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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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Food for Peace

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As we continue our year-long celebration of 60 years of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) programming, I am pleased to share this anthology of stories, written in recent years by USAID/FFP staff and others who have visited our programs.

USAID/FFP has a unique vantage point and role to play as an office of USAID that implements both relief and development programs. This collection highlights both. It showcases the wide array of food assistance tools we use and the different ways they are applied to combat global hunger and malnutrition around the world. Based on the context, we are able to supply either U.S.-procured food or food procured locally or regionally, closer to those in need. In addition, we have the option to improve food security through a “demand side” approach, providing people in need with a food voucher or cash transfer so that they may buy food at their local markets, thereby aiding local merchants and farmers while addressing food needs. In both relief and development settings, we often combine our food assistance with complementary services that improve the impact of our food support.

Read on to find out how our work built the resilience of farmers in Burkina Faso, who were able to successfully grow crops during a drought year and feed their families—three years after our program ended; and how USAID/FFP is partnering with another U.S. Feed the Future program in Bangladesh to improve the incomes of very poor fish farmers. Learn about our creative partnership with the government of Pakistan to support the food needs of displaced populations in their country; and how the first ever mobile money platform in Zimbabwe is combined with in-kind food aid to curb hunger there.

Be it relief or development, USAID/FFP programs are evolving based on years of experience, evidence-based learning, and a willingness to innovate to bring about positive change in some of the world’s toughest places.

In this anniversary year we salute our many diverse, highly professional and committed partners who make this work possible, and the American people, who for 60 years have strongly embraced the vision of a world free from hunger. We are proud to be implementing this portfolio on their behalf.

Dina Esposito
Director, Office of Food for Peace

ASIA AND THE NEAR EAST





TEACHING PEOPLE NOT JUST TO FISH, BUT TO BUILD BUSINESSES TOO

CHALLENGE: Bangladeshi fish farmers struggle to produce enough fish to be competitive in local markets.

ACTION: Food for Peace and Feed the Future partnered in Bangladesh to provide training to poor farmers and increase the income of commercial fisheries.

RESULTS: Farmers increased their income from fisheries and improved the quality of affordable fish in local markets. This program has benefited 34,000 households and 150 commercial fish farms.



Bina and her husband show off the fish they just harvested from their fish farm.

PHOTO CREDIT: DYLAN BUTLER / USAID

“My income is increased by the Food for Peace project and my business has been expanded by Feed the Future.”

—Bina Majhy, a Bangladeshi fish farm manager

In development it is no longer enough to teach a farmer to grow a new crop—or in this case, to fish. Our work isn’t done until we help a farmer learn to run a successful business too. This is precisely what is happening in Bangladesh.

Consider Harun and Bina Majhy, who have co-managed a fishing business in rural Bangladesh for years. To take their small-scale operation to a commercial level, the couple needed training and equipment.

Enter USAID. In 2011, Bina received training from USAID’s Office of Food for Peace on nursery management and fingerling (young fish) production. The next year, Feed the Future (led also by USAID) trained Harun on fish hatchery management so the Majhys could begin producing even higher quality fingerlings at

a larger scale. Today, the Majhys are confident business leaders in their community—not only do they manage their own successful fish nursery and hatchery business, they also provide others with steady employment.

Bina and Harun’s story is just one of many in Bangladesh of small-scale fish farmers who have taken their businesses to the next level through an innovative partnership that links Feed the Future’s long-term food security programs with USAID’s Office of Food for Peace to scale up aquaculture as a pathway to development.

Why aquaculture? In a country where nearly 40 percent of the population lives in poverty, small-scale fish farming enables Bangladeshi farmers, particularly women, to provide nutritious food for their families and is an entry point to the cash economy. And while there is significant demand for fish in Bangladesh, small-scale fish farmers often struggle to produce enough fish for local and district markets at competitive costs.

So, in 2010 USAID launched two programs in Bangladesh that continue to change lives today. The first, managed by Food for Peace, teaches techniques that poor smallholder fish farmers are using to increase their productivity and incomes. The other is a multi-faceted Feed the Future aquaculture program aimed at increasing commercial fish and shrimp production in Bangladesh. Together with partners such as the World Fish Center, Save the Children, and ACDI/VOCA, these programs are building a comprehensive income-generation strategy to help poor households expand fish production in Bangladesh while increasing their profitability and market competitiveness.

For the Majhys, the results have been promising. Before training from Food for Peace, Bina earned the equivalent of about \$90 every month. Using her newfound skills, she now brings in about \$129 per month through her family’s business. Equally important, she plays a vital role as a service provider, acting as a local facilitator for other aspiring women aquaculture entrepreneurs and providing quality fingerlings to her community.

“My income is increased by the Food for Peace project and my business has been expanded by Feed the Future,” Bina says proudly.

In Bangladesh, this partnership is helping fish farmers mitigate the immediate threats of poverty while also linking them to higher-quality fish that can help them access commercial markets. It’s a collaboration that has already benefited more than 34,000 households and 150 commercial fish farms—numbers that continue to increase every day.



Farmers harvest their fish for sale in the market. PHOTO CREDIT: DYLAN BUTLER / USAID



Fingerlings raised by the fish hatchery. PHOTO CREDIT: DYLAN BUTLER / USAID

USAID AND PARTNERS FEED VICTIMS OF CONFLICT IN PAKISTAN

CHALLENGE: Violence has led to the displacement of millions of Pakistanis, causing widespread food insecurity.

ACTION: With 50,000 tons of wheat from the Government of Pakistan, USAID, through the UN World Food Program, helped with processing and distribution to those in need.

RESULTS: The U.S. Government saved \$24.3 million by efficiently addressing food security needs for more than one million displaced IDPs using locally sourced wheat.



For Khan Faqir and thousands like him, the food assistance provided by the GoP, WFP, USAID and other donors is proving to be a life saver. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP) of Pakistan have been plagued by complex cycles of violence and military activities since 2008. The initial insecurity led to the mass displacement of more than three million, and while many have since returned to their homes, one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) still remain separated from their homeland. This displacement has caused severe disruption to the food security of these affected individuals and significant losses of productive assets.

Khan Faqir, a subsistence farmer from Khyber Agency in FATA, is just one of the many displaced. Unable to return home since 2010 and with little opportunity to work and earn a living, Faqir has relied on food assistance to help feed his family of nine. “The situation in our area was really bad due to militancy. We had no money when we arrived at the camp. I was a farmer with some land and a regular income

back at home,” said Faqir. “Now that is all destroyed and I am living in the camp with my family.”

Since 2009, USAID has contributed over \$340 million to the UN World Food Program (WFP) to help feed those displaced by violence in the FATA and KP regions. This funding has been used to buy and ship food from the United States as well as to purchase locally and regionally produced commodities to address malnutrition.

In 2013, recognizing that the food security of those displaced by conflict in KP and FATA was continuing to deteriorate, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) announced that it would donate 150,000 tons of wheat, valued at \$53 million, to the UN World Food Program’s (WFP) operations in KP and FATA.

With this “in kind” gift from the government in hand, WFP then turned to other donors for funds to support the costs of “twinning” this GoP donation, i.e. pairing the GoP’s food donation with resources from other donors to cover the costs of milling, fortifying, storing, and distributing wheat and wheat flour.

Because of the new flexibility in USAID food assistance programming, USAID’s Office of Food for Peace was able to respond to this request with a contribution of \$7 million in September 2013. The USAID/Pakistan Mission contributed \$8 million, bringing the total support from the U.S. Government to \$15 million, or enough to mill and distribute over 50,000 tons of the Pakistan wheat.

In comparison, had USAID purchased and shipped 50,000 tons of wheat from the United States to Pakistan, it would have cost the U.S. Government approximately \$39.3 million, based on 2013 wheat prices. That is \$24.3 million less than had USAID shouldered the full burden of buying and shipping the same tonnage from the United States.

Faqir is now one of the many IDPs benefitting from this latest assistance, having received the wheat flour as part of a larger ration. “We survived the initial few days on the little food that we had brought with us but then we were registered. We are really thankful to those who are providing us this ration in this hour of need.” He is encouraged to know that continued food assistance will be available for the foreseeable future.

This collaboration between bilateral donor agencies, WFP and the GoP, represents a cost-effective partnership that efficiently addresses food security needs for more than one million displaced IDPs. Through this effort, the GOP and the international community can support those who have lost their homes and livelihoods due to circumstances beyond their control.



Khan Faqir and his family benefit from improved food security through new approaches to humanitarian partnership. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

“We are really thankful to those who are providing us this ration in this hour of need.”

—Khan Faqir, a displaced Pakistani farmer receiving food assistance

FOOD AND CASH AID = QUICK RESPONSE TO TYPHOON IN PHILIPPINES

CHALLENGE: The Philippines were devastated in the wake of a massive typhoon, and families did not have access to food.

ACTION: USAID designed an innovative approach that combined U.S. food aid with locally purchased rice and cash transfers to provide relief and start families on the road to recovery.

RESULTS: 2.5 million of the most vulnerable received emergency food assistance in the wake of the typhoon.



A WFP staff person distributes A-20 paste to beneficiaries. PHOTO CREDIT: INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS

“I’m really grateful for the food that saved our lives after Yolanda hit.”

