Notes from Stakeholder Consultation: Implementing Under the New 2016-2025 Food for Peace (FFP) Strategy

30th of May 2017, Washington, DC

Introduction

Laurie Starr, Monitoring & Evaluation and Theory of Change Senior Specialist at The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program, greeted participants and explained how TOPS had identified the topic for this consultation. Implementing Under the New 2016-2025 Food for Peace Strategy was among the top three topics requested by members of the food security and nutrition community via a survey in January 2017. Simultaneously, the Office of Food for Peace approached TOPS with the same idea. Thus, TOPS delivered this stakeholder consultation to fulfill requests from both USAID and the implementing community.

Laurie further explained that the purpose of the consultation was to provide opportunities to ask each other questions, to share and build off each other’s ideas, and to challenge each other and get inspired.

Mark Fritzler, Director for The TOPS Program, welcomed everyone and gave a brief introduction of TOPS, its mission and its consortium partners.

After a quick ‘icebreaker’ exercise where participants told each other what had brought them to the consultation, Laurie introduced Joan Whelan, Strategy and Learning Advisor at USAID’s Office of Food for Peace.

Remarks by Joan Whelan, Strategy and Learning Advisor, Office of Food for Peace, USAID

Joan Whelan stressed that the consultation would not be a detailed presentation of the new strategy, nor a lengthy Q & A session with Food for Peace. Rather, its purpose was to offer a space for discussion and exchange of ideas about how everyone would own this strategy. However, she added, there would be opportunities to highlight any outstanding questions regarding the strategy.

“We hope that the collective knowledge that we generate today will be very helpful for all of us – Food for Peace and the partners – for adapting to better align to the new strategy.”

Laurie Starr
The TOPS Program
Joan presented a few key messages from the strategy:

1. The results framework of the strategy has two sides with two distinct strategic objectives (SO): SO 1 focuses on the **household level** working to improve lives and livelihoods, ensure nutrition needs are met, enhance WASH practices, and natural resource and risk management capacities. The other side (SO2) focuses on results at a **systems level**, improving institutions and communities by strengthening social protection systems, nutrition and health systems, market systems, and natural resource management systems, among others. She stressed that while it may appear that the SO1 represents humanitarian work and the SO2 development work, that is not the case.

2. Improving lives and livelihoods has been and always will be an intrinsic part of our collective [FFP] development work, just as it is in emergencies. And while there is much more we can do to develop systems in longer-term development contexts, there is a lot we can do to strengthen local systems, local markets and local social cohesion, also in short-term emergency responses.

3. Developing the new strategy was a joint effort and a participatory process that owes much to

“We are asking everyone to be more deliberate about the systems approach, because that is where real transformation happens and that is where we can get to a stronger commitment to sustainability.”

Joan Whelan
USAID’s Office of Food for Peace
the input of the FFP implementing partner community. It is built on core principles from the last FFP Strategy period, such as meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and our commitment to nutrition.

4. There are also new aspects in the strategy, such as an increased focus on systems. This is where real transformation happens and we need to think about and be more deliberate about strengthening systems in every context.

5. The systems approach leads to another key aspect of the new strategy: a stronger commitment to sustainability. No one believes that we will meet all the needs of the most vulnerable during the lifespan of an activity and leave after five years having completely sustainable, transformative change and a population not needing development work any longer. But we need to change our orientation to make sustainability a prime focus, and start working incrementally so that activities can build on each other and meet a population with fewer needs every time.

6. A third new aspect of the strategy is the set of cross-cutting issues at the bottom. These will be the focus of our discussion today.

To conclude, Joan stressed that the 2016-2025 strategy is large and comprehensive. Food security is complex and will look different in every region, country, and context. The strategy is not a cookie cutter for proposals and no single program is expected to check every box. However, each development food security activity (DFSA) will need to work through their Theory of Change, understanding local needs, opportunities, strengths and constraints, and adjusting to other development activities already working in the same context. No two DFSAs will look the same, but each one needs to be optimally designed for its particular situation.

Joan also mentioned that the FFP monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team is working to finalize the global FFP strategy indicators and will share these in the near future, but they were not meant to be a topic of discussion during this consultation.

