



TOWARD STRATEGIES FOR ENDING RURAL HUNGER

A REPORT FROM THE
ENDING RURAL HUNGER PROJECT

B | Global Economy and Development
at BROOKINGS

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Helena Hlavaty for exceptional research assistance, as well as David Batcheck and Jeannine Ajello for communications support.

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Brookings gratefully acknowledges the program support provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Introduction

Four years ago, the members of the United Nations committed to end hunger and malnutrition around the world by 2030, the 2nd of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Today, that goal is falling further from sight. Without dramatic, transformational changes, it will not be met.

Over the last four years, the *Ending Rural Hunger* project at the Brookings Institution has tracked progress toward SDG2 through a comprehensive quantitative assessment of countries' needs, policies, and resources in food and nutrition security (FNS).¹ This final update note features lessons learned from the 20 country case studies and background reports commissioned as part of the project, and is accompanied by a complete update of the Ending Rural Hunger database, available freely online at endingruralhunger.org.²

The overall picture is not optimistic. Globally, hunger has apparently risen over the past 3 years, after decades of steady decline. As of 2018, there are an estimated 822 million undernourished people in the world, up from 785 million in 2015.³ While there has been some progress in malnutrition, the pace of progress remains too slow to meet the 2025 and 2030 internationally-agreed targets (though many individual countries will meet at least some of these goals).⁴ There are still 150 million children who are stunted around the world, some 22 percent of the total population. And agricultural productivity remains unacceptably low in many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The average cereal yield of low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa is just 1,500 kg/ha—less than one-fifth of the level of the United States.

The 2030 goals set a vision of a transformational change in FNS policies and outcomes. To date, there is no evidence such a transformation is under way. As Figure 1 below shows, a business-as-usual scenario in countries will leave most people behind on specific hunger-related SDG targets. In the case of overweight children, the business-as-usual scenario shows the problem getting worse, not better. And even this may be over-optimistic if climate change and conflict continue to worsen.

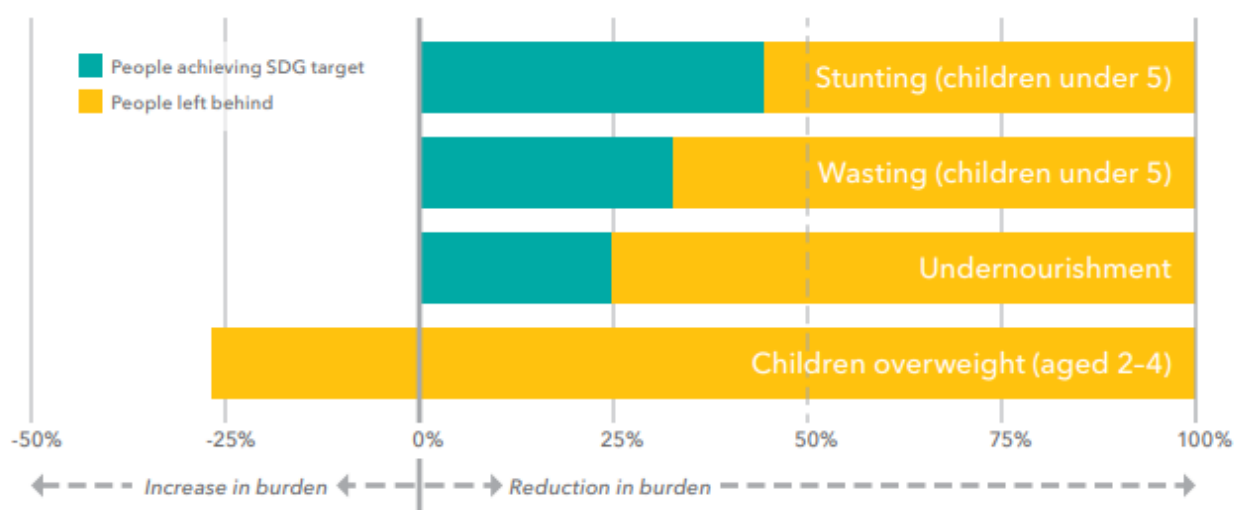
¹ As explained in the original *Ending Rural Hunger* flagship report, the project focuses specifically on rural hunger in developing countries; hunger in developed countries and in urban areas, while issues of important concern, require different types of interventions, which are beyond the scope of this project.

² This database will soon be transferred to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), who will maintain it going forward.

³ FAO, State of Food Insecurity 2018 Report.

⁴ Global Nutrition Report 2018

Figure 1: Projected progress toward meeting SDG targets by 2030, business-as-usual scenario



Source: H. Kharas, J. W. McArthur, and K. Rasmussen, How Many People Will the World Leave Behind? Assessing Current Trajectories on the Sustainable Development Goals, Global Economy and Development Working Paper 123 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018)

Meanwhile, international support for agriculture and FNS is lagging, and continues to be reactive rather than proactive: during a crisis, donors will come together and pledge new money, but these promises are all too often forgotten once famines fade from the headlines and food price spikes decline. Collectively, donors spent \$12.7 billion on official development assistance to agriculture and FNS in 2017, up 3.4 percent from the year before. This level of spending is not commensurate with the scope of the challenge of ending hunger by 2030, nor is it aligned with people's perceptions of global priorities. A recent survey of citizens across 28 countries concluded that ending hunger was, on average, the most important priority among the SDGs.⁵ And while there is scarce funding available for development assistance, countries continue to spend billions of dollars a year on agricultural subsidies for their own farmers, which distort global markets and food prices. All major countries, including those in the OECD as well as China and India, have significant agricultural subsidies that distort and fragment global food markets. The remainder of this note sketches out what a transformational change would require. It begins with a discussion of national FNS strategies in developing countries—the core driver of progress toward ending rural hunger. Next it considers how to finance these strategies, including the crucial roles of national governments, official development

⁵ See Ipsos, "Awareness of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is Highest in Emerging Countries", <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/global-advisor-un-sdgs>.

assistance, and the private sector. It then assesses how the global environment can both accelerate and impede the success of these national strategies, and concludes with an overview of some of the biggest challenges in achieving the end of rural hunger: building holistic food systems in light of increasing environmental stresses, meeting the commitment to leave no one behind in ending rural hunger, and strengthening accountability mechanisms at both the national and international level.

National strategies for ending rural hunger

The SDGs were designed to be global and universal, defining a common vision of shared progress. Turning that vision into reality, however, will largely depend on what happens at the country level; sustainable development is a country-led and country-owned process. Clear and credible national strategies for ending rural hunger allow governments to “domesticate” the global goals, by crafting locally context-dependent strategies. And while not every investment or policy development will necessarily be centrally planned as part of a national strategy, an overall framework that defines goals, coordinates actions, and tracks progress is crucial for catalyzing agricultural transformations.

Most countries have already established some sort of national FNS strategy (indeed, many have several, partially overlapping strategies). These strategies are frequently reported in governments’ Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), a key mechanism for follow-up and review of the SDGs.⁶ The core challenge, however, is to build a strategy that is credible, legitimate, rooted in domestic institutions, and capable of actually shifting behavior. This section, therefore, discusses the elements of successful national strategies.

The first key step in building an FNS strategy is a baseline mapping of a country’s FNS needs. (The *Ending Rural Hunger* dataset is designed to allow for such a mapping.) By benchmarking a country’s data against similar peer countries—whether considered by region, income group, or agricultural zone—governments can honestly appraise where they are doing well and where there is the most scope for improvement.