—Alberto, a local fisherman in Guiuan

A once-in-a-generation typhoon made landfall in the Philippines on November 8, 2013, leaving a trail of devastation. The Category 5 typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Yolanda, affected 14 million people, or 17 percent of the population. Yolanda killed 6,000 people, displaced 4.1 million others and caused billions of dollars in damages to local infrastructure and livelihoods.

Three days after the storm, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) issued an appeal for emergency food assistance targeting 2.5 million people identified as most vulnerable in terms of food security. Many living on the islands of Leyte, Cebu, and Visayas who relied heavily on fishing and agriculture for food had their fish stocks decimated and crops destroyed by Haiyan’s trail of destruction.

USAID was the first international agency to meet the call, authorizing a contribution of \$10 million on the same day as the WFP appeal. USAID designed an innovative approach that combined both U.S. food aid with cash-based models.

Within three weeks of the storm's landfall, USAID provided WFP and the Government of the Philippines with the tools needed to provide lifesaving assistance to the nearly three million people needing food. The approach combined the flexibility of cash-based assistance—which allowed for the immediate purchase of local rice as well as cash transfers in areas with properly functioning markets—with U.S. in-kind food.

"I'm really grateful for the food that saved our lives after Yolanda hit," said Alberto, a local fisherman in Guiuan, whose family was among the many who lost homes and livelihoods.

USAID's cash grant enabled WFP to immediately purchase 2,400 tons of rice directly from the Government of the Philippines and to airlift from Dubai 40 tons of high-energy biscuits, which are nutrient-dense meal supplements that do not require cooking.

In less-affected areas with functioning agricultural markets, USAID provided unconditional cash transfers for the purchase of basic food items before initial harvests came in.

"Our rice harvest will be less than half its normal size," said Silvia, a rice farmer in Roxas. "We really appreciate receiving both rice, which is not available locally, and the money that has allowed us to buy other food from the shops."

USAID also provided more than \$2 million in U.S. in-kind food as part of its initial contribution to WFP's emergency operation. Two days after the typhoon struck, USAID authorized an airlift of 55 tons of nutrient-dense, meal-replacement food bars and paste as well as the immediate shipment of 1,020 tons of rice from its prepositioning warehouse in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The emergency food products arrived on November 13, 2013, followed by the rice on December 3, 2013.

As the humanitarian response shifted from emergency relief to early recovery in mid-December, USAID announced its second contribution of \$10 million for an additional purchase of 5,000 tons of U.S. purchased rice and \$3.7 million for food-and voucher-for-assets activities. Through these activities, agricultural assets such as irrigation canals and farm-to-market feeder roads are rehabilitated in exchange for either food or vouchers. The rice arrived on February 20, 2014, in time to support food-for-assets activities and targeted unconditional distributions to vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled.

The situation in the Philippines highlights the importance of a putting forth a multi-faceted disaster response.



Children in Leyte eating meal-replacement emergency food bars.

PHOTO CREDIT: DAN SUTHER / USAID



Volunteers unload a truck full of rice for distribution in Cebu. PHOTO

CREDIT: LEIGHLA BOWERS / WFP

ELECTRONIC FOOD VOUCHERS IN TURKEY IMPROVE THE LIVES OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

CHALLENGE: Turkey was struggling to cope with swelling number of Syrian refugees.

ACTION: USAID partnered with WFP to establish a card-based voucher system to help the refugees.

RESULT: Refugees have regained some sense of normalcy by buying their food in Turkish marketplaces, bolstering the local economy.



Syrian refugees shop on November 27, 2012 at the Oncupinar camp in Kilis, southern Turkey. PHOTO CREDIT: ADEM ALTAN / AFP



A refugee displays purchases made with their voucher. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

In mid-2011 a violent crackdown on anti-government protestors exploded into a large scale conflict in Syria, forcing millions to flee. As Syria's largest neighbor, Turkey has opened its 511-mile border to over 500,000 Syrians seeking refuge from violence at home. Maintaining an open border policy with its southern neighbor, Turkey provides housing and relief services to hundreds of thousands of refugees living in 21 camps across ten provinces, as well as in urban areas.

Prior to the conflict, Syria was a middle-income country on par with many of its Mediterranean neighbors. Although the Syrian economy relied heavily on agriculture, the majority of Syrians lived in urban areas and shopped at a grocery store. When the crisis began, much of the country's infrastructure began to unravel, including large-scale food production and distribution networks. Syrians reported that some foods, such as fresh produce, meat, and dairy could scarcely be found in markets. As the crisis escalated, so too did the number of refugees fleeing to Turkey.

The Turkish Red Crescent Society, locally known as Kizilay, has been the leading organization responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey. When the refugees

first arrived, Kizilay was cooking hot meals for thousands of Syrians each day. Recognizing it could no longer meet the basic food needs for the hundreds of thousands of people pouring across the Turkey-Syria border, the Government of Turkey made an official request to the UN World Food Program (WFP) for additional food assistance and funding.

In October 2012, WFP, with support from donor organizations including USAID, partnered with Kizilay to implement a card-based aid delivery system. Through these electronic cards, WFP and Kizilay began providing refugees in camps with a monthly cash credit to buy their own food in local supermarkets. The program is good for the local economy, significantly reduces the cost of feeding refugees and allows families in camps to regain a sense of normalcy by buying and cooking the foods they ate at home. The program also takes full advantage of Turkey's well-established financial infrastructure and allows WFP to closely monitor assistance by tracking food prices, spending patterns, and inventory levels in stores. Nearly one and a half years later, USAID is now the largest donor of WFP's emergency operation in Turkey, having contributed \$29 million to the Turkey operation. WFP and Kizilay together distribute food cards to over 140,000 refugees in 15 camps across Turkey.

In a recent conversation with USAID staff in Turkey's Osmaniye camp, 43-year-old Nour summarized her opinion of the transition to food cards from hot meals by saying that her life was "100 times better" than before. Nour, originally from a coastal city in Syria, came to Turkey in late 2011 with the clothes on her back and five children—four daughters and a son. Her husband had been arrested by government forces and, fearing for her children's safety, she fled north. When Nour first arrived in Turkey, she was thankful for the newfound security, but hated the feeling of helplessness as she and her children queued for hot meals three times daily. With a smile, Nour mentions that since the transition to electronic food cards, she has been able to cook the meals her children are most familiar with, creating a sense of normalcy and making their tent feel more like a home. When asked if her daughters help with the cooking, Nour laughed and shook her head vigorously. "Never!" she said, "But my son does," pointing to the door of the tent. Her 15-year-old son was sitting inside shelling peanuts, the local specialty of Osmaniye Province.



Granting refugees control over what food they purchase gives them access to nutritious foods like onions, eggs, and potatoes. PHOTO

CREDIT: USAID

43-year-old Nour summarized her opinion of the transition to food cards from hot meals by saying that her life was "100 times better" than before.

—Nour, a refugee in Osmaniya camp

EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN





EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

CHALLENGE: Women farmers produced less than male farmers because of limited access to extension services.

ACTION: USAID and REST worked with communities to improve irrigation systems and management of those systems, to reduce time required for irrigation and diversify crops grown, particularly for women farmers.

RESULTS: Workloads were reduced and economic opportunities increased for women farmers.



One of the beneficiaries of the improved irrigation system harvests her grass.

PHOTO CREDIT: KELLEY LYNCH

Despite a fast-growing economy, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It is prone to weather-related shocks and experiences high levels of food insecurity, particularly among rural populations and smallholder farmers. Women farmers perform up to 75 percent of farm labor, representing 70 percent of household food production in Ethiopia. But they typically produce up to 35 percent less than male farmers because they have lower levels of access to extension services and inputs such as seeds and fertilizer.

Yet, there are signs of hope. USAID food assistance programs and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) aim to improve access to food and protect assets of the poor by delivering timely food rations while investing in local capacity to improve resilience, and increase and diversify productivity among the poorest of the poor.

Letay Gebresilasie, a 40-year-old smallholder farmer in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, is one of the beneficiaries of the USAID-funded REST program. She farms on a quarter hectare every year to feed her two sons and support her family while her husband is away serving in the military.

“Before I started receiving assistance, I irrigated my land by using the community diesel pump, which broke frequently and was costly to run. I used my entire plot of land to grow red chili peppers and it took me one to two days to water the crops. That was time away from my children and other chores at home,” said Gebresilasie.

However, in 2010, things began to change for the better. USAID and REST provided the village with an electric pump for irrigation. Now, watering Gebresilasie’s crops only takes four hours every three to four days. She does not have to wait for available water, which was often limited by equipment malfunctions and diesel shortages. Instead, she is given a designated watering time as managed by her community water users association.

Gebresilasie has diversified her crops and is now growing mangos, onions, and lettuce, some of which are consumed at home and some sold in the market. To protect these gains, she invests her profits in the community savings cooperative, and eventually hopes to invest in an ox.

With her new agricultural productivity, Gebresilasie has reduced her workload and increased her economic opportunities. By contributing more to the household income, she has gained more decision-making power in her home and has more economic autonomy in her husband’s absence.

Gebresilasie has also become a role model for other women in the village. They seek her advice and tips for improved farming practices. At the end of the year, she will graduate from the program, but her economic advances will not disappear. She will continue to use the electric pump to increase her agricultural yields, reduce her workload, and save for the future.