As for issues that need more time to discuss, like learning questions or topics for further research and development, attendees of the consultation were encouraged to write them in the ‘parking lot’ for future discussions.

**Small Group Discussion: Four correlates**

Laurie introduced the first group exercise where participants were asked to discuss how to catalyze systemic change as defined in Intermediate Results (IR) 2.1 - 2.4. There is a direct correlation between each of the IRs under SO1 and the IRs under SO2. For example, IR 1.2 (improved Nutrition and WASH practices at household level) correlates directly with IR 2.2 (strengthened Nutrition and Health Systems). The groups were tasked with sharing ideas and
discussing the differences in implementation for each pairs of correlates, with a special focus on the work under SO2. What needs to be taken into account to deliver under SO2?

Groups discussed the following questions:

- How does the systems approach of Strategic Objective 2 differ from work under Strategic Objective 1?
- What are some of the considerations that need to be taken into account in working to strengthen each relevant system?

**Group 1: Agricultural, Market and Financial Systems (IR 2.4)**

- Under SO1 (and IR 1.4) there is more emphasis on direct implementation initially, since we are dealing with the poorest populations. For SO2 (and IR 2.4), it might be too soon to start working at a systems level, especially for market systems, something that has to be done gradually. Except maybe for subsidies at the systems level such as improved seeds, fertilizers, assets distribution.
- In order to work towards SO2, there is a need to integrate existing systems at a community level and below. Farmers may not have enough of an understanding of market systems and the positive effects of grouping together for market advantages (better negotiating power for better prices for example).
- Why would market actors want to work with poor farmers? Often we (as implementers) use the FFP programs funded by USAID as leverage to convince them that the risk is low. It is interesting to see how we need to negotiate risk on both sides of this equation (with both farmers and market groups).
- Behavior change around gender will be necessary to catalyze change at a systems level. Traditionally, men play a dominant role in agriculture, market and financial systems so it will be important to convince communities that it works in their advantage to give women access to land and inputs.
**Group 2: Agricultural, Market and Financial Systems (IR 2.4)**

- One key difference is in the implementing activities; SO1 focuses on participants while SO2 focuses on the systems, so the entire level of operation and context analysis is very different between these two.
- The two objectives cannot be separated. Activities under SO1 must be formed to support and leverage activities under SO2, something which is very challenging.
- One way to see it is that SO1 is a niche, focusing on households, while SO2 is a complex, ecological system with markets, policies, farmers, market actors, institutions, etc. We must define how the ‘niche’ of the individual household fits into the complex ecosystem. To integrate these two and make sure they complement each other presents a big challenge.
- M&E is key for systems change.
- Is FFP ready to fund the types of activities that are necessary for systems change?

**Group 3: Social Protection Systems (2.1)**

- Working with systems under SO2 involves activities that require a different skill set, which can pose a challenge.
- SO2 has a focus on institutional capacity development.
- Accountability is needed under SO2 for it to have a positive impact at all.
- Systems strengthening takes longer to achieve, but is likely to be more sustainable.
- We need to fully understand the systems before we can strengthen them. The five-year timeframe of FFP programming is rarely long enough for an in-depth analysis of the systems, forcing us to intervene without a complete understanding.

**Group 4: Social Protection Systems (2.1)**

- There is need for a better understanding of existing systems from national level to local level, which might mean identifying new skill sets that are needed, and embedding those in existing staff.
- We will likely have to choose within a selection of modalities that are promising practices, and it will be important to document these, making them part of a learning agenda.
- Importance of M&E.
- To strengthen the social protection systems, it will be important to learn from the other systems. It is difficult to stay in only one box since all systems are related and connected. Cross-cutting issues must be taken into account.
Group 5: Nutrition and Health Systems (2.2)

- This area is traditionally heavily female oriented, but in order to create sustainable change, men must also be involved to support health centers, create demand, etc.
- Within local health activities it is important to understand what is going on at global level and how that may overlap with your activity. Important to find out what USAID missions are doing in the area and figure out how to integrate with them on behalf of your local activity.
- Key to systems strengthening is an in-depth assessment of what the current systems look like – what are constraints and opportunities.
- Systems strengthening activities require a different skill set among the staff of a DFSA compared with activities at household level. How do we balance that within a DFSA in terms of focus, level of effort, and indicators?
- The timeline is different for systems strengthening.

