

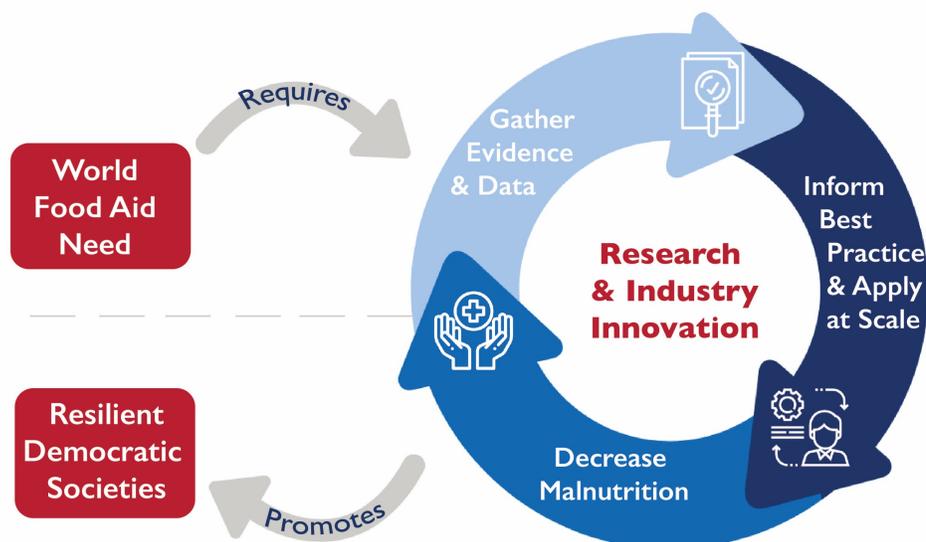
CURRENT STATE OF THE EVIDENCE: ADVANCING FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR NUTRITION PROGRAMMING

In 2018, over **800 million** people were facing chronic hunger and an estimated **76 million people** in **45 countries** required emergency food assistance.^{1,2} Although these numbers seem stark, the humanitarian community responded quickly and effectively to prevent countless deaths. Not content with simply filling bellies, the US and its partners has moved to resolve the massive threat to life posed by malnutrition. Great strides have been made in recent years in tailoring food assistance, through in-kind food aid, cash, vouchers, or local/regional purchase, to address nutrition concerns so that vulnerable children and mothers become more resilient to future shocks.³

Yet more must be done.

Many innovations have been tried in the field, but sharing experiences to define global best practice has been slow. To address a growing call for evidence-based policies and programming, an Evidence Summit was organized on Food Assistance for Nutrition, in Washington D.C. during June 2018. Hosted by the Food Aid Quality Review project and USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) this learning-dissemination event brought together experts and practitioners from around the world. Their goal was to share and discuss recent **purpose-driven research** and **industry innovations** with a view to more effectively respond to the world's food aid needs, and lead to **resilient communities**. Everything from designing and packaging food aid products to delivering them to beneficiaries must be data-driven and based on evolving evidence of what works, with additional focus on what can be improved. Food assistance goes far **beyond the products** themselves, to rigorous **evidence-based practice** in operations, programming and policy making.

FOOD ASSISTANCE RESEARCH AND INDUSTRY INNOVATION FUELS RESILIENCY



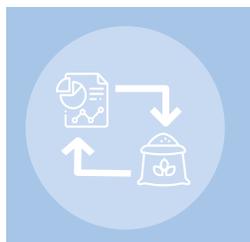
¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO.

² FEWS NET. (2017, November 28). Global Food Security Alert. Retrieved from: http://fewsn.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FEWS%20NET%20Global%20FS%20Alert_20171128_0.pdf

³ Aburto NJ. Food Assistance for Nutrition: The evidence on which we can agree. In: *Food Assistance for Nutrition Evidence Summit*. 2018.

APPLYING EVIDENCE TO SCALE

The Food Assistance for Nutrition Evidence Summit demonstrated major progress in how the community has applied evidence to scale:



Food Assistance Programming is More Agile and Evidence-Based:

The Evidence Summit highlighted the accumulation of evidence on beneficiary populations' nutritional needs and the growing understanding of the role of specially formulated commodities in meeting these needs. The food assistance community has made great advances in the tailoring of food aid products based on evidence. This is demonstrated by the investment of 174 ongoing or published research activities on food aid for nutrition since 2011. Today, USAID/FFP uses 10 different micronutrient premixes, depending on the type of food product and the target population, containing up to 24 vitamins and minerals. They program 28 products in 66 varieties, programming nearly 1.7 million metric tons in FY 2016.



Advanced Food Aid Supply Chain Systems provide Improved Planning Horizons and Cost Savings:

A supply chain optimization model presented at the Evidence Summit aimed at improving cost-effectiveness of USAID/FFP food aid programs. The model showed a potential 25% improvement in cost-effectiveness (equating to millions of dollars) by shifting the advanced planning horizon for purchasing food aid from 3 to 6 months. Considering all points and actors across the supply chain and incorporating data analytics to understand the gains made from changes large and small provide tangible improvements to decision making.



Improved Food Aid Packaging has the Potential to Decrease Food Aid Losses Dramatically:

Food aid packaging improvements was a focus of the Evidence Summit. Data collected from a food assistance program in Burkina Faso revealed that over 10 % of fortified vegetable oil needed to be transferred to new packaging in country to prevent losses. Such data enables the food assistance community to assess the cost of poor packaging and the money lost that could be reinvested in better performing packaging at the manufacturer, thus improving cost-efficiency. Packaging research allows for the identification of technologies that could significantly improve the cost-efficiency of food assistance programs and preserve the quality of the foods until consumption.

EVIDENCE SUMMIT CALLS TO ACTION:

In an effort to support the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger and the Global Food Security Act aimed at reducing global hunger and improving nutrition, the following actions should be prioritized:

- 1. More funding is required for careful studies that document best practice for food assistance in all humanitarian contexts, with particular attention to measurable impacts on maternal and child nutrition.**
- 2. Innovations should be promoted in product formulations, food packaging technology, food safety quality, and food aid supply chain optimization tools.**
- 3. Multi-sectoral and multi-institutional collaboration and communication must be enhanced. No one donor, government or agency can effectively operate alone.**
- 4. Investments should increase in advanced data systems to capture reliable and comprehensive food assistance trends.**
- 5. Metrics of nutritional status need to go beyond physical growth of children to include brain development, gut health, and body composition to provide a physiological understanding of malnutrition.**