“After receiving the benefits of this program, I am ready to graduate, and I am confident in my ability to farm. I am no longer worried about how I will take care of my family as I have learned how to invest and protect my assets,” said Gebresilasie.

In FY 2012, USAID and REST helped to improve the irrigation of 989 hectares of land and establish 99 water users associations in the Tigray region to ensure that the new pumps and irrigation schemes are sustainable. As a result of these efforts, female smallholder farmers throughout the region, like Gebresilasie, are taking the first steps out of poverty and hunger, and building a foundation for resilience and self-reliance.

“Before I started receiving assistance, I irrigated my land by using the community diesel pump, which broke frequently and was costly to run. ...That was time away from my children and other chores at home.”

—Letay Gebresilasie, smallholder farmer



Letay Gebresilasie works on her land. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

BREATHING LIFE INTO ETHIOPIA'S PARCHED WATERSHEDS

CHALLENGE: High levels of food insecurity and frequent shocks persisted in Mereb Leke wareda in Tigray region.

ACTION: USAID partner Relief Society of Tigray implemented social safety net program focusing on natural resource rehabilitation.

RESULT: More than 545 watersheds were built in Tigray and more than 27,000 people graduated from the PSNP.



Community built irrigation canal. PHOTO CREDIT: NENA TERRELL / USAID

“My farm is now totally under irrigation. Water is supplied by a river diversion developed by the program.”

—Ato Berhane Teklu, smallholder farmer

In northern Ethiopia, the rocky, dry Tigray region experiences high food insecurity and frequent shocks. In Mereb Leke wareda, a district within Tigray region, roughly a third of the population of 117,000 lives below the poverty line and produces only about a third of their annual food needs. They get by through market purchases and food received through a social safety net program.

The Productive Safety Net Program, or PSNP, was launched by the Government of Ethiopia in 2005 to help food-insecure families access food 12 months a year and protect community assets through public works projects. USAID is one of nine donors funding this program.

Although most of total wareda’s population is engaged in either crop production or livestock rearing, they earn little income. Land is degraded as a result of deforestation and poor land management practices. On top of that, farmers have to rely on unpredictable rainfall that typically comes just four months of the year. Recently life has been particularly difficult, with frequent severe drought leaving farmers with little crops to harvest.

Since 2005 the local NGO Relief Society of Tigray (REST), with USAID support, has implemented the safety net program which reduces the chronically poor’s profound vulnerability to disaster and shocks.

Ato Berhane Teklu lives in a village located in Tabia Bershiwa, in Ethiopia. He has two sons and two daughters between the ages of 9 and 23. His primary source of

income prior to 2005 was one acre of rain-fed land, which did not produce well. In 2005, Teklu got paired up with the USAID program in his village and embarked on an ambitious gully reclamation project to save his farmland from the devastating effects of erosion.

Drawing on all available family labor, he was able to successfully turn his life around.

Teklu began treating the gullies after participating in the public works undertaken as part of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in his village. Teklu explains, “My farmland was located adjacent to an expanding gully. As I have personally witnessed the effectiveness of gully treatment work done under the program, I asked the program task force in our village to consider this site for rehabilitation. Unfortunately however, they declined to prioritize it, saying there are other sites with higher risk of erosion. I then came up with another option—to mobilize all the labor needed myself, while the task force could help me with technical support and non-local inputs. Fortunately, they accepted this option and supported me.”

Using this self-initiated approach, Teklu constructed four small dams across the gullies that were 60 meters long. Gradually, the gully started to fill up with fertile soil layers, enabling full recovery of once degraded, marginal lands. In the long term, this gully reclamation will reduce Teklu’s vulnerability to low rainfall and drought conditions, key for families regularly impacted by drought.

Teklu later gained access to water from a constructed irrigation scheme in his village. “My farm is now totally under irrigation. Water is supplied by a river diversion developed by the program. I now have 80 papayas, 50 grafted mangos and 40 oranges trees stretched over a quarter hectare of land. Wherever I can, I also grow a variety of vegetables.”

Teklu graduated from the program in December 2011. Since then he has been helping the task force in promoting graduation in his village. Graduation from the PSNP takes place when a household is able to meet its food needs for all 12 months of the year without safety net transfers, and can withstand modest shocks such as a short-term drought.

The program, which focuses on various ways to rehabilitate natural resources, is currently being implemented in 545 watersheds across Tigray to help bring sustained relief to more than 705,000 people. In Mereb Leke alone, from 2009 to 2012 more than 27,000 people have graduated and can meet their food needs year round.



PSNP participant benefits from watershed irrigation works. PHOTO

CREDIT: NENA TERRELL / USAID

FOOD ASSISTANCE INCREASES SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN KENYA

CHALLENGE: Frequent droughts and floods left an estimated 1.1 million Kenyans struggling to break the cycle of hunger.

ACTION: USAID and partner WFP provided food and cash assistance in exchange for participation in programs teaching new farming skills.

RESULT: Through more than 700 resilience-building projects, farmers improved their use of water and produced more food.



A beneficiary of the WFP program uses the new agriculture techniques she learned on her farm. PHOTO CREDIT: NEIL THOMAS / USAID

“We benefit from this project. First, we eat the vegetables at home. And we also sell some of the foods.”

—Ndeli Samuel, widow with four children

Facing ever more frequent droughts and floods, an estimated 1.1 million Kenyans living in the country’s arid and semi-arid regions struggle to maintain their crops and herds, and thousands of children face a constant threat of hunger and malnutrition. Emergency food assistance has provided a lifesaving safety net to many of these households—but can it do more?

Ndeli Samuel is evidence that it can. A widow with four children, she lives in Kathemboni in Kitui County in the marginal agricultural lands of Kenya. She is now a beneficiary of a U.N. World Food Program (WFP) project funded by USAID. The project is an emergency response that goes beyond saving lives to helping communities become more resilient to challenges such as the effects of climate change as they try to recover from the 2011–2012 drought.

In Kathemboni, food assistance enables heads of household like Samuel to participate in programs that teach new skills—like creating sunken crop beds that help retain water. When farmers irrigate their crops, the sunken beds help keep the water from running off.

In exchange for participating in this project, the farmers receive rations of either food or cash to help meet their food security needs during the hungry season before the harvest. The idea is to provide emergency assistance in a way that will reduce a household's need for future assistance. Through local financial institutions, beneficiaries receive electronic transfers of money to access functional markets where food is readily available at a reasonable cost. When markets are not functional and food is not readily available, the program provides food rations.

Kathemboni is one of more than 700 resilience-building projects supported by WFP in Kenya's arid and semi-arid areas and marginal agricultural lands. In fiscal year 2013, USAID food assistance programs contributed \$58.4 million to support WFP operations in drought-stricken regions of Kenya. Of this, \$45 million was provided in food and \$13.4 million was provided in cash transfers.

Farmers learn new skills on communal land where they are each allocated a plot. They can then apply their skills on their individual farms. By adopting simple but more effective technologies to make better use of water in this semi-arid area, most participants are able to grow enough food for their families in as little as one season.

Of the 57 people working in this area as part of the project, 45 are women. Women also make up most of the members on the project committee.

Samuel, who chairs the 24-person project management committee, says she is ready to graduate from the program and help others in her community.

“We started work on this site in May of this year,” she says. “We started by planting kale, spinach, tomatoes, onions and maize. We benefit from this project. First, we eat the vegetables at home. And we also sell some of the foods.” She adds that “Our plan is to expand this project. We'd also like to involve more community members, especially those who cannot work. We'd like to include them in the project and make sure they do not go hungry.”



A farmer in Kathemboni tends to his beans using the new skills he has learned. PHOTO CREDIT: DEREK BROWN / USAID

EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS IN U.S. FOOD ASSISTANCE UNDERWAY AS EXTREME HUNGER STALKS SOUTH SUDANESE

CHALLENGE: The crisis in South Sudan has left roughly 4 million people in need of emergency food assistance.

ACTION: USAID mobilized resources to help partners scale up the emergency response, including through emergency air operations.

RESULT: South Sudanese have received life-saving food and nutrition assistance.



WFP airdrops critical food assistance in South Sudan. PHOTO CREDIT: GUILIO D'ADAMO / WFP



Protection of civilians site in Bor, South Sudan. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

“At the U.N. compound in Bor, I saw where thousands of people have sought shelter and protection as fighting has devastated their homes and livelihoods.”

—Dina Esposito, USAID

It was raining hard as we slipped and slid through the narrow muddy lanes between the dilapidated plastic-covered shelters that are home to roughly 3,600 displaced persons. Here in the town of Bor in Jonglei state South Sudan, I traveled to see for myself the conditions of some of the 4 million people who require emergency food aid. The political crisis that erupted last December in the capital, Juba, has triggered a brutal conflict that has caused more than 1 million people to flee their homes.

At the U.N. compound in Bor, I saw where thousands of people have sought shelter and protection as fighting has devastated their homes and livelihoods. I marveled at how some of the children, despite having endured crowded conditions here for many months, sing a song of welcome, and at the teacher who tells them education is their future and that all things are possible if only they study. This undaunted hope during such extreme hardship and uncertainty is inspiring.

At this U.N. compound and others like, it is estimated that 95,000 people have settled. At least here, in these facilities they are receiving some aid and protection from the conflict that rages around them. Outside of these compounds, there are an estimated 750,000 South Sudanese in hard-to-reach places that have not yet

seen much assistance or protection due to conflict and the onset of seasonal rains that render nearly two thirds of the country inaccessible by road.