Group 6: Nutrition and Health Systems (2.2)

- Many times formal nutrition and health systems are weak or lacking at a local and community level, with informal systems in place instead. It might be necessary to start by strengthening the informal systems and find ways to link them to the formal systems as those develop. For example, community health volunteers in an informal system can be trained and then absorbed into a formal health system.

Natural Resource & Environmental Risk Management Systems (IR 2.3)

- When working alongside governments to strengthen disaster risk management systems, there is a need for the government to have some resources. Are we willing to allocate resources through the government to enable them to implement activities according to our expectations? How can we expect them to develop capacities if they don’t have any resources? An example is when small, local disasters happen (where the international community does not step in) and there are no funds or mechanisms to respond at a national level.
- We don’t have to do everything. There will always be other organizations working in a country to strengthen government systems, working on policy aspects, etc. We must become better at understanding what is going on outside our own development activity, both inside and outside of the USAID ecosystem. We need to take into account the work of other organizations and work with them to make sure our actions are complementary.
Laurie commented that the last point can be applied across all IRs and that this is the key reason why FFP is asking for an extensive stakeholder mapping before even submitting a proposal. By including external actors in our Theory of Change, we can understand how our work is influenced by those around us, and how our work may influence those actors.

Plenary Discussion: Systems Strengthening and New Skills

Participants responded in plenary to the following question:

- What new capacities/skills/practices/changes might be required to carry out systems strengthening work – whether in development or emergency settings?

Responses:

- **Assessment skills**: skills to do thorough assessments at a new level, including assessments of institutions, coverage, other entities operating in the area, capacities of existing institutions, markets, etc.
- **Ability to prioritize actions**: there may be many possible actions that can drive the specific outcome we are seeking. We must know how to prioritize among these actions and decide where we should intervene as a Food for Peace program.
- **Training in training**: to provide the systems and institutions within them with the tools to provide training themselves across a broad and context-specific set of capacities. This may demand more of a private sector mentality.
- **Adaptive management**: effective use of information and ability to adapt implementation accordingly.
- **Willingness to learn what others are doing**: both inside and outside of our own work.
- **Skillset to identify incentives and constraints of the private sector**: so that we can leverage those incentives and constraints in line with our own activities.
- **Advocacy and policy development skills**: we need to develop them further ourselves and we need to help local organizations develop them.
- **People with large local networks and profound knowledge of the local context**: they will help us assess the situation better and enable us to link program activities to what is going on in the country already.
- **Shift in how we measure and define results**: the focus can no longer be on how many beneficiaries we have reached through our activities during the DFSA timeline, but rather on what we leave behind. The new indicators will be key for this, as well as how evaluation criteria are defined in the Requests for Applications, to drive activities toward SO2.
- **Negotiation skills**: training beneficiaries and local leaders in negotiation skills to enable them to negotiate prices at market level, with institutions for advocacy, for services delivered in a certain way, etc.

- **A mix of skill sets**: generalists/institutional level actors and specialists that can link together to integrate and bridge specific activities with broader approach and institutional context.

Parking Lot Question: Do we need to shift our focus from direct to indirect beneficiaries?

**Plenary Discussion: Cross Cutting Issues**

Participants responded in plenary to the following questions:

- What are effective examples you have seen of these cross cutting issues as standalone efforts?
- What are effective examples of these cross cutting issues integrated into other programmatic areas of work?

**Examples:**

A program in Niger is working with a group of men and husband schools (adapted from the UNFPA husband school concept). This is incorporated into the strategic objective (SO) for Health, Nutrition and WASH, focusing on reproductive health issues but with men exclusively. Men and husbands are encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis and they have taken it quite far by building up the infrastructure at the health facilities. The project is now looking at expanding the subject matter beyond that. This is in parallel to an independent but related SO that deals with gender but more from an advocacy standpoint. For that the program works with traditional and religious leaders to pull out parts of the Islamic text that pertain to women’s rights to use in messages communicated via radio and other channels to convince men that it is okay for women to play untraditional roles.

