

**Statement of Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo  
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**Hearing on Food Security and Nutrition Programs in Africa**

**Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights, and International Organizations  
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

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Thank you Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Committee on Foreign Affairs. I am Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo, and for the last 3 years I have served as President of Catholic Relief Services. I am honored to represent Catholic Relief Services in this hearing.

In my statement, I will review Catholic Relief Services' food security strategy, discuss how Feed the Future helps us to implement that strategy with a special focus on nutrition, and examine how the Global Food Security Act enhances the Feed the Future program.

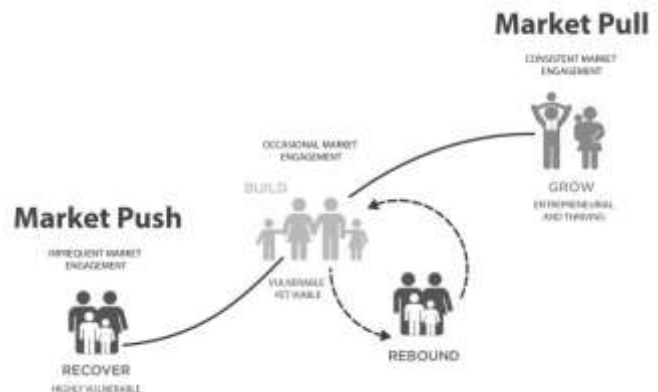
**Catholic Relief Services and the U.S. Catholic Church**

Catholic Relief Services is the international relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic Church. We are one of the largest implementers of U.S. funded foreign assistance overall, and of international food aid. Our work reaches millions of poor and vulnerable people in 93 countries. Catholic Relief Services works with people and communities based on need, without regard to race, creed, or nationality. We partner with institutions of the Catholic Church and other local civil society groups in the implementation of programs which, from our experience, is essential to understanding the needs of the communities we work with, and ultimately the long-term success of our work.

**Catholic Relief Services Concept of Food Security**

A core focus of our work is on improving the livelihoods of small holder farm families as a means to achieve food security. Among these vulnerable families, the depth of poverty varies, depending on levels of assets, risk, commercial prospects, education, and ability to take on new technologies. Accounting for these differences, our approach varies with the level of need and is focused on moving smallholder farm families along a Pathway to Prosperity (see Graph 1), and ultimately out of any need of assistance.

Graph 1 - Pathway to Prosperity Model



Moving people along the Pathway to Prosperity requires transitioning families from subsistence farming into greater engagement with markets. Ultimately, small holder farming is a small business and even very vulnerable farmers – with the right skills, assets, and opportunities – can increase their income through increased connections to markets.

Catholic Relief Services provides customized support to farm families at all levels of the Pathway in areas of building and protecting assets, acquiring new business skills, adopting better farming practices, revitalizing the natural resource base while protecting or improving nutritional outcomes. The vast majority of the people we work with are subsistence farmers who would be classified in recover or maybe the build segments of our Pathway to Prosperity model. That said, changes in production and commercial behavior by one group in a community will affect others, so our programming incorporates a community-wide strategy and uses a gender-sensitive multi-sectoral, integrated approach, including agricultural production, nutrition, natural resource management, and market engagement. We believe that this holistic, community-wide approach is the most effective way to achieve long-term food security.

Development food aid, especially Food for Peace development programs, has been a central source of funding for projects that help vulnerable people, particularly those at the lower ends of the Pathways model, move up the economic ladder towards greater self-sufficiency. The success of these projects centers on the multiyear, multi-sectoral approach. They address community and household needs for a long enough period of time to effect both behavior change and construct and rehabilitate critical infrastructure, including the natural environment. While food aid has had a long track record of success, we have seen over the last five years the establishment of another important program directed at improving food security in poor countries – the Feed the Future Initiative.

