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Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives  
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## **Introduction**

Chairman Costa, Ranking Member Rouzer, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to speak with you today about international food assistance programs.

My name is Trey Hicks, and I am the Director of the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) within the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the largest provider of food assistance to the world's most vulnerable people.

## **Overview of the Office of Food for Peace**

For 65 years, our mission has been to save lives and end hunger by providing food assistance. We do this work because alleviating global hunger represents the best of America's generosity and goodwill. It can also advance U.S. security by helping to stabilize fragile regions, which can make the world a safer place. By helping them recover from crises, our work supports people as they take their first steps on the Journey to Self-Reliance. These efforts complement the work of other parts of USAID, including the Bureau of Food Security (BFS). My remarks today focus on DCHA/FFP's efforts and mainly on Title II.

## **Responding to Emergencies**

The majority of our work helps the hungriest people affected by conflict and natural disasters, including refugees. During Fiscal Year 2019, about 90 percent of DCHA/FFP's funding supported emergency responses in 55 countries, which helped tens of millions of people.

DCHA/FFP continuously monitors food insecurity levels worldwide and makes emergency funding decisions on a monthly basis, often to meet anticipated emergency food needs several months in the future. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, evolving conflicts, and political crises that result in population displacements often require immediate assistance. DCHA/FFP balances these changing needs by continuously adjusting programming priorities to ensure our food assistance is reaching the most vulnerable populations worldwide.

When making funding decisions, DCHA/FFP carefully considers many factors, including the severity of needs, the availability of funds, contributions from other donors and the extent to which other donors are doing their fair share, access and security constraints in affected countries, as well as the capacity of our partners, all to ensure that we invest our humanitarian resources responsibly and effectively.

To anticipate food insecurity, DCHA/FFP uses data from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, which USAID funds—including analyses of weather, markets, and trade conditions—to inform our programmatic decisions. This information is critical in enabling DCHA/FFP to respond early and robustly so our assistance has maximum impact.

In addition to data from FEWS NET, DCHA/FFP often looks to a disaster declaration from a U.S. Embassy, an emergency appeal issued by the United Nations (UN), or a request from local authorities for assistance because they do not have the capacity to respond adequately. Most important, our staff and partners on the ground assess needs and serve as critical sources of information. All of these inputs are critical to help us determine if, when, and how to respond.

### Tackling Chronic Hunger

We recognize that repeatedly responding to emergencies, while life-saving, is an expensive stop-gap measure that will not end hunger nor improve long-term food security. BFS leads Feed the Future, a whole-of-government food security effort, that seeks to reduce the root causes of hunger and future emergency food needs in areas subject to recurrent food crises. While the FY 2020 Budget has proposed to eliminate Title II, Feed the Future programs include ongoing DCHA/FFP development programs that also equip people with the knowledge and tools to feed themselves.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, DCHA/FFP invested over \$365 million in development food security activities in 12 countries, including several Feed the Future target countries. These activities aim to reduce chronic malnutrition among children under five and pregnant or lactating women, increase and diversify household incomes, provide opportunities for microfinance and savings, and support agricultural programs to build resilience, reduce shocks, and the vulnerability to future shocks and stresses.

### **Options for Emergency Food Assistance**

Typically, DCHA/FFP provides people with life-saving emergency food assistance in four ways: 1) food procured and shipped from the United States; 2) food procured near crises (locally or regionally from developing countries); 3) food vouchers; or, 4) cash or electronic transfers for families to buy food in local markets. How we respond depends on the context of the emergency, and includes factors such as appropriateness, timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency. For example, access to vulnerable communities can be a challenge, especially in conflict areas, where security may be a concern and may make the logistics of moving in-kind assistance unmanageable. Increased flexibility allows us to use the right tool at the right time to feed more people. I'd like to share a few examples.

Even before the conflict began in Yemen, the country relied on imports for the vast majority of its food. Today, conflict has left more than 20 million Yemenis hungry, the largest food security emergency in the world. USAID-provided in-kind food aid, such as authorized under Title II of the Food for Peace Act, is critical because many Yemeni households cannot support themselves and food is extremely expensive in local markets. In partnership with the UN World

Food Program (WFP), we are reaching up to 12 million people in Yemen every month with Title II and other types of food aid.

In Jordan, where local, urban markets are functioning, DCHA/FFP provides food assistance to refugees through electronic food vouchers. In-kind food assistance is not a feasible option, because it would be difficult to reach such a dispersed population in urban centers. Vouchers, however, allow people to buy food in markets that are close to where they live, while supporting the local economy in refugee-hosting areas.

In the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, DCHA/FFP uses different types of food assistance to respond to drought, displacement, and other shocks. For refugees in eastern Ethiopia, DCHA/FFP provides in-kind food, including U.S. Title II food aid, as well as food purchased in local and regional markets, because refugees live in remote areas with limited local production, restricted access to markets, and high food prices. Where markets are functioning, DCHA/FFP uses market-based assistance to help people affected by drought or displacement. Cash and vouchers enable them to choose food that meet their needs best and provide dietary diversity, while bolstering local markets.