Women-organized savings and loan cooperatives in a community as a standalone activity will empower women and give them financial literacy and household literacy training. In addition, it will feed into and help achieve many other parts of a project by giving them the ability to plan, save, access small amounts of credit to buy nutritious foods, etc.
A program in Sierra Leone supporting Ebola survivors is offering financial planning services for women. While focused on women, it involves household decisions-making processes and ensuring there is understanding and agreement in the household to avoid gender-based violence, which can be a risk when women receive benefits not received by men.

A project in Zimbabwe that was showcased at the recent TOPS Breastfeeding Seminar, had men writing what they thought they were doing to support breastfeeding and women writing what they would like men to do to support their breastfeeding. A skilled negotiator facilitated discussions and helped different perspectives come together. This is an effective model that could transfer over to many areas.

As an example of enhancing social cohesion, CARE did a conflict mitigation project with a food security and WASH component. When conflict arose between two communities around a new water system, the conflict mitigation group supported community leaders to find a solution while the new water lines were being installed. An example of integration and of optimizing the sequencing of activities.

A program in Central America had a strong component of social cohesion building as a standalone effort that later became integrated as a bedrock for the program. In contexts such as El Salvador and Honduras, there is a lack of social cohesion due to the high levels of violence. Gang violence as well as unresolved war memories contribute to community members’ feelings of no justice, no control over their own security. In such contexts, conflict resolution and peace-building programming are necessary to make it possible to come in with other interventions since development work cannot take root when there is no social cohesion. Activities for youth include building work opportunities, livelihoods and afterschool activities, to avoid joining gangs.

Small Group Discussion: Cross Cutting Issues

Each group was assigned a cross cutting issue to discuss, guided by the following questions:

- What has helped you to determine when and why standalone efforts may be more effective than integrated efforts?
- Do standalone efforts always phase into an integrated approach?
- What are examples of when this is and is not true?
- What new capacities/skills/practices might be required to carry out this work?

By standalone effort, we don’t mean an activity that has nothing to do with our other programming, but rather that it is not integrated into another IR. There may be times when we need to look at a cross cutting issue in and of itself, not related to health, not related to agriculture, or to the social safety net, etc. For example, a gender dialogue might have to happen as a standalone effort before it is possible to plan and carry out activities such as increasing women’s access to market.
Social Accountability of Institutions Strengthened

- Community mapping as a potential activity to identify needs and available resources, and then advocating up to those systems for what type of support they might need.
- There are different lenses through which you can see social accountability of institutions. Social accountability of government systems, of communities, and of our own organizations, and partners.
- In order to succeed, there have to be observable results in the short term in the form of shared benefits.
- In terms of necessary new capacities: communications, advocacy, negotiation and awareness of existing government processes and mechanisms.
- For implementing organizations, it might be useful to add capacity in field anthropology, preferably from the country itself, to help design these interventions.
- Important to remember our partners’ ability and capacity as well.

Social Cohesion Enhanced

- Activities to enhance social cohesion can be justified as standalone efforts when they are a precursor to the rest of the program activities. Examples include contexts where conflicts need to be addressed, and where negotiations for women’s rights need to take place, before other interventions can start.
- The outcome of the standalone effort should support the other program activities (comparing to the removal of a bottleneck).
- A capacity that will be required is analytic competency – the ability to look at a Theory of Change and say: ‘this is not working because a and b.’

Gender Equity and Youth Opportunities Increased

- Standalone efforts do not always phase into an integrated approach. Sometimes gender efforts, for example, are met with resistance resulting in them being siloed.
- It may be more effective to work with those who are interested in a topic and then, if demand increases, be inclusive.
- If gender really comes off as "women's empowerment" to a predominantly male audience, people can lose interest quickly.
- Building social cohesion needs to come from mutual interests and building capacity to work together. Adding on too much could be a disincentive.
- The focus on key issues that bring people together around mutual interests and keep them interested and working together is important, but these may be missed opportunities for integrating peace building (as we heard), youth and gender.
- Importance of targeted strategies that explicitly reach youth audiences, especially when it is a challenge otherwise to get youth to the table. At the same time, once you have
begun to engage effectively with youth, it’s important to follow up with efforts that make the rest of the community engaged so that the outreach is not done in isolation/vacuum with only the youth group.