Because conflict disrupted the prepositioning of food throughout the country before the rains set in, the U.N. and its partners are now mounting a major air operation across the three most conflict-affected states in an effort to mitigate famine.

USAID is taking five major steps to help the people of South Sudan:

- As the potential scale of the crisis began to emerge in February 2014, USAID shipped 20,000 metric tons (MT) of U.S. food to the region. By May, when U.N. officials alerted the world to the possibility of famine, Food for Peace put that food into action, rapidly moving it to the U.N. World Food Program's South Sudan program.
- At the South Sudan Humanitarian Pledging Conference in Oslo, Norway in May, \$112 million of the almost \$300 million pledged by the U.S. Government was for food assistance. These funds go toward 29,600 MT (enough to feed 1.8 million people for a month) of in-kind food aid to WFP, and regional purchase by WFP and UNICEF of specialized nutritious foods.
- As part of our Oslo pledge, the United States provided \$8 million to support a dramatic scale-up of emergency air operations. This is one of the first times USAID will use its new authorities in the Farm Bill for activities that “enhance” in-kind food programs. By providing a generous and early contribution to the U.N. to begin leasing aircraft to deliver food, USAID helped to ensure the air assets needed for expanded operations are in place as the rains begin.
- USAID is tapping a seldom-used special authority in the Farm Bill—the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust—to respond to extraordinary, unforeseen and expanding need with additional food aid.
- In March and April, USAID doubled its monthly procurement of U.S.-manufactured ready-to-use food products to prevent and treat malnutrition so it can speed these products to South Sudan for use later this year and next.

These extraordinary efforts will help bring emergency food assistance to hundreds of thousands of people in need, and remind the South Sudanese people of the compassion and generosity of the American people as they face the most extreme crisis this young nation has known since its independence in 2011.

[First published in USAID's Impact Blog, June 13, 2014, written by Dina Esposito]



Distribution of food in Juba. PHOTO
CREDIT: UNICEF

WEST AFRICA





ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED HIS FAMILY

CHALLENGE: Farmers had trouble feeding their families with small and unproductive plots of land.

ACTION: Landowners provided 30 hectares of land for vulnerable community members, and community members built 400 meters of cement irrigation canals to better utilize the new land.

RESULTS: Farmers were able to grow as much as seven 10-kg sacks of rice during the regular harvest season, earn income from vegetable gardening in the off-season, pay school fees and medical bills, and send their children to school.



Rassomde producers, including Amadé Ouadrigo (left). PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

Across the Sahel, periodic droughts have increased with distressing frequency. In 2012, millions throughout the Sahel—including parts of Burkina Faso—experienced food insecurity after poor harvests in 2011 that were exacerbated by conflict and insecurity that spilled out of Mali and into neighboring countries.

Despite these challenges, communities in Burkina Faso that previously received assistance from USAID are thriving. In the village of Rassomdé, farmers continue to produce yields three times greater than before USAID's assistance and in spite of the 2012 food crisis.

USAID began addressing food insecurity in Rassomdé in 1999, with partner Africare implementing two successive, five-year development food assistance programs. At the time, community members already farmed land near the local reservoir, but the plots were small and not very productive. Africare convinced landowners to reserve 30 hectares for young adults and vulnerable women in the community to work. The hectares were divided into 120 plots of 0.25 hectare each, with one household identified to rehabilitate each of the new plots by the community's Food Security Committee.

Instead of digging traditional, impermanent trenches, community members built 400 meters of cement irrigation canals through a Food for Work activity. Over time they dug additional smaller irrigation canals. With four motor pumps for the canals purchased by Africare at a government-subsidized price, farmers increased crop production after only their first harvest.



Irrigation system built by community members with USAID support in Rassomde. PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA

HARTL / USAID

Food for Work also helped build roads, allowing the farmers to more easily meet with buyers and eliminating the need for intermediaries. Soon, regional buyers from Cote D'Ivoire, Togo and Ghana who had been purchasing from nearby markets sought out Rassomdé's sesame, cowpeas, tomatoes and onions. A value chain was started.

Today, three years after USAID's departure, producers can pay their expenses and still earn a net income of \$617 per household from vegetable gardening in the off-season. During the regular harvest season, they grow enough rice to fill as much as seven 100-kilogram sacks, and enough corn to fill five 100-kilogram sacks—all to use for household consumption.

One farmer, Amadé Ouadrigo, 50, said, "Prior to the [USAID] program, I was only able to provide my two wives and 11 children six months' worth of food throughout the year. Now I can provide 12 months of food. And we are eating better, because we have more foods available to us."

Ouadrigo said the key to farmers' success has been a combination of improved seeds, irrigation and soil fertility enhancing techniques that have improved the productivity of the land. Even though last year was a bad year for crops throughout Burkina Faso and the entire Sahel, his redeveloped land produced. It kept his family fed. His other household plot that was not part of the USAID program failed.

With the extra income generated from the small plots, farmers like Ouadrigo are purchasing wheelbarrows, motorcycles, livestock and bicycles; paying school fees and medical bills; and giving their children food to take to school. This latter point is noteworthy; no school-age children work in the fields any more, as all are enrolled in school. Before USAID and Africare's intervention, few children went to school.

The program also brought with it access to credit, which has provided families with the means to invest in improved agriculture and livestock techniques. Prior to the program, there were no options to access credit. Africare facilitated a relationship between the villagers and a microfinance institution, resulting in more than \$1.2 million distributed to women, with a repayment rate of 98 percent two years after the project closeout. Some of the producers have built up enough savings to cover their own production costs and are no longer dependent on loans.

"The continued progress in Rassomdé, despite last year's food crisis, is an inspiring example of how USAID and its partners have been building the resilience of communities across the Sahel," said Dina Esposito, director of USAID's Office of Food for Peace.

"Prior to the [USAID] program, I was only able to provide my two wives and 11 children six months' worth of food throughout the year. Now I can provide 12 months of food. And we are eating better, because we have more foods available to us."

—Amadé Ouadrigo, farmer

RESPONDING EARLY AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE SAHEL

CHALLENGE: High food prices, another failed rain, and conflict in Mali and Libya put seven to ten million people at risk of sliding into crisis.

ACTION: USAID reached 4.6 million of the most vulnerable people, primarily women and children, with life-saving food assistance, and improved access to water, sanitation, and critical medical help.

RESULTS: Nuaga, one program beneficiary, grew bright green onions on her three market garden plots. She was able to meet her food needs from her market garden proceeds during the dry season.



Nuaga, a farmer in Silmidougou assisted through Food for Peace's development food assistance program. Nuaga has become a leader in her community as a result of the program. PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

"I am resilient now, just like the onions."

—Nuaga, program beneficiary

In the village of Tougouri, in Burkina Faso, I stood with the four women squinting in the sun. They each held a digging tool. Between them, they had 31 children and no husbands. Nuaga, wearing a bright yellow scarf, noted the rains were bad last year. No, she said, none of them were able to harvest much of the maize they had planted during the rainy season. I had just driven from Niger, through hours of flat and dusty land, and was in Tougouri to visit communities that were once again experiencing drought.

In the arid regions of East and West Africa, we are seeing droughts that used to come every ten years, now coming nearly every other year. A year after the worst drought in 60 years sent 13.3 million people in the Horn of Africa into crisis, we are now facing a rising threat of crisis in the Sahel—an arid belt that stretches from Senegal through Niger and Burkina Faso to Chad.

When families are living on the edge of survival, the slightest shock can send them into crisis. For many women throughout the Sahel, as in the Horn of Africa, who are eking out a living on small farms or raising livestock, a failed rain means no food for their children. Years of repeated drought means they can't put away any reserves. Today, rising food prices, another failed rain, and conflict in Mali and Libya, means that between seven and ten million people are at risk of sliding into crisis as we enter the lean season of the months ahead.

I have spent the last year helping to lead the United States' response to the Horn of Africa drought. We began prepositioning stocks of food in the region as early as Sept 2010 and through the crisis we focused on expanding resilience programs that help rebuild assets, improved water infrastructure and increased the ability of families to buy food in the markets through voucher programs.

Through our early actions, we were able to reach 4.6 million of the most vulnerable people, primarily women and children, with life-saving food. We know that it is critical to reach children in those first 1,000 days with the right nutritional food when their brains and bodies are developing. We also helped an estimated 3.9 million people stay healthy with improved access to water, sanitation and critical medical help, especially vaccinations so crucial for protecting children under five from infectious diseases that easily kill a child already weak from hunger.

Back in the fields of Burkina Faso, Nuaga proudly took me along the edge of her three plots filled with bright green onion sprouts. Seven years ago, USAID began a program in partnership with CRS to increase the resilience of villagers dependent upon rain fed crops. Two years ago, the program ended. Yet, Nuaga and her fellow farmers are continuing to thrive on the proceeds of their dry season market gardens. "We chose onions," she noted, "because if the water pump fails for a few days, they are strong enough to survive." Nuaga is sending her children to school and still putting away a little for the unpredictable needs, she said. "I am resilient now," she laughed, "just like the onions."

[First published in USAID's Impact Blog, March 2, 2012, written by Nancy Lindborg]



Onion crops ready for harvesting.

PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

AFTER WAR, LAUNCHING LIBERIA'S FUTURE

CHALLENGE: In this formerly war-torn country, child malnutrition and mortality rates have been a significant impediment to the country's development.

ACTION: Community members built or repaired 120 wells to decrease diarrheal diseases and helped form over 250 groups to boost agricultural yields.

RESULTS: Families within Liberia have seen improved water, sanitation, and hygiene, child health and nutrition, and agricultural production, critical components to achieve a more food-secure future.



LAUNCH is boosting child nutrition by educating mothers and health workers, distributing nutritious food, and improving WASH in schools and communities.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

In the Liberian village of Sanoyea, mothers dance to music and sing their names during a get-to-know-you game, while their children play and snack on fruit and porridge. At this meeting, they learn from trained leaders about breastfeeding, hygiene, preparing nutritious food, and other ways to keep their children healthy.

The Liberian Agricultural Upgrading, Nutrition, and Child Health (LAUNCH) program, which forms mothers groups like this one, has been working since 2010 to mend a society broken by years of civil war. Between 1989 and 2003, successive civil wars left half the Liberian population food insecure and lacking access to safe water, sanitation, and health services.

LAUNCH is working to empower tens of thousands of Liberia's most vulnerable to lift themselves out of poverty. A USAID Food for Peace program, LAUNCH, which is implemented by ACDI/VOCA, Project Concern International (PCI), John Snow Inc. (JSI), and Making Cents International (MCI), supports the U.S. Government's Feed the Future Initiative. The program repairs infrastructure; improves water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); teaches farmers more efficient agricultural methods; and counsels mothers on boosting child and maternal nutrition. Most importantly, it brings community members together to address some of their most dire development problems while fostering strength through deep-seated bonds.

IN THEIR HANDS

More than seven percent of children die before their 5th birthdays in Liberia. In an effort to boost maternal and child nutrition, LAUNCH brings mothers together

to educate them on important health issues. Mothers have found the sessions valuable and are eager to share their knowledge with their peers. “I teach other mothers to pound and boil plantains like I do to feed my boys,” said Patience, one of the 14,000 members of the care groups. The program also trains health facility workers on child health and provides more than 89,000 of Liberia’s most vulnerable women and children with healthy food such as corn-soy blend packets, bulgur wheat, and yellow peas.

“LAUNCH is aggressively seeking to reduce malnutrition and illness in women and children, and build strong community resilience,” said Joe-Hoover Gbadyu, a food security specialist at USAID/Liberia. This means addressing the underlying causes of poor nutrition, and chief among them is poor WASH. LAUNCH is building or repairing 120 wells and building or repairing institutional latrines in clinics and schools.

But infrastructure is just the start. LAUNCH is helping form groups of determined Liberians who are improving WASH at the grassroots level. Community Water Committees educate communities about latrine use, handwashing, and other hygiene issues and maintain water points, while parent-teacher associations focus on upgrading WASH in schools.

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Liberian farmers are also gathering to support each other as they learn the skills to combat food insecurity in their communities.

LAUNCH has helped form over 250 farmer groups, in which members are taught to better manage natural resources and sustainably boost yields. “Water conservation is emphasized during the training program, mostly for management of soil moisture during the dry season and for control of runoff during the rainy season. Mulching, mounds, and ridging are some of the water-saving techniques the program promotes,” said Mr. Gbadyu. The program has created 260 demonstration plots so farmers can practice and perfect the new techniques together, before adopting them on their individual farms.

Empowerment is contagious in the formerly war-torn country. Kpannah Fireman, a women’s care group leader asserted, “Women can stand on our own two feet.” Across Liberia, more people like Kpannah are banding together to solve their own problems, embodying the African proverb that says, “Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.”

[This article first published in March, 2014, prior to the Ebola virus outbreak.]

“LAUNCH is aggressively seeking to reduce malnutrition and illness in women and children, and build strong community resilience.”

—Joe-Hoover Gbadyu, food security specialist, USAID/Liberia

MALIAN FAMILIES REAP REWARDS OF BETTER NUTRITION AND HYGIENE

CHALLENGE: In Mali, an estimated 11.9 percent of children under 5 suffered from acute malnutrition in 2013.

ACTION: The hearth approach was used to teach women how to improve and maintain their children's nutritional status by using locally available foods and good household practices.

RESULTS: The project helped rehabilitate 746 underweight children, taught mothers proper hygiene practices and food preparation, and revitalized a community safety net to sustain these gains in food security.



Mothers and children gathered for a community meeting. PHOTO CREDIT: ANNE SHAW / USAID

Katouma, 48 months, is amongst the cleanest, happiest and most active children of the many gathered with their mothers in Tion, the Ségou region of Mali. The mothers discuss a newly introduced approach to nutrition and the benefits it has brought to their households.

“Before the [program], Katouma was always sick and crying and didn’t have energy,” said Katouma’s mother, Kadija Konta. “Now look at her!”

This community-based approach, called Positive Deviance/Hearth, identifies “positive deviances,” or practices, that allow women to improve and maintain their children’s nutritional status by using locally available foods and good household practices at the “hearth,” or home. In 2013 alone, 88 percent of the 847 children identified as underweight gained weight as a result of these practices.

Katouma lives in the Ségou region, plagued with the highest prevalence of acute malnutrition in southern Mali. In 2013, an estimated 11.9 percent of children under 5 suffered from acute malnutrition. To address these challenges, USAID supports this development food assistance program implemented by Catholic Relief Services to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity.



Child having his arm measured for malnutrition. PHOTO CREDIT: RYAN VROEGINDEWEY / USAID

After attending Hearth training in April and May 2013, Konta put into practice improved household hygiene practices such as keeping kitchen utensils and eating areas clean, and washing hands prior to food preparation, eating or feeding young children, and after using the latrine. Konta also learned how to prepare nutritious recipes including enriched porridge and soup with meat to improve and maintain the nutritional status of Katouma and her other young children. Katouma is one of dozens of children in Tion who participated in USAID-supported Hearth activities in addition to more traditional malnutrition screening and treatment activities delivered through local health centers.

Five months after Hearth activities ended, it was clear that all of the mothers continued to take the advice to heart. “We can’t even compare the difference in our children before and after the Hearth,” said one mother.

Female community leaders are encouraging others to make positive daily changes even after the project ends. Fathers were also briefed on the approach before the activities began and have noticed the benefits. The mothers noted that their husbands are happy and have more affection for their children. Improving family nutrition practices will also lead to less household health costs and result in greater food security.

Prior to the start of the project, while a community safety net was in place, comprised of community contributions of staple grains for families of undernourished children in Tion, the contributions were not sufficient. Following Hearth activities in the community, however, members were more aware of the positive results of their contributions and the community safety net was revitalized. Men provide local products and small monetary donations for ingredients such as meat and spices so the Hearth groups have the resources they need. Crop sales from a project-supported garden plot allows community members to increase their revenue to purchase other healthy ingredients. A portion of the improved millet production from these community plots also goes back to the Hearth groups to create nutritious recipes.

The Hearth approach was implemented in over 21 communities most affected by malnutrition in 2013 and helped rehabilitate 746 underweight children. It continues to be introduced in a growing number of communities in 2014. Thanks to USAID support, this program, which started in 2008 and ends in late 2014, contributes to the improved food security and nutritional status of over 203,000 people in 205 Malian communities.



Kadija Konta discusses how project activities improved the nutritional status of Katouma, 48 months.

PHOTO CREDIT: KERRI AGEE / CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

“Before the [program], Katouma was always sick and crying and didn’t have energy. Now look at her!”

—Katouma’s mother, Kadija Konta

VARIED FOOD ASSISTANCE INTERVENTIONS SAVE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS IN NIGER

CHALLENGE: Families have had to sell productive assets to buy enough food during the lean season.

ACTION: USAID provided cash transfers or in-kind food assistance to help food-insecure families meet their food needs.

RESULT: Over 2.2 million beneficiaries received food assistance from WFP during the 2013 lean season, improving food security and reinforcing the local economy.



A program beneficiary uses her money to make a purchase. PHOTO CREDIT: WFP

“There is nothing left in our granaries. The harvest was very bad and we could not feed our children. I can only thank those who are helping us to have food on our plate.”

—Hadija, program beneficiary

Karimou Karidjo, a 29-year old farmer from the Tillabéri region of Niger has had difficulty supporting his wife and four children due to poor harvests. “I have to find food for my children. To do so, I collect and sell wood, but even then it is difficult to put food on the table,” Karimou explains.

Karimou and others are often forced to leave their village and migrate in search of food for their families, abandoning their fields at the very time they should be planting. They are among the more than two million chronically food insecure in Niger, a country in West Africa where recurring drought, floods and high poverty rates make food security crises all too frequent.

2012 was a particularly bad year for Karimou and others; the “lean season”—the period before harvest when food is scarcer—stretched from the normal four months to more than nine. USAID supported the UN World Food Program (WFP) with an innovative program that implemented relief assistance differently,

using different approaches based on seasonality and functioning markets to reinforce livelihoods while saving lives.

Hadija was one of the 2.2 million beneficiaries along with Karimou who received food assistance. She explains that for her family, rations provided a huge boost during the lean season.