A starting point is to assess trends in hunger outcomes. Unfortunately, several indicators of hunger are moving in contradictory directions. For example, rural poverty is improving in many places (rural poverty should be considered as a proxy for hunger: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has identified expanded

⁶ These VNRs are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs/>.

rural social protection as one of the fastest ways of reducing hunger), while modelled estimates of undernourishment have risen. Correlations suggest that just one-third of the movement in undernourishment is linked to movements in rural poverty. There are similarly low correlations between rural poverty, undernourishment and self-reported food insecurity. These differences reflect the complexity of measuring hunger—dietary diversity and other experiential indicators may be complementary but not interchangeable proxies.⁷

Given these complexities, policymakers need to establish rich empirical understandings of their particular FNS contexts. For instance, our data suggest that both Malawi and Angola have significant needs in reducing the productivity gap in agriculture as compared to other countries. Within this, they have similarly large shortfalls in agricultural infrastructure; yet Malawi's shortcomings are concentrated in banking and finance systems in rural communities, while for Angola the bigger challenge is physical infrastructure such as road density and distance to fertilizer plants. Without digging in to such details of a needs assessment, governments can easily be led astray in developing a strategy; for example, for years India attempted to tackle its malnutrition problems by increasing grain supply, while the real needs were in sanitation and micronutrient supply (see Box 1).

Moreover, successful country strategies must look beyond national averages to assess the food security of different regions and vulnerable groups. In Senegal, for example, food insecurity has a sharp geographic focus, with particularly high rates of hunger and malnutrition in the south of the country (see Box 2). It is clear that strategies appropriate for some regions will not be effective in others. Similarly, both regional and national averages can mask differences in the FNS needs of particular vulnerable groups, such as households headed by women. To effectively design interventions, policymakers need to understand the full complexity and diversity of citizens' FNS needs.

⁷ See reports from the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project III at www.fantaproject.org/research.

Box 1: Diagnosing the root sources of India's malnutrition

Since as early as the 1960s, India's policy efforts to combat hunger have primarily revolved around food subsidy programs, based on the notion that calorie consumption and hunger are inversely related. That is, the more calories one consumes, the less hungry he or she becomes. Thus, food supply expansion was the primary instrument for improving food and nutrition security.

Over time, however, numerous researchers began to question this approach. In 2013, for instance, Dreze and Sen showed that, despite having considerably higher per capita income, India's population exhibited worse nutrition status than the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that targeting food sufficiency alone was not addressing nutritional needs. Around the same time, Hammer and Spears (2013) showed that a community sanitation program in India was associated with an increase in children's height-for-age z-scores, which reflected Virmani (2007)'s finding that sanitation and nutrition are closely related. These findings raised the question—would India have been better off putting more of its limited resources towards sanitation investments, rather than food subsidies?

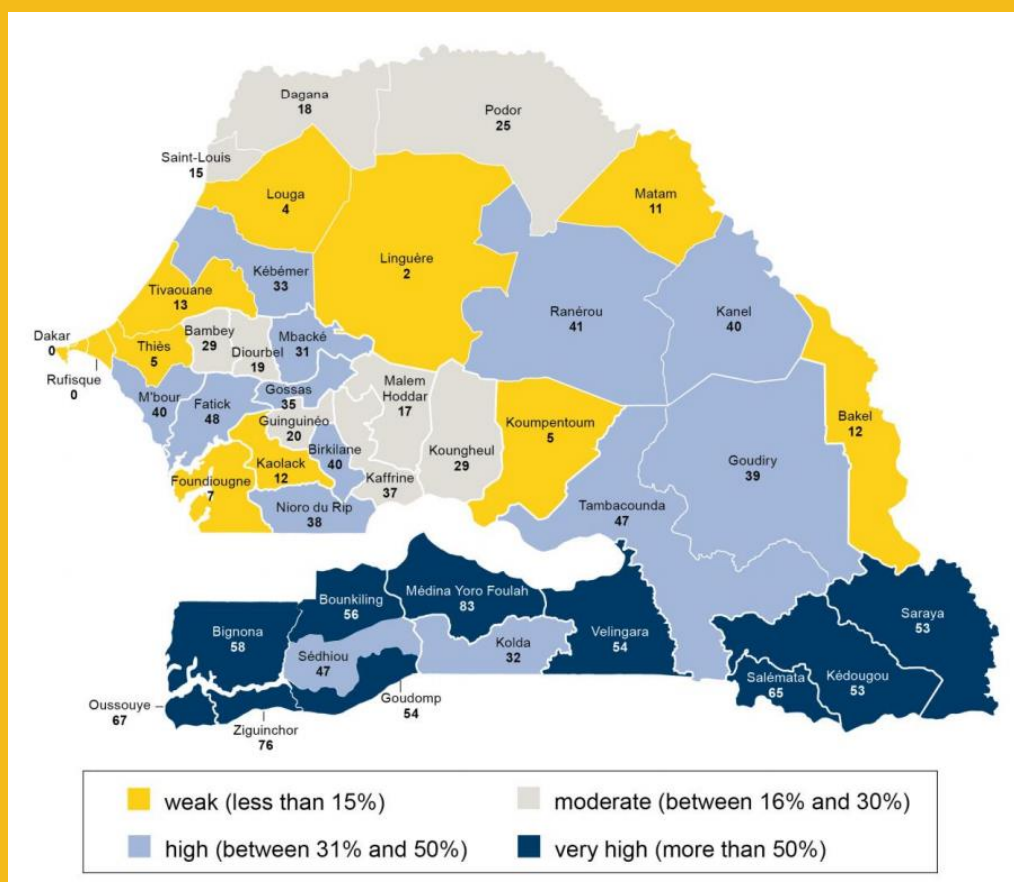
Today, researchers and policymakers alike recognize that India's FNS interventions should shift from increasing grain-based calorie consumption to targeting malnutrition directly. In other words, India's core challenge is not a lack of food supply, but rather a lack of specific nutrients and poor sanitation systems. Accordingly, officials have begun to prioritize sanitation improvements and agricultural reform over further food subsidies, recognizing that no amount of even the highest quality food will help a child suffering from chronic diarrhea. Indeed, the Indian case shows that a careful assessment of needs is critical to ensuring that limited resources are being allocated most effectively. While Indian policymakers are right to worry about the extent of malnutrition in the country, caloric undernourishment was not the central issue, and further boosting the supply of grains will not solve the problem.

Note: This account is adapted from the Ending Rural Hunger India case study, "Food, Hunger, and Nutrition in India: A Case of Redistributive Failure," by Surjit Bhalla. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

Box 2: Pinpointing food insecurity in Senegal

In some regions of Senegal, the proportion of households with poor or limited food consumption is as low as zero, as is the case in the capital region. Meanwhile, in Ziguinchor, which lies in Senegal's south, that number is 76 percent. Overall, the southern regions of Senegal are disproportionately affected by FN insecurity, due to a range of factors including regional conflict and substandard infrastructure. However, there are also intra-regional differences masked by the regional averages. For instance, the northeast of Senegal has a high rate of food insecurity, however, the Matam department within that region does not. The reverse is true in other regions, where certain communities suffer from high food insecurity even if the region as a whole has low food insecurity.

Figure 2: Prevalence of food insecurity in Senegal



Note: This account is adapted from the case study, "Ending Rural Hunger: The Case of Senegal" by Ibrahima Hathie, Boubacar Seydi, Lamine Samaké, and Suwadu Sakho-Jimbira. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

Additionally, needs assessments must not only focus on a static understanding of current deprivations, but also a forward-looking, dynamic understanding of evolving vulnerabilities. This is particularly important for countries most vulnerable to climate change, who need to be preparing to build resilience to climate shocks. For example, Ethiopia has developed a broad climate resilient green growth strategy, that incorporates both adaptation and mitigation efforts (see Box 3). A thorough understanding of FNS vulnerabilities can allow countries to “stress test” their FNS systems, allowing them to act quickly and purposively if and when shocks arise.