- The particularities of working with youth can include differences in use of cellphone, internet, the nature of employment (short term, seasonal, etc.), and, their different perception of risk, etc.
- Strategies and tools that are unique to reach youth can include sports, music, and other cultural trends that might be more effective with youth than with the broader community.

**Laurie added:** Use your theories of change to figure out where these standalone efforts may be more effective than others! Generally, if you end up with a big barrier that prevents progress, it is usually a good indication that you may need some standalone efforts that are later integrated into the other work.

**Small Group Discussion: Sustainability**

![Sustainability Diagram](image)

Small groups discussed the following general questions along with group-specific questions, all guided by the sustainability framework:

- What kind of adjustments are necessary to current programming to sustain (replace) resources supplied by projects?
- How do we plan and implement, and what is the role of community input?
How do we determine ‘success’ in our programs?

What are some necessary adjustments to sustain beneficiary demand for project-initiated services after the end of a project?

- Linking value to the service provided. When we know what is locally valued and in demand, complementary services can be created. One needed service can be embedded with something that is wanted. People may not be willing to pay for a needed training for example, but if you link that to something that is wanted, they will pay and get both.
- Using marketing models to promote a value or service. By building a business case for an intervention, we can create financial incentives, and also involve the private sector. If a service within a livelihoods program, for example, is provided at a discount in the short term, beneficiaries will afford a higher price later on.
- Building linkages to existing institutions. Working with local and high-level institutions to get them participating in programming. Using language that helps them understand that you will help them meet their goals to incentivize institutional integration. This will create local and high-level champion institutions who are invested and engaged in continuing the program, since they are experiencing success and meeting their own goals.
- Of the four components that need to be sustained, capacity will be the most difficult. As staff changes, knowledge can go away or be dissipated with each transition.
- Assumptions we need to make in our sustainability planning: we assume rational incentives and values, we assume that public policy direction is constant and we assume the economic situation would be constant. As we plan and implement, in order to maintain sustainability, we need to have a feedback loop through all stakeholders so that we continuously consult, assess, plan, and validate with all stakeholders.
- For success, we need to have post-evaluations as well as a learning agenda for Food for Peace development activities.

What are some of the necessary adjustments to sustain service provider interest in service provision?

- There are many different types of service providers – public sector versus private sector, for example.
- Looking at the framework, different approaches will be needed to motivate different kinds of service providers and keeping them interested in service provision in the long term. Private sector providers may need a different kind of capacity building than public sector ones, for example. This will require an adjustment within your team on how they approach working with the different type of providers.
- It will be important to help service providers (especially private sector) become more community focused by creating a link between them and the community in terms of interest and focus. This will require behavior change.
- Helping the local community exercise their voice or organize their needs, so that service providers can respond to them, ensuring a match between needs and provided services.
- Identify where communities are and the economic continuum of demand, i.e. can they access the services available to them and can they pay for them?

What are some of the necessary adjustments to sustain or replace resources supplied by projects?

- We need to rethink and reemphasize how individuals or groups are motivated and assess that at a community level to be context specific.
- How can we leverage some of the SBC gains and lessons learned from our work at a household level, and translate that into systems?
- Engaging community leaders and local partners, understanding their priorities to ensure alignment and sustainability.
- We need more sustainability research and studies so we can rely on evidence.
- Importance of clearly defining and discussing expectations around sustainability, preferably at the outset or even before the beginning of a project, with all stakeholders. Idea for implementing partners to create standards of services and inputs, so we are all offering the same.
- Creating ownership among the community, including empowering local NGOs.

Necessary adjustments to sustain the technical and managerial capacities so that service providers can continue to operate independently of the project

- Plan from the outset to accommodate for shocks (contingency planning, crisis modifier, etc.).
- Engage with the private sector with respect to the sustainability criteria that addresses issues related to motivation and resources.
- Have a deliberate strategy for capacity building of service providers that includes continuous training and education rather than one-off trainings of trainers.
- Identify change agents and catalysts at the community level and deliberately link them to service providers. Often these individuals are volunteers at the project startup.
- Find ways to incentivize learning from failures and challenges. There is much more learning that can be done and progress towards sustainability to be made, if we study where we have come up short.
- Assumptions:
  - We often assume service providers exist whose capacity can be built, which is not always the case.
  - We often assume that shocks will not happen, but experience shows we always should assume the opposite.
- Determinants of success:
o Beyond impact indicators, we should be able to see transparent and consistent learning throughout the project as a success in itself.

o Diversified and shock resistant livelihoods strategies among our target population.

o Male engagement in women empowerment initiatives.

o A linkage between formal and informal structures at the community level at the end of the project.