“I’m extremely happy to receive the food at this difficult moment. There is nothing left in our granaries; the harvest was very bad [and] we could not feed our children. I can only thank those who are helping us to have food on our plate. I hope for better future,” Hadija said.

Severely food-insecure households received food or cash assistance depending on food availability in their local markets. Where markets were working well, families were provided funds sufficient to buy a standard “food basket” in local markets. Recipients can access a more diverse food basket (including fruits, vegetables and dairy) when buying locally and the relief assistance reinforces the local economy. Where markets were not robust, or too remote, families received food rations instead. USAID through WFP also provided supplementary fortified and blended nutritious foods for children 6–23 months as well as pregnant and lactating women, to treat and prevent malnutrition

BUILDING UP ASSETS

When community members were not working their fields, WFP made transfers conditional for many, providing them in exchange for work that developed community resources, such as rehabilitating farmland that yields more food for the community. Village members learned simple agricultural techniques like banquettes and half-moons to improve land quality and thus food production. Those that provided labor earned food to feed their families, or cash that could be used to buy food.

“I’m very pleased with the results,” Hamid Al Barka, a village chief benefiting from the program in the Tillabéri region said. “The money given to us has allowed our women to take care of us and our children.”

The ability of USAID to program both cash and commodities in these situations is critical to the program’s impact and strengthening resilience in the long term. Delivering lifesaving aid in a way that helps communities help themselves aims to promote self reliance and reduce their need for future food assistance.



A beneficiary of the cash-for-assets program stands with his millet crops. PHOTO CREDIT: WFP

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN





IMPROVED HOME GARDENS EMPOWER WOMEN IN RURAL GUATEMALA

CHALLENGE: Children have suffered from chronic malnutrition and have lacked access to nutritious foods.

ACTION: USAID has supported home gardens and health and nutrition sessions across rural Guatemala.

RESULTS: Over 10,000 households have been able to establish home gardens and grow healthy vegetables for their families.



Sheny holds a crop in her home garden. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID



Sheny's home garden, where she is currently growing maize. PHOTO

CREDIT: USAID

In Guatemala, one out of every two children suffers from chronic malnutrition, leading to high levels of stunting and poor cognitive development. In the country's rural, western highlands, however, indigenous women are beginning to empower their neighbors to grow and sell their own foods and prepare healthy, nutritious meals to improve the well-being of their families.

USAID and Catholic Relief Services have partnered to change behaviors related to health and nutrition across Totonicapán, Guatemala, through a Food for Peace project. Guatemalan mothers learn to build home gardens filled with chard, spinach, carrots and other crops, and practice improved health and nutritional behavior to ensure their children will grow up healthy and strong.

Before the project, mothers throughout the community had struggled to grow many crops and mainly spent their money on staple rice foods. Since the project

began, mothers have seen significant improvements in their home gardens, including increased access to nutritious foods and improved soil conservation.

Catalina, one project beneficiary, did not know much before about growing vegetables and maintaining soil. “We didn’t know a lot of things before,” she said. “Now we have home gardens and grow spinach, beets, carrots and other vegetables. Our children eat better now.”

Catalina was trained by the project to be a volunteer promoter, and now teaches other women in her community proper agricultural techniques such as contour farming and irrigation to replicate in their own home gardens. She also had difficulty paying her children’s school fees, but now uses the money earned from selling vegetables to help her son go to school.

“Before, we only ate vegetables if we had the money to buy them. But now we can get them from our home gardens. Our land has changed a lot with the program,” said Shen, another project beneficiary and mother of four. She now has a home garden with 14 different kinds of vegetables.

By integrating agriculture and nutrition, families can improve their agricultural production and dietary diversity to decrease rates of malnutrition among children. The project uses a unique community participation model of farmer field schools that integrates health and nutrition teachings. Through this model, promoters hold training sessions to teach groups of 25 to 30 mothers how to grow wholesome, nutritious foods.

From October 2013 to September 2014, more than 10,000 households received support in establishing home gardens. Families planted seeds of chard, spinach, carrot, beet, radish and other native plants.

As a result of the project, mothers in Totonicapán have recognized their value and potential as strong, influential leaders in their communities. In addition to learning new agriculture and nutrition practices, many community members attribute the success of home gardens to a strong belief and confidence that positive change in their family’s overall health and income is possible.

“Before, we didn’t think we were any good or useful because we didn’t study. Now we know we have value. I was always shy to speak in public but now I am proud to talk,” said Catalina.

The program, which runs from 2012 to 2018, aims to sustainably improve food security for 23,500 rural families living in poverty in San Marcos and Totonicapán.

“We didn’t know a lot of things before. Now we have home gardens and grow spinach, beets, carrots and other vegetables.”

—Catalina, project beneficiary

ELECTRONIC VOUCHERS HELP EARTHQUAKE-AFFECTED HAITIANS RECOVER FROM CRISIS

CHALLENGE: Families lacked funds to purchase food available in the local markets after the Haiti earthquake.

ACTION: Families received electronic vouchers delivered via cell phone to purchase their food.

RESULTS: 170,000 people were able to purchase rice, corn flour, cooking oil and beans from their local markets. More than \$8 million was injected into the Haitian economy as a result of people buying locally and engaging in mobile banking.



Mercy Corps staff showing beneficiaries how to use e-vouchers.

PHOTO CREDIT: MERCY CORPS



Tent camps after the 2010 Haiti earthquake. PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

After the devastating 2010 Haiti earthquake, an innovative, first-of-its-kind electronic voucher (e-voucher) food assistance program helped meet the food needs of recovering Haitians.

Gina of Saint Marc commune was just one of the many earthquake-affected individuals who benefited from the e-voucher program. Gina's family and others throughout Haiti had lost most of their possessions due to the earthquake and lacked enough money to purchase food and cover other basic living expenses. During the aftermath, Gina's family of five received e-vouchers that allowed them to purchase more food in bulk, rather than buying food daily, which would have been more expensive. Thanks to the e-vouchers, her family was able to meet their food needs as well as send Gina's younger sister and older brother to school.

The vouchers, valued at \$40 per month, enabled over 170,000 earthquake-affected individuals to purchase rice, corn flour, cooking oil and beans from their local

markets. As a result of the program, 62 percent of households no longer had to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as selling their productive assets, such as seeds, chickens, or goats, to purchase food to ensure their food security. And by keeping families engaged in local markets, the program helped reduce the disruptive economic impact of the crisis and facilitated the transition towards recovery.

How did this work? By partnering with three Haitian companies— Fonkoze and Unibank, local financial institutions offering mobile banking services, and Voilà, Haiti’s second largest cell phone company—Mercy Corps tapped into the existing mobile banking infrastructure to benefit those most in need. In areas where cell phone use was widespread, such as Saint Marc, USAID partner Mercy Corps was able to immediately initiate e-voucher transfers. In other locales, Mercy Corps worked with cell phone providers to offer subsidized cell phones. This investment in mobile money services injected over \$8 million into the Haitian economy.

In 2010, mobile money electronic transfers was a newly emerging field in Haiti. Through this program, USAID and Mercy Corps were at the forefront, providing beneficiaries with more timely and efficient transfers and introducing them to financial services that many had never previously been able to access. Gaining access to these types of financial services was a significant step forward towards greater financial inclusion of the poor. In Haiti this was particularly important, because while in 2010 40 percent of Haitians had cell phones, only 10 percent had bank accounts.

Local vendors also saw significant benefits from the program. Janos Theophyl was one small shop owner that gained new business due to the mobile money approach. “I was able to build a new home thanks to all the new business I have,” she said proudly. Of the program’s 155 small business owners, 62 percent registered their business for the first time. This new economic model helped rebuild lost livelihoods, accelerate economic recovery and set the foundation for future growth.

Haiti was one of the first countries ever to benefit from e-vouchers from Food for Peace during a time of crisis. Due in part to the success of e-vouchers in Haiti, USAID now uses e-vouchers across the globe to assist families in times of crisis and conflict—including in Jordan, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.

The \$12.5 million food voucher program, implemented by USAID partner Mercy Corps, took place in the Lower Artibonite and Central Plateau Departments of Haiti from July 2010 to September 2011.



Mercy Corps staff showing local vendor how to use e-vouchers.

PHOTO CREDIT: MERCY CORPS

“I was able to build a new home thanks to all the new business I have [from the voucher program.]”

—Janos Theophyl, small business owner

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA





PHOTO CREDIT: ALEXANDER JOE / AP

A NEW LIFE FOR GOMA'S WATER SYSTEM

CHALLENGE: Unsafe water for drinking, washing and cooking was causing food insecurity in Goma.

ACTION: USAID and partner Mercy Corps built a water system for city of Goma residents.

RESULTS: 250,000 people have gotten access to clean water.



Workers fuse pipes together in Goma. PHOTO CREDIT: MERCY CORPS



Mobile water sellers fill their cans in Goma, where the Nyirangongo volcano destroyed 40 percent of the Congolese water utility network in 2002. PHOTO CREDIT: DIEUDONNE

MBUKA / USAID

In the shadow of Africa's most active volcano, Mount Nyiragongo, the shore of Lake Kivu in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) bustles with crowds each day.

Though the water is dangerous—risking cholera and other water-borne diseases—many families living in the nearby city of Goma have little alternative for drinking, washing and cooking.