### **Feed the Future**

In 2009, following food price spikes that hit poor countries in Africa especially hard, the United States along with other G-20 countries pledged significant resources to improving food security in poor countries. In the following year, the Feed the Future Initiative was conceived and became the United States' vehicle for implementing this pledge. Today, Feed the Future is a “whole-of-government” initiative that is intended to concentrate resources and coordinate efforts from multiple agencies for greater results in food and nutrition security. Projects are based on country-led investment plans and require participating countries to make commitments to also invest their own resources in agricultural development activities. At present there are 19 countries that are part of the Feed the Future Initiative.

Catholic Relief Services supports the Feed the Future Initiative. As noted above, food aid programs have long addressed long-term food security needs in poor countries, but investments made through those programs have never been commensurate with the level of need. For instance, Food for Peace development programs in recent years has only been funded at around \$350 million/year. Dedicated Feed the Future funding provided through the Development Assistance account has reached \$1 billion or more in the last few years, marking a significant and much needed increase in investment by the United States in the area of food security.

While Feed the Future is a relatively new program, it has already seen important changes in implementation. For instance, the first few years of Feed the Future saw significant investments directed at smallholder farmers at the higher end of our Pathway model. We noted in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2012 that Feed the Future

investments needed to focus more on the most vulnerable in the countries in which it was operating. Since then we have seen additional resources directed to the most vulnerable in existing and new projects, and we are grateful for this attention to the needs of these at-risk farm families. Still, more and sustained investments in people in the lower segments of our Pathway model are warranted. Ensuring pro-poor approaches focused on smallholder farmers is vital, not only because the vast majority of people in Feed the Future countries are at the lower ends of the Pathway, but also according to the Food and Agriculture Organization smallholder farmers produce 70% of the world's food. They are also the farmers whose land and livelihoods are most impacted by shifting weather patterns and degradation of the natural environment. With world population expected to grow to 9.7 billion by 2050, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that agricultural production needs to grow by 70% to keep up. Feed the Future will be a critical tool in making the kinds of investments necessary to reinvigorate smallholder farming and help these families adapt to changes that are already impacting agriculture, and food and nutrition security.

Catholic Relief Services is presently implementing four Feed the Future projects as either the prime awardee or a sub awardee, and in each of these our work is largely, if not exclusively, directed to the most vulnerable.

### **Catholic Relief Services Feed the Future Projects**

Zambia/Mawa: Catholic Relief Services leads the Feed the Future Zambia Mawa Project, a \$10 million five-year project benefiting 21,500 smallholder farming households in two districts in Eastern Province, Zambia. This project helps smallholder families prosper by finding the balance between harnessing agriculture for consumption and for income through engagement with markets. To support the transition from subsistence farming to producing for markets, Mawa helps farmers and their families build essential skills to move them toward sustainable market engagement. Through community-based savings groups, trained community field agents teach basic financial skills to help farmers maintain and grow savings while also obtaining loans. They also teach joint budget planning to ensure the needs of all household members are considered, particularly nutritional needs of the children. Mawa also helps farmers adapt to change and manage risk in an environment where changing markets, environmental degradation and volatile weather threatens vulnerable farmers. Sustainable production skills enable farmers to protect and maintain the natural resources upon which their agricultural livelihoods depend. Business and marketing skills that are also provided prepare groups of farmers to produce for the market by organizing their production process to meet market demand. Across this continuum of services, Mawa's network of trained nutrition volunteers promote better nutrition and health by helping families build the knowledge and skills necessary to produce and preserve sufficient quantities of diverse, nutritious and quality foods, while also teaching good feeding, care and hygiene practices, which are essential for a healthy start to life. Mawa's foundational gender approach improves household dynamics that support the adoption of the promoted agriculture and nutrition behaviors and use of income, savings, and other project benefits for household productive and nutritional needs.

