

BFS/FEED THE FUTURE LEARNING AGENDA

Feed the Future’s inter-agency learning agenda, led by the initiative’s learning agenda, was an interagency effort primarily led by USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The purpose of the agenda is to learn about which interventions have the greatest impact in a given context, which are most cost-effective, and what combination and/or sequence of interventions/investments have the greatest impact on the objectives of improving agricultural growth, reducing poverty, and reducing malnutrition. It is also necessary to develop a learning agenda to determine related effects of Feed the Future interventions on women’s empowerment, vulnerable populations, farm and off-farm employment for males and females, effects of global climate change, and improved natural resource management that sustains livelihoods and resources for future generations.

The learning agenda identifies six key themes and associated strategic questions around advancement of global agricultural development, increased food production and food security, and improved nutrition, particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children. The learning agenda team developed themes and questions through an analysis linking Feed the Future’s results framework and Missions’ Multi-Year Strategy, then organized working groups of technical experts to refine and prioritize questions. The team vetted final learning questions through a series of meetings with diverse stakeholders. Participating agencies helped sponsor and conducted the learning activities; the original intent was for key questions to be addressed through rigorous impact evaluations. Interviews revealed challenges in the learning agenda, including that using impact evaluations as the only source for answering learning agenda questions proved difficult due to the time and expenses needed to implement these types of evaluations, and it was sometimes difficult to coordinate agencies with different levels of financial authorization for the initiative during the revision of the learning agenda. Feed the Future is now beginning to develop a next round to the learning agenda that will build on important lessons, such as expanding learning activities and knowledge sources beyond impact evaluation, and integrating mechanisms to ensure the agenda is a “living process,” adapted along the way to reflect new evidence and changing contexts.

Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Created learning agenda (completed) ✓ Generating knowledge (ongoing) ✓ Capturing/synthesizing knowledge (ongoing) ✓ Sharing knowledge (ongoing) ✓ Applying knowledge (ongoing) ✓ Updating/ adapting learning (planned)
Materials	Feed the Future learning agenda ; learning agenda PPT ; learning agenda summary
Key Learning Questions/ Themes	<p>Six key themes: 1) Agricultural Productivity; 2) Markets & Trade; 3) Gender & Women’s Empowerment; 4) Research & Development; 5) Nutrition & Dietary Diversity; and 6) Resilience of Vulnerable Populations</p> <p>Under each theme are key questions (29 questions total)</p>
Key Learning Activities	Review and document existing evidence; conduct impact evaluations related to learning questions and themes
Timing	<p>2011: U.S. govt. interagency initiative led by USAID; support from BFS assistant administrator</p> <p>2012: Report was released in April</p>

Steps in Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate a “laundry list” of questions by examining causal linkages in Feed the Future’s results framework and Missions’ Multi-Year Strategies 2. Develop learning agenda themes and refine questions through an analysis of questions by BFS/M&E and experts from the International Food Policy Research Institute 3. Prioritize questions in each theme through working groups of technical experts 4. Develop concept notes on learning agenda themes 5. Vet and refine learning questions by convening meetings of researchers, evaluators, reps from civil society organizations, and USAID/U.S. govt. experts 6. Conduct final vetting with Feed the Future Missions and BFS/Office of Country Strategies & Implementation and Feed the Future senior leadership 7. Roll out learning agenda for operational use in reviewing and conducting impact evaluations
Current Learning Agenda Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using the Feed the Future learning agenda as a framework, BFS synthesized a report from 196 performance and impact evaluations from 2010 to 2015 that looked at how these evaluations provided evidence or understanding for the key questions. ● Developing dissemination and uptake strategies
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make the learning agenda a “living process” with feedback loops that allow questions and priorities to change as programs change ● Develop a new interagency learning agenda for the Global Food Security Act
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly consultative process in identifying and prioritizing themes and questions ● Strong leadership support that made the learning agenda publicly visible—increased transparency and accountability
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consensus-building fatigue from all the work developing themes/questions and aligning impact evaluations ● The Global Food Security Strategy legislation authorizes funds only for USAID and the U.S. Dept. of State, so members of the MEL Interagency working group faced challenges around funding and how they might support/participate in the development of the new learning agenda. This was despite wide participation in the MEL Working Group. Looking ahead, they will explore ways to better share ownership of developing the Global Food Security Strategy learning agenda. ● Focus on impact evaluations was too limited. A broader range of data and information sources, to include performance evaluations and other data collection methods, would have improved dissemination and utilization.
Promising Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong cross-agency collaboration throughout the formulation of the learning agenda, including focus on reflection and discussion of key design issues (e.g., At what level and in what detail is a learning agenda useful?) ● The Feed the Future Synthesis of Evaluations Report was used to inform the Global Food Security Strategy.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Important to clarify at what level and in how much detail a learning agenda will be useful ● PPL/LER can play an important role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing support and guidance as offices develop learning agendas ○ Promoting coordination and collaboration across USAID learning agendas with complementary themes and questions ○ Supporting organizational learning by creating an information management center for evidence
Point of Contact	Zachary Baquet, Senior Knowledge Management Advisor, BFS