Goma's dilapidated water system—already leaking, inadequate and badly damaged by lava flow when Nyiragongo erupted in 2002—simply can't provide enough water for the city's inhabitants. This is compounded by the more than 60,000 people who have been displaced by the recent conflict here.

As Siya Marguerite, a mother of five children said: "Here, there is no water, there are no rivers, so we all suffer. My children are growing up in conditions much worse than I had at their age." Marguerite settled in Goma after fleeing violence that plagues rural eastern Congo.

Here disease is closely linked to water quality. A 2008 survey of Goma inhabitants found that the incidence of diarrhea in children under age 5 was 22 percent. Although a 2010 government survey indicated 69 percent of urban areas have

access to clean water, in Goma it is estimated at best 40 percent have access to clean water[U2] . USAID, in partnership with Mercy Corps and other donors, is close to providing a lasting solution to the city’s water problem for disadvantaged families. By March 22, 2013 USAID and Mercy Corps will complete the first and most significant phase of work rehabilitating, improving and massively extending the city’s water system, bringing safe water to the doorsteps of more than 250,000 people in Goma, nearly a quarter of the estimated population of the city.

“Working on a municipal water system is not typical for a USAID food assistance program,” said Paul Majorowitz, team leader for Central and Southern Africa in the Office of Food for Peace. “But because Mercy Corps’ program was focusing on a peri-urban area with high malnutrition rates, we felt it was critical to focus on the water problems as a way to address underlying food insecurity issues such as diarrheal disease transmission.”

Health problems associated with poor water quality such as chronic diarrheal disease can often lead to malnutrition, as these health issues can deplete an individual’s body of vital nutrients. And treating the resulting malnutrition only with nutritious food is not enough, if the individual is still exposed to influencing environmental factors such as unsafe water.

By working with REGIDESO, the Congolese state water utility company, the provincial government and partner agencies, the water system bring water points within 250 meters of people’s homes—giving a maximum 10-minute round trip to fetch water, rather than the current three hours that some face. Water will be available from these public water points for 50 francs (\$0.06) per 20 liters, compared to the 150-300 francs per 20 liters of clean water that residents currently purchase from private vendors.

To build this infrastructure, crews faced digging pipelines through huge, solid beds of lava rock. Even jackhammers bounced off the surface, which required teams to excavate virtually all of the thousands of meters of pipeline trenches by hand. The massive scale of the project and escalating conflict in Goma and across the Kivu provinces also presented difficulties for workers, causing work to be abandoned for a time.

Still, completing the water project was deemed a high priority. Safari Ruvugirwa, a resident on the outskirts of Goma, remarked: “We are happy because we will no longer need to walk many kilometers to find water. Water will find us right here.”

[This article first appeared in the March/April 2013 issue of FrontLines magazine.]

“We are happy because we will no longer need to walk many kilometers to find water. Water will find us right here.”

—Safari Ruvugirwa, Goma resident

“SHARING OUT” TO MOVE OUT OF POVERTY IN MALAWI

CHALLENGE: Families were unable to save money and get access to credit.

ACTION: USAID and its partners helped communities establish Village Savings and Loan groups.

RESULTS: Across all VSL groups started by consortium partners, members have saved a cumulative total of \$1.6 million since 2010. More than 92,710 Malawians—65,470 women and 27,240 men—are now saving on a regular basis. Families are able to buy the essentials and plan for the future.



Lines Katchile celebrates receiving her share out. PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

“One of the most important things I gained is time management, because I do not have to do casual labor.”

—Lines Katchile, VSL member

The mood was high as three village savings and loan (VSL) groups gathered in Zaloengera village, Malawi, for their end-of-year “share out,” the time of year each individual receives their earnings as a VSL shareholder.

Only three years ago, many of the VSL participants couldn’t dream of saving a few Kwacha, the official currency of Malawi, much less starting their own small business or expanding their crop production enough to sell to major buyers.

In 2009, that all changed with the development food assistance program implemented by a consortium led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The program tackles food insecurity through a variety of interventions, including VSLs, by challenging the notion that the poorest individuals can’t help themselves out of hunger and poverty. In a country where over 60 percent of the population lives on less than \$1.25 a day and is affected by recurrent natural disasters as well as poor harvests, this was hard to imagine.

Many communities were skeptical of the VSL at first. How could they save money when they hardly had any to begin with?

The VSL caters to those who don't have many resources. By putting in a small amount, even pennies, weekly or biweekly into the group's savings box, the accumulated savings and interest over the course of a year adds up.

"Often in rural villages in Malawi, community members feel they must give any extra savings to a relative or neighbor in need to help pay for a funeral, for school fees, etcetera. The VSL program provides our beneficiaries with a socially acceptable venue through which to save money that cannot be easily accessed when a relative or neighbor comes by to borrow money," said Bahati Kalera with Project Concern International, a consortium partner.

Lines Katchile, 31, is now taking control of her family's future through a VSL group. Katchile, who lives in Jumbe village, is married with five children. She had no savings prior to joining her VSL group, and was considered to be one of the poorest in her community.

In 2012, Katchile took some of her family's limited earnings and invested it in a VSL group after hearing from others of its benefits. During her first six months in the VSL group, she saved about 25,000 Kwacha, or \$60. These initial earnings were enough to buy iron sheets to roof her house and a few other household items. During 2013, she saved 75,000 Kwacha, or \$180.

"One of the most important things I gained is time management, because I do not have to do casual labor," said Katchile. In fact, her VSL savings allowed her to develop three new businesses, providing her a steady income as she continues to grow them.

While the consortium initially designed the VSL groups only for USAID program beneficiaries, in 2011, it began allowing non-beneficiaries in the communities to join. Today, as much as 15 percent of VSL members are estimated to be not directly affiliated with the program.

Across all VSL groups started by consortium partners, members have saved a cumulative total of \$1.6 million since 2010. That's more than 92,710 Malawians—65,470 women and 27,240 men—saving on a regular basis.

[This article first appeared in the March/April 2014 issue of FrontLines magazine.]



VSL members have their savings recorded in a ledger kept by the VSL group's secretary. PHOTO CREDIT:

JESSICA HARTL / USAID



Lines Katchile's house. She added the metal roof to her house with her first year of savings. PHOTO CREDIT:

JESSICA HARTL / USAID

SMALLHOLDER FARMERS FEED REFUGEES IN RWANDA

CHALLENGE: Congolese refugees have been dependent on humanitarian food assistance to meet basic needs.

ACTION: WFP purchased corn and beans from Rwandan smallholder farmers to feed the refugee population.

RESULTS: Farmers increased their food production and living standards through the additional income, while feeding refugees in need of emergency assistance faster and at a lower cost. WFP and USAID saved \$240 per metric ton on corn and \$900 per metric ton on beans.



Beans being sold at market. PHOTO CREDIT: FINTRAC

Rwanda, located in the heart of central Africa, has experienced remarkable progress in food security and nutrition in the last several years. According to a 2011 survey, between 2009 and 2011, levels of stunting among children dropped from 52 percent to 42 percent, wasting from 5 percent to 2.1 percent, and levels of underweight children from 16 percent to 13.8 percent.

However, despite these improvements, the Rwandan people still experience high rates of poverty and malnutrition—a situation further exacerbated by the more than 67,000 refugees who now reside within Rwanda's borders. These refugees come primarily from neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), fleeing the continuous conflict and violence plaguing the east. In April 2012, fighting in DRC intensified between M23 rebels and government forces, resulting in a new influx of refugees into Rwanda. As many as 25,000 new refugees are expected to arrive by the end of 2013, according to the U.N. World Food Program (WFP).

With no access to land for cultivation and limited livelihood opportunities, refugees depend entirely on humanitarian food assistance to meet their basic food needs. Extremely vulnerable groups must rely heavily on supplementary food to stave off malnutrition.

USAID and the WFP are working together on a program that feeds the large refugee population while supporting smallholder farmers within Rwanda. With cash support from USAID, WFP purchases cereals and pulses from Rwandan smallholder farmers for the refugee population. This program helps farmers increase their food production and living standards while feeding refugees in need of emergency assistance. Between December 2011 and December 2012, USAID and WFP fed more than 72,000 people in Rwanda, including 61,600 refugees.

Bernadette Furaha is one of the farmers from Kirehe district in the Eastern province of Rwanda whose maize was bought by WFP. “I was very poor, with no shelter and no support,” she said.

Furaha had a small plot of land and started cultivating it, but she had no access to a market and did not know how to manage post-harvest staple crops. With the support of USAID and WFP, she learned how to manage her produce after harvest, and as a result of her improved maize quality, she was able to sell it to WFP and to traders. Thanks to the support she received from WFP and USAID, she has constructed an iron-roofed house, bought a cow, and enrolled all of her children in school. She pays medical insurance for herself and her four children, and they have enough food at home for the family and extra income from selling crops on the market.

Agnes Ingabire Mutoni is a 31-year-old refugee with six children. “My youngest child, Joselyne Mushimire, suffered from malnutrition because we had travelled a long distance from Rutshuru in eastern DRC to Rwanda fleeing fighting in the area,” she said. “I arrived at Nkamira transit center and transferred to Kigeme camp, where I received a monthly food ration and super cereal [a fortified food] from WFP. My lovely child recovered from malnutrition after a few months of eating the nutritious food.”