Box 3: How Ethiopia is building climate resiliency into its FNS strategy

Countries that recognize and plan for environmental shocks will be better prepared to handle their consequences. Ethiopia is an example of a country that has made a conscious effort to put climate change at the forefront of its FNS policy. Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP) are the key, overarching strategy documents guiding the country's development progress. The first GTP (GTP I) spanned 2010 to 2015 and focused on agriculture and rural development. The document outlines disaster mitigation and management strategies to reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks, especially as they relate to food security. The strategies include increasing food reserves, establishing disaster-driven population resettlement programs, and building credit-driven safety net programs for families. GTP I also marked the adoption of Ethiopia's Climate Resilience Strategy, which represents the government's effort to increase preparedness for and responses to environmental shocks. Just as SDG2 calls for resilient agricultural practices, so, too, does Ethiopia's strategy outline a range of investments in climate change adaptation and mitigation technology.

In GTP II, the subsequent 5-year development plan, Ethiopia established the Climate Resilient Green Growth strategy (CRGE) as a key part of its FNS strategy. The strategy has four pillars: (1) the adoption of agricultural and land use efficiency measures to achieve food security and increase farmer income; (2) increasing forest coverage to reduce greenhouse emissions; (3) expanding environmentally-friendly power-generating schemes; (4) and introducing modern and energy-efficient technologies. Since 2008, Ethiopia has also had a Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP), which is designed to conserve soil fertility lost due to difficult topography of the

country and to preserve biodiversity, sustain agricultural growth, and reduce vulnerabilities resulting from chronic food insecurity.

To promote the success of its ambitious strategies, Ethiopia's government has undergone extensive institutional reform, with several CRGE units being established across ministries. Despite this, Ethiopia still faces many implementation challenges. For example, critics note that the CRGE strategy is not well integrated with GTP II. Additionally, GTP II was developed without clearly set resilience indicators. Looking forward, the country will need to continue to build on and expand its climate resilience program, but it is already off to a promising start.

Note: This account is adapted from the case study, "Ending Rural Hunger: The case of Ethiopia" by Eyerusalem Siba and Biruk Tekle. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>

Once a thorough assessment of needs is complete, governments should map these needs into a coherent and actionable strategy: who will do what, where, and by when—and who will pay for it. Given the complexities of food and agricultural systems, such strategies are necessarily multifaceted, touching on everything from infrastructure and transportation investments to higher education and trade policy. This presents a fundamental conundrum in designing national FNS strategies: is it better to have a single strategy that incorporates all of these critical sectors, or multiple strategies more narrowly focused on specific aspects of FNS? The correct answer to this question will depend on the political and bureaucratic structures of particular countries, yet there are important trade-offs that governments (and civil society) should be aware of. Single national strategies can be effective in galvanizing attention, allocating financing, and identifying and maximizing positive spillovers across sectors; yet given the complexity and number of actors involved, they can be difficult to execute. A series of more confined strategies, on the other hand, may be more easily managed, but can fail to coordinate action across sectors and ultimately lead to only piecemeal solutions. In Tanzania's experience (see Box 4), the government's efforts to embed the goal of ending hunger across a wide range of disparate strategies ultimately led to a disconnect between the ambitions of policy and available resources, making desired outcomes difficult to achieve in practice.

Box 4: Strengths and weaknesses of Tanzania's decentralized FNS strategy

Tanzania embedded FNS issues across a wide variety of policies and programs until 2016. These included, but were not limited to, a long-term development vision, a series of five-year development plans (designed to guide progress towards the vision), and a broad range of policies governing key issues in agriculture, food production, food security, and infrastructure, among others. Some national initiatives are linked to regional initiatives, enabling Tanzania's efforts to work in parallel with regional (and global) goals.

Although Tanzania's policies were comprehensive and well-structured, numerous factors affected the transition between policy and practice, including pace of policy reforms, quality of implementation plans, gaps in infrastructure, caliber of human resources, and, perhaps most importantly, availability of financial resources. Achieving Tanzania's goals required sustainable access to funding, which was often very difficult to secure. Tanzania's budget often failed to allocate necessary funds to transform the country's goals into reality, resulting in a high dependence on uncertain and volatile donor funding. Also, with numerous policies in the works, funding had to be passed through various channels, rather than being unified under a single policy or strategy. In addition to financial challenges, embedding FNS goals across a range of policies required meticulous coordination. The difficulties and challenges of implementing a decentralized FNS strategy led Tanzania to undertake a complete institutional transformation in 2015 and 2016, which continues to demand time and resources to coordinate the diverse group of FNS stakeholders.

Tanzania's new approach allows policymakers to develop a systematic FNS strategy. But for this to succeed, there needs to be greater support—both internally and externally—for meeting FNS goals.

Note: This account is adapted from the case study, "Ending Rural Hunger: The Case of Tanzania", by Roselyne Alphonse. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

From strategy to implementation

Even the best designed strategies, of course, mean little if not accompanied by serious commitment to implementation. Yet too often implementation receives scant attention from top level policymakers; carefully laid out strategies end up discarded, lost among other bureaucratic priorities, or overtaken by events. Who specifically has responsibility for each action item in a national strategy? Do they have the resources—financial, information, personnel—and incentives necessary to do so? How can governments, civil society, and donors work to improve state capacity to make implementation of FNS strategies more effective? Taking implementation seriously requires grappling with these questions.

The case of Brazil is an example of a government making the end of hunger into a political priority (see Box 5). There, a new FNS strategy was not just a technocratic plan but explicitly linked to President Lula's political mandate. That is, one of the core purposes of the strategy was to reinforce political significance to investing in agriculture and ending hunger, and to serve as a commitment device binding political leaders to these goals. Lula understood that long-term strategies need to be developed and considered through a political lens, with an understanding of politicians' incentives and constraints. This allowed for FNS advocates to take advantage of political windows of opportunity, where incentives are aligned for ambitious reform programs. When political realignments created demand for strong FNS strategies—as occurred in Brazil—there was a plan that was ready to roll out.

One particular challenge in implementing complex strategies is coordination among key actors, both inside and outside the government. In their 2015 report on “Achieving Zero Hunger,” the FAO, IFAD, and WFP identified a two-track strategy: social protection to raise the incomes of the poor, and investment in productive activities to ensure a supply of safe, nutritious food. The latter, in turn, has significant public and private components, with the private sector expected to contribute in all areas, especially in soil and water conservation, genetic improvement, storage marketing, and processing. The public sector, for its part, would contribute to these activities but also focus on improving transport and electricity infrastructure and the institutional framework of land titling, safety regulations, and rural finance, as well as research and development.

Box 5: The political underpinnings of Brazil's Zero Hunger strategy

The 2002 Presidential Election in Brazil brought to power Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Lula, of the Workers Party, had made the urgent need to improve social inclusion and economic justice key messages of his campaign. When Lula took office as Brazil's president in 2003, he therefore had a strong political mandate to introduce ambitious new policies aimed at alleviating poverty and eradicating hunger.