### **Funding for the Office of Food for Peace**

DCHA/FFP provides assistance primarily via two types of funding: 1) Funds under Title II of the Food for Peace Act, most recently amended by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, over which this Subcommittee has jurisdiction; and, 2) International Disaster Assistance (IDA) funds under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended.

Under Title II, USAID provides U.S. commodities such as wheat, beans, sorghum, and vegetable oil to meet emergency food needs. We also use these funds to carry out development activities that address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition.

IDA funds finance the full spectrum of emergency humanitarian assistance operations in response to international crises, including emergency food security activities. The Global Food Security Reauthorization Act of 2017 recently amended the FAA and reauthorized IDA, as well as the Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP), USAID's market-based food assistance programs.

In his Budget Request for FY 2020, the President has not requested funds for Title II, IDA, or overseas humanitarian assistance in the Migration and Refugee Assistance account, managed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) at the U.S. Department of State. Instead, the President proposes to create a new International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) account to provide food and non-food humanitarian assistance to all populations in need through the most effective and appropriate means for each crisis. The IHA account would consolidate all overseas humanitarian assistance funding into a single new, flexible account administered by USAID. Through the IHA account, we would continue to be the world's largest humanitarian donor and purchase food from U.S. farmers, which would remain a vital part of U.S. food assistance programs overseas.

I will provide highlights about our current food assistance operations including oversight, recent and forthcoming changes, and coordination efforts within and beyond the U.S. Government for DCHA/FFP's programs. Given the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee, I will start with our current procurement of Title II commodities.

### **Procuring U.S. In-Kind Food Aid**

Dozens of U.S. commodities are available for programs authorized under Title II, and we work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), agriculture organizations, and university researchers to constantly improve them.

Once we assess and determine that a U.S. in-kind food assistance program is appropriate, we engage with partners to do the work—either Private Voluntary Organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services and World Vision, or international organizations, such as the WFP. Partners choose from the list of eligible commodities, based on local assessments of markets and needs. We help them to identify the types and amounts of U.S. commodities required, as well as a schedule for their delivery. Once approved by DCHA/FFP, they place an order for the commodities. Via USDA, we send a bid to U.S. producers, evaluate the resulting offers, and purchase the commodities on the open market.

After we procure the commodities, we work closely with our partners to ship them from a U.S. port to the recipient country. Upon arrival in that country—typically four to six months from when we decide to respond—the food is targeted to the hungriest people: children under age five, pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations.

### **Programmatic Oversight**

USAID delivers emergency food assistance in accordance with the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence. In short, we intend and design our assistance to reach the most vulnerable people. We take the responsibility of investing U.S. taxpayer dollars seriously, work to ensure that we are as effective and efficient as possible under current law, and target and monitor our assistance so it gets to those who need it most.

We deliver our assistance under very difficult circumstances, often in conflict environments, but we try to mitigate risks through monitoring and regular reporting. DCHA/FFP uses a variety of approaches to verify our aid is reaching its intended beneficiaries, including third-party monitoring, geo-tagged photos and videos of distributions, and feedback hotlines for beneficiaries. We also work closely with our partners, other donors, and our Inspector General to identify risks and take steps to protect our assistance.

### **Evolving to Meet Today's Crises**

While our programs are stronger and more sophisticated than ever, that does not mean there is not room for improvement. According to FEWS NET, more than 88 million people will likely experience acute hunger and need urgent emergency food assistance in 2020. Many of them

are among the 70 million people who are displaced. After they flee their homes, many rely on humanitarian assistance in the places they settle. Conflict is the largest driver of increased hunger and displacement. Conflict-driven crises are happening more frequently, often compounded by natural disasters like drought and can result in multiple displacements of families. As a result, today's crises are bigger, last longer, and are more complex. To meet the humanitarian needs of today, and the future, our programs continue to evolve and improve.

### 2018 Farm Bill

With respect to Title II, the 2018 Farm Bill, the House Agriculture Committee made modest technical changes to the Food for Peace Act that helps DCHA/FFP be more efficient and effective with U.S. taxpayer dollars within the limits of the statute's constraints, which ultimately means that we can save more lives. Some of the key changes include the following:

- Eliminating the requirement to monetize food aid, which will help promote greater efficiency in the Title II program;
- Increasing funds for programmatic monitoring and oversight of Title II, from a cap of \$17 million to 1.5 percent of the annual Title II appropriation, which also covers contracts for studies to improve the quality of food aid, FEWS NET, and others;
- Attributing Community Development Funds from the State, Foreign Operations appropriation for the Development Assistance account towards the Title II non-emergency directive; and,
- Allowing more effective use of 202(e) funding by streamlining categories of associated costs by clarifying what are administrative costs and what are the costs of getting commodities to the final distribution point, including transportation, storage, and distribution.