By purchasing the food locally, USAID and WFP are able to save considerable time and money. Because the food did not need to be shipped from overseas, the program saved more than \$240 per metric ton on corn and \$900 per metric ton on beans. Additionally, this food was distributed to refugees within two months of purchase, compared to an average of three to six months for food coming from the United States.

Out of a difficult situation, USAID and WFP were able to help refugees and farmers alike through one innovative and efficient program.

“I received a monthly food ration and super cereal from WFP. My lovely child recovered from malnutrition after a few months of eating the nutritious food.”

—Agnes Ingabire Mutoni, refugee with six children

SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN UGANDA PROFIT BY LINKING TO MARKETS

CHALLENGE: Farmers have lacked access to markets to sell their crops.

ACTION: USAID's partner trained community knowledge workers as entrepreneurs to share agricultural market information for a small fee with the farmers.

RESULTS: In fiscal year 2013, 23 entrepreneurs reached more than 4,000 farmers with critical market information and earned a total of over \$2,000 in commissions. Farmers expanded their connections to traders.



Community members jointly store their sesame crops at a bulking center, to aid group sales to traders. PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

Across the eastern Acholi sub-region of Uganda, small business entrepreneurs are engaging in new market opportunities and taking the first steps out of poverty. Through a network of community knowledge workers (CKWs), village members are working together and creating a sustainable model to help rebuild livelihoods in the formerly war-torn part of the country.

Due to years of armed conflict in the Acholi and neighboring Karamoja sub-region, a large percentage of households relied on food aid. In response to food insecurity and recovery needs, USAID and Mercy Corps partnered from 2008 to 2014 on a development food assistance program to help former internally displaced persons rebuild their land, livelihoods and lives.

George Okello from Tongrom village in northern Uganda is one such CKW who has dedicated time to serve his community and intends to leave a legacy. Recruited from local villages, CKWs were trained to use low-end smartphones to collect and disseminate agricultural market information to help farmers select crops and increase their market opportunities. As agricultural intermediaries, CKWs charge farmers a small fee for market information, creating accountability for CKWs and an incentive to continue providing these services beyond the life of the program.

CKWs also acted as field officers and trained smallholder farmers on effective agricultural practices, including crop rotation, managing livestock, pest control and

postharvest handling practices. In fiscal year 2013, 23 CKWs reached more than 4,000 farmers and earned a total of over \$2,000 in commissions.

Okello used the knowledge he gained to increase his own dry season yields by applying manure to his maize crop. “With the proceeds earned from my harvest, I bought two cows.” He planned to continue training farmers and providing them with information on weather, agriculture and markets.

To improve access to quality inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and agro chemicals, the program partnered with the Ugandan National Agro-Input Dealers Association (UNADA) that trained and recruited over 18 input agents. The agents then supplied maize, sorghum, bean and vegetable seeds valued at \$39,257 to more than 3,700 farmers in fiscal year 2013. Inputs came from both input companies as well as contract farming companies, all with long-term interest in increasing farmer productivity in the sub-region.

Auma Grace is one input agent who was recruited and trained with support from the program. Through her extensive network of smallholder farmer peers, Grace sold 216 kilograms of sorghum seeds to 54 farmers. She also established two demonstration plots for beans and maize, using them as a foundation to train 67 farmers on land preparation, line planting and plant spacing—trainings she herself received from UNADA.

To improve market opportunities, the program set up a farming contract scheme in which farmers were guaranteed markets to sell their sesame and white sorghum crops. Mercy Corps partnered with two agribusiness companies in fiscal year 2013 that enabled more than 7,500 farmers to produce a total crop value of over \$3.5 million, or approximately \$240 per farmer. In total, 16,371 acres of land yielded 4,374 tons of sesame and white sorghum. There are now five agribusiness companies actively buying sesame from farmers, creating a more competitive environment.

“I linked a six-member farmer group to buyers from a neighboring district,” said Okello. As a result, the farmer group sold 3 tons of millet at once. A transaction like this used to be not only uncommon but unbelievable to many farmers. With the profits earned, each farmer bought a cow for themselves.

As the program closes and Mercy Corps no longer supports training CKWs, the Grameen Foundation has committed to further development of the CKWs’ skills so they can stand on their own as small business entrepreneurs. The success of the program has empowered farmers, input agents and buyers to expand their networks, increase their overall profits, and rebuild their livelihoods.



George Okello, a community knowledge worker in Tongrom village, stands near his two cows and maize garden. PHOTO CREDIT: MERCY CORPS

“With the proceeds earned from my harvest, I bought two cows.”

—George Okello, CKW

FIRST TIME MOBILE MONEY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REACHING ZIMBABWEANS IN NEED

CHALLENGE: Poor harvests were leading to a longer hunger season.

ACTION: WFP provided both food and mobile money to buy food, given the 92% cell phone coverage in the country.

RESULTS: Families were able to access food, and women were able to manage the funds for their families to ensure it was used for food.



Bellah Mabhungo, beneficiary of the mobile money program. PHOTO CREDIT: JESSICA HARTL / USAID

“We never went hungry during the time we received assistance.”

—Bellah Mabhungo, program beneficiary

“We never went hungry during the time we received assistance.” Such a simple statement from Bellah Mabhungo, 57, from Mabhungo village in Zimbabwe said it all.

For her and others in the village, the hunger season had come a little earlier than expected in 2013. Harvests had been poor in Mabhungo and neighboring villages, and the reduced harvest meant higher food prices in the markets, a double hit for families like Mabhungo’s and Mable Siwenge’s. More than two million people in Zimbabwe were in need of food assistance at the peak of the hunger season in March 2014.

That’s where the seasonal targeted food assistance by the UN World Food Program (WFP) began to help. As Siwenge, 50, noted, “With the assistance, we managed to survive until harvest time in March [2014].” Siwenge was a first-time recipient of food assistance this year, as her land did not produce well with the local maize and groundnut seeds she used.

Other families in Mabhungo village had received this food assistance in previous years—about one third to one half of the 168 families in the village. But this year USAID and partner the UN World Food Program decided to try something different in this and other villages in Gweru and Gokwe South districts—mobile money and food, instead of just food. WFP chose to do these cash transfers in Gweru

and Gokwe South because enough food was locally available to support direct purchases by beneficiaries. So while this intervention did not make sense in other districts because of inadequate food supplies, it did in Gweru and Gokwe South.

Partnering with EcoNet, one of the largest mobile phone companies in Zimbabwe, and their subsidiary Steward Bank, WFP piloted the first ever mobile money-based food assistance in Zimbabwe. With 92 percent cell phone coverage in the country, distributing food assistance in the form of mobile money made sense. Even individuals who did not have their own phone typically did have a SIM card (the data storage card in a mobile phone), and could use a neighbor or friend's phone with their own SIM card to access their mobile money.

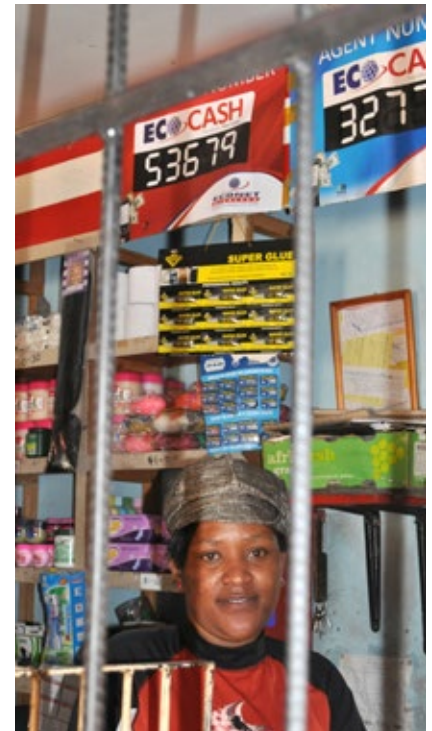
Each month, several days prior to the food distribution of vegetable oil and beans, more than 17,300 beneficiaries in Gweru and Gokwe South districts would receive an SMS text message indicating their \$4 per person was now in their e-wallet. Beneficiaries could then immediately go to the nearest EcoCash agent (agents for EcoNet) to get the actual cash in hand. For Siwenge, it took her about 40 minutes on foot to get to the nearest EcoCash agent.

Beneficiaries such as Siwenge saw a distinct advantage to getting mobile money—she managed the money for her seven-member household (\$28 per month) and could take it out of her e-wallet little by little, so it was less likely to be diverted for things such as school fees, non-food items or loans to family members. With her cash, she bought grains for her family and had them milled.

Mabhungo agreed with Siwenge. She said the mobile money helped her family, because “it made food available.”

Both women felt they budgeted better for their families with only part of their food coming in the form of cash, but also felt it gave them a control over what food their families ate.

Families in need weren't the only ones to benefit. Rural markets were stimulated because families now had the cash to purchase grains, and EcoCash agents in Gweru and Gokwe South districts also saw an increase in their business. Nyasha Muzila, an EcoCash agent at Muzila Store near Mabhungo, affirmed this increase in business during the two months of the mobile money program. While she also indicated her EcoCash transactions and sales from her store went back to normal levels at the end of the program, she and her family felt it opened up new opportunities for them to reach rural communities with other mobile banking options.



Eco Cash agent Nyasha Muzila at her store in Mabhungo. PHOTO CREDIT:

JESSICA HARTL / USAID

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