development](#). USAID.
- USAID. 2022. [Listening to Local Voices: Accountability and Feedback Plans](#). USAID.
- [Local Systems Practice User's Guide](#).
- USAID. 2023. "Locally Led Development Spectrum and Checklist Tool." Learning Lab. Last modified October 09, 2023.
<https://usaidthelearninglab.org/resources/locally-led-development-spectrum-and-checklist-tool>.
- [Tips for Better Use of Advisory Councils](#).
- USAID. 2012. [Understanding Facilitation Briefing Paper](#). USAID.

References

- ¹ USAID. 2022. [Localization at USAID: The Vision and Approach](#). USAID.
- ² USAID. 2022. [What is Locally Led Development?](#) USAID.
- ³ USAID. 2014. [Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development](#). USAID.
- ⁴ USAID. 2022. [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#). USAID.

For further assistance related to these Activity Design Guidance documents, please contact ftfguidance@usaid.gov.