The centerpiece of Lula's FNS strategy was the Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) program, a set of more than 30 complementary programs dedicated to ensuring food security and combatting structural causes of hunger and social exclusion. The Fome Zero program built on a plan Lula had originally endorsed in 2001, 2 years before taking office. Lula's administration also launched the National Council of Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) in response to demands for obtaining better visibility in policy dialogue from both family farming and agribusiness. Fome Zero had a significant impact on food security outcomes at the national level, and enabled Brazil to meet its MDG of halving extreme poverty and hunger 5 years ahead of the 2015 deadline.

In parallel to his domestic efforts tackling hunger, Lula prioritized development cooperation as a key instrument of a very active foreign policy. Brazil's development cooperation in agriculture "correspond[ed] to an assertive effort of the Brazilian government to promote its expertise in this area and, at the same time, strengthen its international reputation." The prominent launch of Zero Hunger in 2003, therefore, had a significant influence on Brazil's cooperation agreements and projects with developing countries over time, fostering debates in various international forums around the responsibilities of federal governments in the eradication of poverty and hunger. Not only did Brazil successfully prioritize hunger, but it took action—both domestically and internationally—to transform that idea into impact.

Note: This account is adapted from the Ending Rural Hunger case study "Brazilian Cooperation and Agriculture" by Isabel Cantinho. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

With multiple agencies carrying out different aspects of FNS strategies, not all will necessarily have the same incentives and resources at their disposal. For example, ministries of agriculture may be focused on raising national food supplies that mostly depend on large commercial farm performance, rather than on smallholder farmer families whose needs are more relevant for food and nutrition security. Bureaucratic infighting and divergent interests can make it difficult for staff and leadership from multiple agencies to work together seamlessly. Without clear top-down direction and established processes for resolving inter-agency conflicts, bureaucrats can end up spending too much of their time and effort counteracting one another.

Coordination with outside actors is probably even more crucial—and often more difficult to achieve. Two key outside actors are donor agencies and the private sector. Both are important sources of finance and knowledge for FNS, yet both may also have their own interests and incentives that are only imperfectly aligned with those of the government. Donors' visions for how to transform agricultural sectors may differ from those of the government, and they may be encouraging reform programs that governments find politically costly. Meanwhile, the private sector's profit motive is effective in achieving agricultural transformation at scale, yet may conflict with some of the government's other FNS priorities, such as regulatory concerns and equitable approaches to land and water utilization. Ultimately, while there is no silver bullet to resolve these persistent differences, governments need to build coordination mechanisms that allow them to productively collaborate with outside actors, recognizing their interests will not always perfectly align. Multistakeholder governance structures that encourage knowledge sharing are one potential mechanism to improve this coordination.

Box 6: The challenge of improving coordination in Nigeria

In Nigeria, a diverse array of stakeholders contributes to FNS planning and implementation. Key actors include the ministries of agriculture, health, and education, among others. Each entity has its own strategies and challenges, which can often be an obstacle to effective coordination in carrying out the country's FNS strategy.

Perhaps the most critical coordination challenge is a lack of sufficient and sustainable financial resources. Because of Nigeria's fragmented FNS

strategy, funding FNS initiatives often relies on securing multiple funding streams, which is, in and of itself, difficult. To further complicate matters, Nigeria is heavily reliant on donor funding. Donor priorities are not always perfectly aligned with country priorities, and donors often attach stipulations to their funding that are difficult for developing countries to meet. For example, some development partners have required that their disbursements are contingent on the payment of counterpart funds by the Nigerian government. The government has struggled to make these payments, causing numerous delays in FNS-project implementation.

The government is currently making efforts to better coordinate the activities of all actors working towards FNS, including among state and federal governments. Only limited progress has been made, however, in promoting government coordination of donor activity. Ultimately, all stakeholders will need to recognize each others' strengths and balance their own priorities against the common goal. Coordination is no easy task, but with the right mechanisms, governments can significantly improve implementation through stronger coordination.

Note: This account is adapted from the case study "Ending Rural Hunger: The Case of Nigeria", by Aderibigbe S. Olomola. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

Finally, all implementation plans need to include mechanisms for adjusting policies over the lifetime of a strategy. Governments need to monitor and evaluate their FNS activities, and feed this information back into ongoing planning and implementation discussions. Policies may need to be adjusted due to unforeseen shocks (such as a drought), the availability of new information (such as knowledge of new technologies or seed varieties), or simply because an intervention is not delivering the results that were expected. Yet such course correction can also be difficult, as it requires judgment calls and there is a risk of abandoning policies too quickly which may take time to deliver results. For a strategy to be influential—that is for actors to reorient their activities so that they align with the strategy—there must be some expectation that the strategy will persist over the long term. Thus, while governments should be open to adjusting their approach, constant revisions to a strategy could weaken its effectiveness.

Box 7: How Uganda incorporates regular policy reviews in its FNS strategy

Uganda has developed a broad-ranging FNS strategy that includes transforming its agricultural sector. It has explicitly sought to develop this strategy in light of lessons learned from the successes and failures of previous strategies. One of Uganda's key strategic documents, the 5-year Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan (ASSP) was designed largely based on lessons learned from implementation of a previous plan, the Agriculture Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan (DSIP). The DSIP, though it achieved many successes, suffered from weak coordination between agencies and between levels of government, as well as a lack of engagement of women, youth, and vulnerable groups. The ASSP specifically notes these earlier shortcomings, and seeks to address them.

Moreover, the ASSP includes mechanisms for ongoing review and updating of the plan's implementation. Regular technical working group meetings at the national level will assess the progress of ASSP implementing ministries, departments, and agencies. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF) will produce quarterly, semi-annual, and annual progress reports (based on inputs from ASSP implementing actors). In collaboration with sub-sector and technical support units, MAAIF will coordinate annual agricultural sector performance reviews to evaluate operationalization of each prior financial year. Furthermore, prior to the overall agriculture sector review, reviews will also take place at the district, regional, and national levels to give stakeholders an opportunity for reflection and planning. Uganda's approach allows the government to receive key feedback, which both can shape implementation of the current strategy as well as the design of future strategies.

Note: This account is adapted from the case study "Ending Rural Hunger: The Case of Uganda" by Gracious M. Diiro. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

Financing the end of rural hunger

Ending rural hunger will require more resources than are currently allocated. The national strategies that governments devise will be of little value if they do not have the means to carry them out—and indeed, previous experiences suggest a lack of dedicated funding is often a cause of failure (see, in particular, the Nigeria and

Tanzania case studies referenced above). Thus, governments will need to mobilize strong and diverse funding to support their FNS ambitions. Here we briefly review the prospects of three key sources of finance for ending rural hunger: domestic government spending, official development assistance, and private sector investment (both domestic and foreign).

As of 2015—the most recent data available—governments in low and middle-income countries spend an estimated \$520 billion on agriculture, forestry and fishing.⁸ This aggregate figure, of course, masks substantial variation across countries. On average, richer countries tend to spend more than poorer countries—not surprising given that they have more resources available overall, but notable as the greatest needs tend to be in the poorest countries.

These governments face a dual challenge. First, they need to increase the resources available for spending on agriculture. Though several governments have made a political commitment to increase this spending – most notably through the African Union’s Malabo Declaration, which calls on governments to allocate at least 10 percent of their budgets to agriculture – this has proven difficult to achieve in practice. For instance, the first biennial review of progress on the Malabo Declaration found that so far only 10 out of 47 African Union members met the target. Indeed, increasing spending on agriculture either means diverting money from other public expenditures or increasing the total tax intake, and both present substantial challenges for governments. The former is almost always challenging politically, as every dollar reallocated from some other spending priority creates a conflict with other stakeholders and supporters. Increasing the total intake, meanwhile, requires governments to extract revenues from citizens and corporations who may be reluctant and/or unable to pay, and may be both politically and practically difficult. Notably, increasing total tax revenues can have regressive impacts on income distribution when they are funded out of relatively flat taxes, such as value-added taxes. While economic growth will tend to lead to greater resource mobilization, absent substantial changes to economic fundamentals (such as, for instance, significantly higher revenues from natural resources following a new discovery or price shock), governments may struggle to come up with significantly more funding. This is particularly a problem for countries that are beginning to transition away from budgets reliant on development assistance, such as Ghana (see Box 8).

