

The Famine Forum

By the FANTA Project

Recognizing a rapidly changing global context for U.S. foreign assistance, development has been elevated as the third pillar of U.S. national security, along with defense and diplomacy.¹ To meet the challenges of this new global context, development assistance must be more effective and be harmonized with the broader U.S. foreign policy objectives.² USAID, in response to the critical need to make development more effective and development policy more coherent, is seeking ways to move from famine response to famine prevention.

Famine-prone countries fall into the category of fragile states. Fragile states pose growing problems to U.S. national security interests, impede progress towards further globalization, and consume a disproportionate amount of foreign assistance during humanitarian crisis. Famine prevention is critical to protecting U.S. national security, economic interests and investments in development worldwide.

Insufficient funding flexibility and limited levels of development and humanitarian assistance, coupled with the need for greater programming synergy, have constrained the ability of the Agency to address the unique challenges posed by famine-prone countries. In practice, “winning and progressing nations” are those deserving of development assistance funds and “fragile (failing, failed and recovering) states” are targeted with limited humanitarian assistance funds - food aid in particular - resulting in a focus on consumption-oriented approaches to relief without reducing vulnerabilities.

Famine-prone countries are a unique sub-set of fragile states that require special focus. In response to the need to better deploy resources to meet the challenge of famine in fragile states, the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), organized a Famine Forum March 24-25, 2004 in Washington, D.C. The objectives of the forum were to:

- Recognize that a sub-set of fragile, failing and failed states represent the most ‘famine-prone countries’ and requires that the Agency “does business differently” to address the underlying causes through a developmental relief approach;
- Redefine the Agency’s definition of famine and policy toward the application of resources to prevent and respond to the threat of famine;
- Use the newly identified “famine scales” to lower the present threshold of famine;

¹ U.S. Department of State, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 2002).

² United States Agency for International Development, *U.S. Foreign Aid: Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century* (January 2004)

- Identify alternative responses necessary for success beyond the “nuts and bolts” of food and non-food programming, including livelihood and market interventions, responses to health system inadequacies, as well as short- and longer-term policy and governance constraints; and
- Develop approaches that result in better engagement of other donors to assist in reducing the threat of famine.

Participation in the forum included a broad representation of USAID practitioners, senior-level USAID management and representatives from FEWSNet, IFPRI and FANTA. International famine experts Sue Lautze, Tufts University – Feinstein International Famine Center (FIFC), and Stephen Devereux and Paul Howe, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), made significant contributions to the discussion with some state-of-the-art thinking on the challenges of addressing famine in the 21st century.

The synthesis report of the forum will be available on the FANTA website at www.fantaproject.org.

Note: FANTA would like to thank all of FAM’s consortium members for the excellent work done on fulfilling its mission to "promote the efficient and effective use of food aid resources to help alleviate hunger and contribute to food security". We especially would like to thank Mara Russell and Trish Long for their leadership, professionalism and commitment to both FAM and the broader food aid community.