- Importance of engaging the community in defining sustainability from the outset of the project – what does sustainability look like for them and what is their role in making it happen?

**Necessary adjustments to programming so that we sustain the linkage between beneficiaries and the systems that are strengthened under SO2**

- Necessary outcomes of assessing the local context:
  o Mapping of (project) constraints, opportunities and entities with which we would link, to figure out what we are capable of doing based on what is available to us in that specific community.
  o Understanding of what links are already there and working, and what links are not and why that is the case.
  o Understanding where the objectives of those entities may align with each other and with our project.

- Necessary adjustments to planning and implementation:
  o Increase focus on institutions.
  o Have a solid plan in place for withdrawing direct engagement and support to beneficiaries and institutions. Ensure local ownership.
  o Good sensitization and understanding of expectations that communities and institutions will take over. Make transition process transparent.
  o Be aware of shocks and how they may affect (and ruin) systems that we have built.
  o Use an adaptive management approach.

- Determinants of success:
  o Linkages must be part of how we measure success.

- Building exclusive linkages may be a risk if they fail. Important to build capacity of the community for them to build their own linkages.

**What were common themes among all group discussions?**

- Local ownership
- Adaptive management
- Crisis modifiers
- SBC for individuals within the institutions/systems
- The need for more project sustainability studies (and follow up 5, 10 years later)
Plenary Discussion: The Way Forward

**How do Food for Peace and implementing partners (IPs) need to adapt in order to support implementation under the 2016-2025 FFP strategy?**

- RFAs need to reflect what kind of impact FFP wants to reach – deep or broad? Number of beneficiaries or system? Focus on direct or indirect beneficiaries?
- When we look at capacity building among service providers within institutions, we will measure something different from beneficiary reach. A new set of criteria is needed for measurement. The indicator discussion needs to happen.
- One program does systems strengthening and then another program comes in with a different mandate and does things that affect this. Encourage USAID to help with coordination of efforts. Emergencies are great examples when this type of coordination between initiatives often happens.

**Joan Whelan of USAID described what the Office of Food for Peace has identified as internal issues in implementing the new strategy:**

It’s important that if we ask our implementing partners to change emphasis and take the time to strengthen systems and improve sustainability, our staff must understand and accept the implications of the change. Results taking longer to reach for example. It has been a challenge to make sure everyone is properly trained in the new strategy internally, especially due to high turnover, a large organization, and lots of new staff. It is important that everyone speaks with one voice. We are looking over language in internal documents – procurement, reporting, etc. – for both emergency and development awards and want to start reflecting more internally, making sure we are funding what we want to be funding.

- Request from CRS to FFP: Greater transparency on the part of FFP for upcoming countries of focus may allow us to do more in-depth assessments of systems and institutions.
- Something we struggle with regarding private sector engagement is our own staff and teams, to update their approach and the way they look at these programs. We should not be looking at the private sector ourselves, but train locals to do this. It demands a change of perspective or mindset for market/systems strengthening.
- We need to link to stakeholder mapping. We need to engage more deeply with stakeholders and also engagement with government platforms.
- There has never been a demand or supply when it comes to coordination between projects and organizations. To make donors, local institutions, and different projects funded in the same area coordinate and work together will mean a completely new way of working, a change that is demanding.
- The demand for coordination must be integrated in the RFA. However, we can only do so much. Even if we want to coordinate, maybe other organizations or projects don’t.
- It will be important for local USAID missions to be involved and encourage coordination.
- In Mali, the mission sent letters to all USAID partners saying which partners they needed to coordinate with, and how (both USAID and non-USAID). This changed the entire project completely.
- Call for any final comments:
  - First group work touched on staff capacity strengthening. The new strategy makes us think of what advocacy means? Ensuring that community voices are heard through all levels of institutions will require capacity of staff and communities to advocate.
  - Step back and look at regulations and how that may impact what we are trying to do.
  - Are our staff, chiefs of party and managers well-versed in adaptive management?