⁸ Based on analysis of FAO’s “General government expenditure on agriculture, forestry, fishing” and IFPRI’s “Percentage of agriculture expenditure in total GDP” data; for further details on these calculations, see Homi Kharas and John McArthur (2019), “Building the SDG economy: Needs, spending, and financing for universal achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”, Brookings Global Economy and Development Working Paper #131.

Box 8: The Challenge of Domestic Resource Mobilization in Ghana

In recent years, Ghana has experienced high economic growth, propelling the country to lower-middle income status. This designation, although certainly a sign of progress, has also proven problematic for Ghana's development efforts. As a middle-income country, Ghana is no longer eligible to receive certain types of donor funding that it has relied on in the past. With less development assistance available, Ghana is struggling to fill the gap in financing, as the government has not substantially increased its own spending on agriculture to offset slowing development assistance. The country's flagship agriculture and food security plan, the Medium-Term Agriculture Sector Investment Plan (METASIP), had 66.3 percent unmet need in 2015. This gap was expected to be covered by donors and philanthropists, but those contributions never materialized.

Rather than focusing on how to amass external funds, Ghana is now turning its attention to mobilizing more funds domestically. Part of the money may come from budget reallocation. The government has also reformed its tax revenue agencies, with coordination between the Tax Policy Unit and the Ghana Revenue Authority. Ultimately, Ghana is realizing that it will need greater domestic resources to help close the funding gap and finance SDG2 and other FNS objectives.

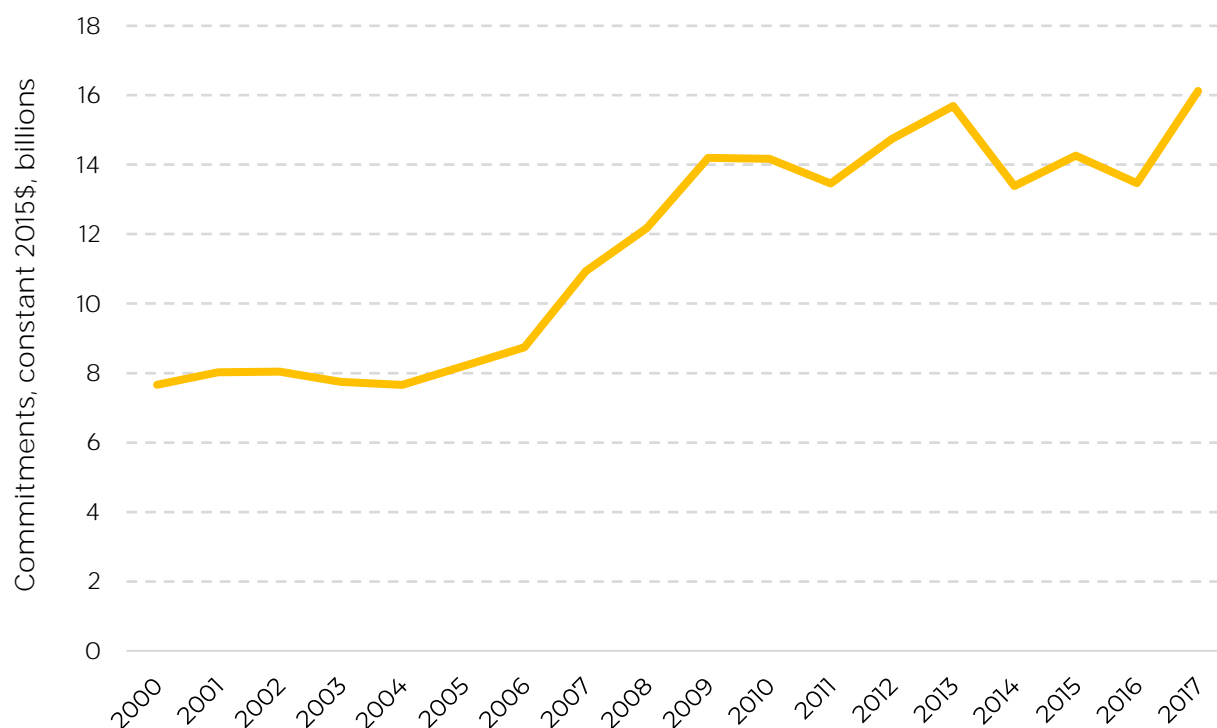
Note: This account is adapted from the case study "Ending Rural Hunger: The Case of Ghana" by Francis Mulangu. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

While governments can and should look to increase the domestic resources available for agriculture, for many countries—particularly the poorest—finding more money to spend is likely to be challenging. This leaves the second half of this challenge: increasing the efficiency of current spending. This is partly about allocation within the FNS budget—ensuring resources are directed at the most urgent priorities and where they can have the greatest impact. It is also about cutting down inefficiencies and leakages in project delivery. Yet again, a laser focus on squeezing efficiencies out of current budgets can sometimes backfire—aggressive demands to cut spending on administration and oversight can end up ultimately causing deeper inefficiencies and poorly functioning agencies.

In light of the challenges of getting more out of domestic government financing, then, greater funding from donors will also be necessary to achieve the end of rural

hunger. But here recent history also suggests reasons to be pessimistic. Official development assistance for FNS grew substantially between 2006 and 2009—i.e., during the height of the food price crisis—increasing by over 60 percent in real terms.⁹ Since then, however, commitments have been effectively flat, with no clear discernible increase. Unfortunately, there is little reason to expect any significant increase on the horizon. Indeed, in late 2017 the Trump Administration announced the United States would no longer be funding the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), a multistakeholder fund for agriculture that was set up in the midst of the food price crisis in 2009. The United States had been the single largest donor to the fund, contributing a cumulative \$628 million since its inception—nearly one-half of total contributions. Other donors have also scaled back their support for FNS, although these have been offset in part by expansions in aid from Germany and a few other countries. Overall, the world is not stepping up to the challenge of funding the end of hunger.

Figure 3: Official Development Assistance for FNS



Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD data

If the scale of additional resources is limited, the only other option is to increase the quality of foreign assistance for FNS—to do more with less (or ideally more with

⁹ For further details on calculating official development assistance for FNS, see the methodology section on the *Ending Rural Hunger* website.

more). This is, at least in part, about targeting resources to where they will have the most impact. The *Ending Rural Hunger* project assesses donors' targeting of their FNS aid based on three criteria: whether they spend resources in countries with high needs, with strong policies, and where resources are otherwise scarce. Donors do face some difficult trade-offs in this approach: many countries with high needs have weak policy environments, for instance. Yet beyond such inevitable trade-offs, many donors simply do not appear to have credible strategies for targeting their FNS aid where it will do the most good. Both Canada and the United States, for example, have struggled in developing their aid allocation mechanisms—it is often unclear on what criteria countries are selected, whether ostensible priority countries actually receive more aid, and how cross-cutting sectoral and thematic priorities will be implemented in practice (see Box 9). Overall, there is considerable scope for donors to improve both the quantity and the quality of their financial support for ending rural hunger.