### USAID's Transformation

Through Transformation, USAID is positioning its structure, workforce, programs, and processes to advance our national security effectively and support host-country partners on their Journey to Self-Reliance. These efforts include significant improvements in the way USAID promotes food security and conducts humanitarian efforts.

#### *Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance*

We work extremely closely with the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) within DCHA to respond to humanitarian emergencies. We tackle food insecurity, while OFDA addresses other sectors like shelter, medical care, and hygiene. We work together to save lives, reduce suffering, and help communities recover as quickly as possible.

The forthcoming Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) will bring together FFP and OFDA, the two USAID humanitarian offices now within DCHA, by unifying and elevating our humanitarian assistance capabilities and expertise, eliminating the artificial distinction between emergency food and non-food response, and preventing unnecessary duplication in the field. The new Bureau will advance USAID's goal of creating a more strategic and seamless approach to delivering food and non-food international disaster aid in humanitarian crises. It will also manage certain programs that link humanitarian assistance to the rest of the Agency's

work, like ongoing DCHA/FFP's development food security activities and DCHA/OFDA's programs to reduce the risk of disasters. BHA creates a strong platform for unified USAID humanitarian leadership and policy with respect to UN organizations, other implementers, and donors so USAID's humanitarian programs are effective, efficient and fully accountable.

#### *Bureau for Resilience and Food Security*

DCHA/FFP also coordinates closely with BFS to address the underlying root causes of hunger and malnutrition, while building the resilience of vulnerable populations. USAID's programs work with the most vulnerable households and families to reduce the risk of disasters and improve agriculture, livelihoods, maternal and child health, and women's empowerment. In the same country, BFS works at a systems level to improve agricultural productivity and supply-chain development to benefit poor farmers and businesses—people slightly farther along on the Journey to Self-Reliance than the populations DCHA/FFP typically serves. We also collaborate with BFS by co-investing Community Development Funds in places like Burkina Faso, Haiti, Kenya, Niger, and Uganda.

After USAID's Transformation, BFS will become the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) and we will work together even more closely. RFS and BHA will both fall under the Relief, Response, and Resilience (R3) suite of Bureaus at the Agency. Together, the R3 Bureaus will form an even more robust and comprehensive link across the development spectrum from mitigating to responding to crises through to sustainable development, including food security.

#### **Coordinating the U.S. Government's Food Assistance Efforts**

DCHA/FFP is the U.S. Government's leader in food assistance, but we do not do this work alone. As Administrator Green has said, "Tackling hunger requires an all-hands-on-deck approach."

DCHA/FFP's ongoing development food security activities are part of Feed the Future, led by BFS. Feed the Future brings together a broad array of partners, including other U.S. Government Departments and Agencies, to coordinate efforts to end global hunger.

At both the policy and programmatic levels, DCHA/FFP also works with PRM at the State Department, which has the primary responsibility for formulating policies on refugees. Together, we respond to assist refugees in need: DCHA/FFP addresses food needs and PRM tackles non-food needs.

We also work closely with USDA. In addition to USDA's role in purchasing Title II commodities in coordination with USAID, we collaborate in other ways. For instance, USDA and USAID staff have the opportunity to review applications for each other's development food-security activities to increase coordination and alignment between our programs.

Beyond the U.S. Government, we also coordinate with other donors and private businesses to meet growing humanitarian needs more sustainably. Over the last five years, governments and

European Union institutions have increased their humanitarian assistance by 30 percent. While we welcome the increased contributions many have already made in the last few years, the U.S. Government is putting more emphasis on working persistently and effectively to get other donors to do their fair share. We applaud France, which recently ratified the Food Assistance Convention, and as part of this commitment, announced a plan to increase its annual commitment to food assistance.

With respect to Title II, DCHA/FFP has a long history of working alongside U.S. growers, commodity aggregators, logistics operators, food manufacturers, packagers, and others, to purchase and transport millions of tons of food commodities and nutrition products. For example, we work with companies like Edesia based in Rhode Island that produce a therapeutic, peanut-based paste we use to treat severely malnourished children. We also meet twice a year—including yesterday—with the Food Aid Consultative Group, comprised of members from the agriculture industry, maritime, and non-governmental organizations, to discuss U.S. Government international food assistance programs.

We are continually exploring mutually beneficial ways to bring new private sector partners into our work, as well as to tap into private sector technical expertise. For example, we are working with the Humanitarian Supply Chain Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to test new and improved packaging for commodities, which, if successful, we would ultimately purchase from private sector packaging companies.

### **Conclusion**

Before closing, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Food for Peace team and our partners for delivering life-saving food assistance on behalf of the American people. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I look forward to your questions.