Box 9: Comparing Canadian and American approaches to targeting FNS assistance

Canada and the United States are both major players in foreign assistance for FNS. Yet both have also struggled to direct their financing to the countries and projects where it could have the greatest impact.

Until recently, Canadian development assistance was focused on a list of priority focus countries. For example, in 2009, Canada committed to allocating 80 percent of its bilateral assistance to a set of 20 focus countries, while in 2014 these targets were adjusted to 90 percent in a set of 25 focus countries. While in principle focusing assistance on a smaller number of countries should allow for greater impact, in practice Canada struggled to meet these allocation targets. Moreover, it was often unclear on what basis countries were selected for inclusion on the list of focus countries, with the list routinely changing with little justification or proof of prior impact. Numerous key entities ranging from OECD experts to Canada's own Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development expressed grave concern about the lack of transparency regarding country selection, particularly given its significance for funding allocation. In 2009, Canada made food security one of its top development priorities with the launch of the Food Security Strategy (FSS). In practical terms, however, it is not clear this strategy had any meaningful impact on Canada's assistance to the sector.

More recently, in 2017, Canada announced a new development assistance strategy, the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). This policy does away with the list of focus countries, although it does call on Canada to spend more of its resources in sub-Saharan Africa. The new policy does not include FNS as a key priority, suggesting Canadian support for the sector may wane in the coming years. More generally, frequent changes of direction in Canadian policy make it difficult for both Canadian officials and developing country governments to make long term plans around Canadian assistance.

In contrast to Canada, the United States has never had a defined list of priority countries for its overall foreign assistance program. Under the Obama administration, the US did, however, introduce a food security-specific program—the Feed the Future initiative—which had clear country targeting. At launch, Feed the Future included 20 focus countries, but in 2017 this list was further narrowed to 12: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda. Countries are selected based on a combination of factors, including level of need, potential for growth stimulation, opportunities for partnership, and host government commitment, among others.¹⁰

In general, the targeting approach of Feed the Future appears promising. The problem, however, is that much American FNS aid is not part of the Feed the Future initiative. For example, between 2009 and 2013, the US disbursed nearly \$10 billion in total FNS aid, yet only one-third went to Feed the Future countries. Moreover, many countries receiving substantial FNS aid did not have particularly great FNS needs, including Morocco, Armenia, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. Thus, while in principle the United States has an effective program for targeting FNS aid, in practice the results are less promising.

Note: This account is adapted from the Ending Rural Hunger case studies “Canada’s food and nutrition strategies” by Matias E. Margulis and “The U.S. response to the challenge of global food and nutrition security” by David Hong. For further information, the entire studies can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>.

Finally, in addition to domestic government spending and foreign assistance, a third potential source of finance is private investment, both domestic and foreign.

¹⁰ <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/about/>

Unfortunately, cross-country data on private investment in agriculture and food security is notoriously difficult to come by. Much of this spending is by smallholder farmers investing their own incomes back into their operations, but there is no way to reliably measure or track such spending. The data that are available measuring private sector investment in agriculture suggest that though such spending has increased in recent years, there remains significant scope for further investments—and that government strategies to help catalyze such investments are needed. The FAO estimates that between 2006 and 2017, the share of agriculture in total credit supply globally increased from 2.2 percent to 2.9 percent.¹¹ While this increase is welcome, it still means that agriculture's share of total credit is well below its share of economic activity, or what the FAO refers to as the “Agricultural Orientation Index” (AOI) of private credit. The AOI is particularly low in many sub-Saharan African countries, where agriculture is a significant share of economic activity yet private credit remains extremely low, as many farmers have little to no ability to access credit markets.

With limited domestic capital available for agriculture, there are potentially many profitable investments for foreign companies. Foreign investments in agriculture include both land deals and investments in food processing and beverages—the latter a far more important source of jobs and technology transfer for local economies. Beyond simply choosing to invest, however, global businesses also influence sustainable agricultural development in many other ways, including their sourcing decisions, labor, and other production policies, and marketing strategies. The movement to build more inclusive supply chains, with greater outreach to smallholder farms, can potentially lead to more efficient, sustainable, and healthy global food systems. Many large multinational firms, including Unilever, Mars, and Cargill, are responding to increasing pressure from consumers and regulators to adopt practices aligned with the sustainable development goals including the objective of ending hunger. Given the reach of these global firms, such initiatives have significant promise if they are sustained over the long term.

The global environment for ending rural hunger

While country-led domestic strategies are the most important element in ending rural hunger, such strategies do not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, the global environment can both support and hinder such strategies in significant ways—serving as either tailwind or headwind in the drive to end rural hunger around the world. This section considers three key components of the international context:

¹¹ FAO (2018), “Credit to Agriculture”, available at <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/investment/credit/en/>.

global markets in food and agriculture, investments in global public goods, and the multilateral system for FNS.

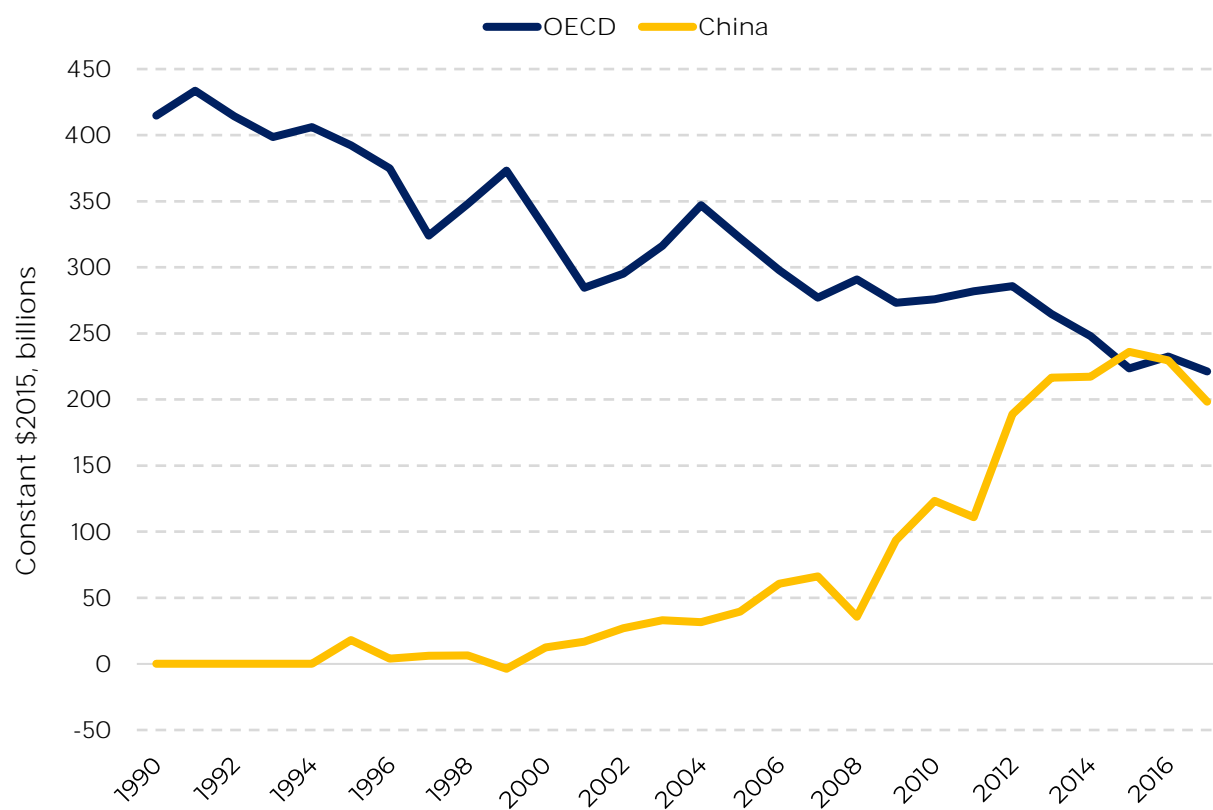
Strengthening global markets in food and agriculture

Most agricultural goods are traded as global commodities, meaning there is effectively a “world price” determined by global conditions. While prices in some localized communities, particularly those that are more remote and less connected to other markets, may diverge from this world price, in general global market conditions matter more for food and agriculture than they do for more customized products such as manufactures and services. This means the benefits of well-functioning global markets—as well as the costs of market manipulation—are particularly high.

Yet global markets in agriculture face multiple impediments—impediments that typically work against the interests of poor farmers in developing countries. Rich countries distort agricultural markets through subsidies and other trade barriers that limit developing countries’ opportunities to earn high prices for their exports. The 53 countries monitored by the OECD currently spend over \$700 billion a year on total agricultural subsidies, including consumer, producer, and general services support, dwarfing their commitments to official development assistance.¹² Though in recent decades both the United States and European Union—historically the two largest agricultural subsidizers—had made progress in bringing down the extent of their support for production, which is particularly market-distorting, this progress now appears to have stalled. Indeed, the Trump administration’s efforts to support farmers whose income may have been hurt from retaliatory tariffs are likely to increase American subsidies. Moreover, though spending by the United States and EU had been declining for decades, subsidies from China rapidly increased between 2008 and 2015, before edging down slightly in recent years (see Figure 4).

¹² OECD, “Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2019”. The figure is an average of annual spending between 2016-2018.

Figure 4: Agricultural subsidies (producer support estimates)



Source: OECDStat, Producer Support Estimates database

Considering the stalled progress in bringing down subsidies, a renewed political push is needed. Yet too often international development voices and perspectives are left out of agricultural subsidy debates, which focus more narrowly on domestic food consumers and producers, ignoring the global spillovers of such approaches. Advocates of promoting food security in developing countries need to identify political opportunities for potential reform, and work to frame these debates as vital for supporting the end of rural hunger worldwide (see Box 10).

Box 10: How will the UK reform its agricultural subsidies after Brexit?

In 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. As a member of the EU, the U.K.'s agricultural subsidies have been set by the EU's Common Agriculture Policy, which generally features high, market-distorting subsidies. Leaving the EU, then, presents an opportunity for fundamentally rethinking the U.K.'s approach to agricultural subsidies.

There are many reasons why some degree of structural reform of agriculture and trade policy makes sense in light of Brexit. These include, for example, budgetary savings, stronger protections for the environment, and creating a more equitable producer support system for local farmers. Yet in assessing the future of British agriculture support, decision-makers ought to make a conscious effort to consider how any changes could both directly and indirectly affect developing countries. Alternatives to the status quo could include completely removing subsidies, perhaps modeled on the New Zealand reforms of the 1980s; moving toward more of an insurance-based support similar, closer to the American model of producer support; or perhaps explicitly incentivizing farmers to invest in public goods, namely ecological and rural heritage investments. Any of these changes could, if well designed and implemented, have substantial positive effects on improving the functioning of global agricultural markets.

While it of course remains to be seen how the U.K. will proceed with any post-EU agricultural subsidy reform agenda, it is important for development advocates to engage in this debate and seek to shift the emerging new regime toward one that minimizes the costs to poor farmers in developing countries.

Note: This account is adapted from the case study "Ending Rural Hunger: Contributions by the U.K." by Andrew Rogerson. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>

Investing in global public goods

A second key feature of the global environment that will help drive progress on ending rural hunger is investments in global public goods. Because the gains from global public goods are shared broadly, rather than captured by any particular country, individual national governments are likely to under-invest in them. This suggests that there is an important role for donor-financing of public goods with

broadly shared benefits, as well as for greater coordination at the international level to incentivize greater investments.

One particularly important global public good in agriculture is the basic research and development (R&D) that goes into scientific discoveries and drives technological progress. Because the knowledge generated through such research can be used by many different farmers across many countries, the potential returns from such scientific breakthroughs are extremely large. Yet for decades governments have tended to underinvest in agricultural R&D, for example spending far more subsidizing inputs than on research. While it is difficult to precisely pin down an ideal figure of how much governments “should” be spending on agricultural R&D, one rough rule of thumb is an amount at least equal to 1 percent of their agricultural GDP.¹³ Yet based on the most recent data available, only 7 sub-Saharan countries meet this threshold: Burkina Faso (1.01 percent), Cabo Verde (1.17 percent), Zimbabwe (1.39 percent), Botswana (2.27 percent), South Africa (2.78 percent), Namibia (3.09 percent) and Mauritius (4.82 percent). While governments can and should increase their spending on agricultural R&D, there is also ample scope for donors to help fill this gap. However today only about 6 percent of official development assistance to the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is spent on research—which is less than one-third of 1 percent of total development assistance.

Beyond R&D, another key global public good is high quality, reliable, internationally-comparable data. For years this has been a significant challenge to defining global goals related to hunger and food security, let alone tracking progress toward these goals. Yet more recently there have been some important advances. For example, while the SDGs include the target to “double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers,” at the time the goals were set it was unclear how this would be defined. The FAO has been working to refine a definition and begin collecting the data necessary to meaningfully track progress on this metric. While data availability remains limited (at present, data on labor productivity of small-scale producers are available for 11 countries, while data on incomes of small scale producers are available for 38), formalizing and standardizing the processes for collecting these data is a crucial first step. Similarly, food loss and waste is another important policy priority where, up until now, there have been only extremely limited internationally comparable data available, but where definitions have now been standardized and better data can start being collected. More generally, the FAO has launched an ambitious capacity building program to improve data collection. The agency recently reported that, partly as a result of this effort, the average number of countries reporting on the 21 SDG indicators for which the FAO is responsible increased from 29 percent in 2017 to 42 percent in 2019.

¹³ This is the minimum target set by the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2006.

A third key global public good is limiting the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving the climate crisis and providing a carbon sink to reduce net emissions. Indeed, there is a vicious cycle between agriculture and climate change. Agriculture and animal husbandry, and land use management are key levers of net carbon and methane emissions, accounting for about one-quarter of total emissions. At the same time, a warming planet makes agricultural production more challenging, particularly for farmers in arid regions. Of course, arresting climate change is a classic public good, in the sense that while overall it's clearly efficient for the agriculture sector to cut emissions, any individual farmer or government that makes costly investments to limit emissions may not directly capture the benefits of these actions. This suggests a need for more coordinated global action. Governments need to work collectively, along with the private sector and civil society, in order to shift trajectories on agricultural emissions.

The global FNS architecture

A final key feature of the global environment is effective multilateral cooperation. In a well-organized and coordinated system, donors would collectively be able to identify spending gaps (by both country and issue area), align their activities to promote positive spillovers, and avoid duplicating their efforts. Yet achieving this level of coordination is difficult: there is no single dominant actor in the FNS multilateral system that can dictate system-wide flows. Indeed, there are many important players who each play important roles, including the three Rome-based agencies (RBAs) of the UN (the FAO, WFP, and IFAD), the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, and large bilateral donors such as USAID and DFID. There is no single master plan that all these actors abide by; nor, it should be stressed, would we necessarily want there to be. These actors each have their own particular knowledge and expertise, and likely know how to achieve their specific mandates better than anyone else.

In light of the lack of any formal, hierarchical coordination system, it is all the more important to improve informal, horizontal coordination. This has been an ongoing priority for several years, with mixed results: while organizational leaders continually stress the value of coordination, in practice they are often reluctant to defer to others or meaningfully adjust their own activities. Looking forward, the challenges of coordination are likely to only increase, as emerging donors such as China and Brazil take on an ever-greater role in the FNS system. While there are no silver bullets for improving coordination, regular forums where key actors can discuss their strategies and seek to identify areas of overlap are helpful. Similarly, organizational leaders who publicly pronounce the value of coordination should ensure these messages are also

accurately transmitted throughout the operational teams in their agencies, with incentives in place for staff to encourage on-the-ground coordination.

Box 11: Improving coordination among the FAO, WFP, and IFAD

Rome, Italy is home to three distinct U.N. agencies with food security-related mandates, and the collective activities of the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) are crucial to the global effort to end rural hunger. Yet maximizing the impact of the RBAs will require strong coordination between them, a long-standing objective the three agencies have been working to improve.

In principle, each agency has a distinct mandate which should lessen any competition between them: the FAO focuses on data and technical capacity, IFAD focuses on long-term financing for agriculture, and the WFP focuses on emergency food assistance. Yet the agencies are not immune to the mission creep that plagues many international organizations, as they attempt to take on more and more work. In particular, the WFP has been moving into more longer term development programming, which puts it into closer competition with IFAD. This raises the prospect of overlap and duplication among the agencies.

The leaders of these three agencies are aware of the need for coordination, and are taking some important steps to try to improve such policies. For example, in 2018 the three signed a new 5-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote collaboration at the country, regional, and global level. This includes systematically consulting with each other in developing country programming exercises and greater sharing of knowledge, information and best practices. As always, however, the real question is whether such initiatives will actually translate into changed behaviors. Putting in place the proper incentives for staff members to meaningfully adjust their work at field level will be crucial. While the MoU calls for country offices to report up on the successes and challenges of collaboration, it remains to be seen how effective this mechanism is for incentivizing a closer relationship between the three RBAs.

Note: This account is adapted from the Ending Rural Hunger case study "Issues for consideration by the Rome-based agencies" by Mark Wilson. For further information, the entire study can be downloaded at <https://endingruralhunger.org/report/>

Conclusion: Looking forward and policy recommendations

In this brief note, we have laid out the key building blocks needed to achieve the end of rural hunger: credible, actionable and well-targeted national FNS strategies; which are adequately financed by governments, donors, and the private sector; carried out amidst a global environment that accelerates, rather than impedes, national progress. Of course, to diagnose the problem in this simple short-hand is not to downplay the scale of the challenge or the complexity of implementing such a wide-ranging policy reform agenda. Yet our goal is to provide a macro-level analysis of what it will take to move away from the business-as-usual scenario we have observed over the last 4 years, and to get serious about ending hunger.

We conclude this analysis by identifying three key issues that we believe should be at the frontier of the global FNS debate in coming years: the move to understand FNS challenges through the analytic frame of food systems; the SDG imperative to “Leave No One Behind,” which demands closer and more focused attention on particular vulnerable groups; and the ongoing need to strengthen accountability mechanisms in the drive to end global hunger.

1. Toward sustainable food systems thinking

One of the big advantages of the overall SDG framework is the understanding of development as an integrated package with deep connections across its various components. Such an integrated understanding is particularly valuable when it comes to assessing the linkages between healthy diets, environmentally-sustainable food production, and small-holder farmers’ welfare and income. A food systems approach, which identifies and analyzes the connections between all elements of the food production cycle—from farming practices to food processing to distribution and consumption—offers a promising lens for a richer understanding of the nature of FNS challenges and how FNS relates to broader development objectives. As the recent EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health noted, the key question is how to build food systems that operate within the safe space of planetary boundaries and health boundaries: systems that simultaneously achieve the goals of ensuring a sustainable environment and promoting healthy diets.¹⁴ Only by mapping and understanding the complexities of food systems can we prioritize the policy levers to achieve these goals.

One important landmark in advancing a food systems lens toward FNS will be the upcoming Food Systems Summit, which U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres

¹⁴ See the EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report, 2019.

recently announced will be held in 2021. This summit will be an opportunity to advocate for transformational change toward sustainable food systems around the world. Such an approach could include, for instance, new partnerships between the public and private sectors to better support inclusive and sustainable global value chains, which will allow farmers to participate in global markets and be rewarded for their efforts. Another idea is to develop a clearer assessment of the latest scientific knowledge linking food, nutrition, and agriculture, perhaps through creating a technical advisory expert group modeled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the body that assesses the science of climate change. What is important is to include the new business models and technologies being developed by the private sector to shift global food systems in a sustainable direction.

2. Leaving no one behind

A second key forward-looking theme is the imperative to ‘leave no one behind’ in both national and global efforts to achieve the end of hunger. Leaving no one behind has been a key slogan of the SDGs, but there is new momentum to meaningfully put it into practice.¹⁵ This requires a special focus on marginalized groups such as women, youth, indigenous groups, the disabled, and those that are geographically, economically, or socially excluded. It also requires prioritizing efforts toward those that are currently furthest behind, with the greatest needs.

The significance of leaving no one behind is evident in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) that countries have submitted on their SDG strategies. Ghana, for example, cites the need to leave no one behind as one of the crucial cross-cutting themes of its overarching strategy. Lesotho similarly highlights leave no one behind as a key organizing principle of its strategy, which emphasizes the need to address urban-rural disparities. International organizations are also increasingly picking up similar themes; for instance, in late 2018 FAO organized the first High-Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems, while IFAD recently hosted the fourth Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum. Ultimately, putting leave no one behind into practice means a focus on supporting specific people facing specific problems in specific places.¹⁶ As both governments and donors develop and implement their strategies for ending hunger, the commitment to leave no one behind should shape how they prioritize spending and policy reforms. And in many instances, more and better data—to understand who precisely is being left behind—will be the first prerequisite. New technologies, such as biometric identification, can also help more precisely target and track individuals most at risk of being left behind.

¹⁵ See Homi Kharas, John W. McArthur, and Izumi Ohno (editors), *Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals* (Brookings Institution Press, 2019).

¹⁶ Kharas et al (2019).

3. Strengthening accountability

Developing effective accountability mechanisms is a long-standing challenge in FNS. In brief, while politicians—in both rich and poor countries—frequently promise to prioritize FNS, even pledging to specific commitments, all too often they fail to follow through on these assurances. Yet when leaders fail to deliver upon promised contributions, they face minimal consequences for coming up short.

Classifying this problem as simply a “lack of political will” is both analytically and practically unsatisfying. Analytically, it is important to understand the particular incentives and interests politicians respond to, and how these are translated into policy decisions, rather than bemoaning political will. Practically, what is needed is new accountability mechanisms—at both the national and global level—that can credibly shift policy outcomes, and complaints about political will appear unlikely to do so.

While it is beyond the scope of this note to identify new accountability mechanisms, it is worth noting that in other fields, such as global health, innovative new institutions such as the Global Fund and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, appear to have helped spur greater accountability on the part of donors. Changes to the international FNS architecture may conceivably spark similar gains in agriculture and food security. In any case, whether new institutions are needed or not, better data—more accurate, more timely, and more complete—are needed to track progress and setbacks, a necessary first step in promoting accountability. Similarly, transparency among key actors—on financing flows and project evaluations in particular—are needed in order to meaningfully allow civil society and other stakeholders to hold policymakers to account.