Ethiopia/GRAD: Catholic Relief Services is a subawardee to CARE in the Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development (GRAD) project, a five-year program benefiting 75,000 smallholder farming households who are part of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program. Catholic Relief Services is providing technical leadership of the nutrition element

of this project. Initially nutrition was not a strong element in the program, but after implementation began its importance was elevated. Our work focuses on promoting behavior change to encourage breastfeeding, greater dietary diversity through the adoption of household vegetable gardens and livestock rearing (chicken, goats, sheep), and the promotion of Alive and Thrive communications through savings groups. Initial results show that households are consuming more vegetables that are being produced from their household vegetable gardens and more eggs from their backyard poultry. Initial results also show that interventions have led to reduced admission rates for out-patient therapeutic care for malnutrition compared to the same month in previous year.

Nigeria/Livelihood: Catholic Relief Services is leading the Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods Project, a \$20 million five-year project in Northern Nigeria. It is using a multi-sector approach that will help 42,000 very poor households grow their agriculture production, incomes and improve nutrition. Most households served in the project are considered very vulnerable with limited market engagement, and thus fall into the Recover segment of our Pathway model. This project improves agricultural practices, including production and post-harvest storage for nutrient rich crops/livestock already being produced and promotes a market-oriented approach to diversify production. The project also makes cash transfers to some families to help meet nutritional needs, recover assets and overcome barriers to income-generating activities. To support sustainability, it strengthens the institutional capacity of government systems to implement poverty reduction programs and reinforce accountability between the government and citizens. The Project developed a Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) package of interventions for nutrition and hygiene based on formative research. The package centers on 21 key messages including Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), vitamin and mineral supplementation, home gardening, rearing of small livestock, and handwashing. Other elements of the SBCC package include a local recipe guide, food preservation manual, and integration of nutrition and hygiene into non-formal learning centers. Underlying these interventions is a case worker model approach that empowers households to set their own goals, identify services appropriate to household needs, participate in economic opportunities facilitated by the project according to household capacity and financial readiness, and track and document impact of services.

Tanzania/Nafaka: Catholic Relief Services is a subawardee to ACDI/VOCA in the Feed the Future Nafaka Staples Valued Chain project. Catholic Relief Services contribution to the project is to increase the incomes and resilience for vulnerable smallholder households who are unable to participate fully in the maize and rice value chains of the larger project. Our objective is to bridge the gap between smallholders' current status and market-based agricultural production activities. We use Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) to help vulnerable households build their financial resilience and decrease their vulnerability to shocks. These SILC groups consist of 20-30 smallholder farmers who pool their savings and lend to their own members. This provides capital for SILC members to invest in income generation activities (better seeds, livestock, side businesses), and the interest paid by the member taking the loan provides all SILC members a return on their investment. By September 2015, more than 12,000 vulnerable households have been organized into 616 SILC groups. These groups have accumulated savings of \$645,000. Catholic Relief Services also works with agriculture extension agents to promote the planting of household gardens as both a source for income-generation and dietary diversity. In order to strengthen the nutritional outcomes of these activities, we include nutrition messaging on crop selection, nutrition education on dietary

diversification, meal planning, and processing and preservation (in collaboration with USAID's Tuboreshe Chakula food fortification project).

### **Child Nutrition and Feed the Future**

Malnutrition is one of the world's most serious but least addressed problems. The human and economic costs of malnutrition are enormous and fall hardest on women, children and the poor. Nearly 3 million children perish each year due to malnutrition, a fact made more tragic because their deaths are entirely preventable. Given its long-term importance, the Feed the Future Initiative has made nutrition one of the corner stones in its overall response.

We know that proper nutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, which roughly is measured from conception to the child's second birthday, is critical for attaining full integral human development. According to the World Health Organization there are 171 million children who are stunted -an irreversible consequence of chronic malnutrition and repeated exposure to diseases such as malaria and diarrhea —during their first 1,000 days of life. It is estimated that 40% of children under 5 years old in Africa are stunted. These children will miss more school due to illness, will have diminished educational outcomes and will earn less as adults. This translates to significant lost productivity on a national scale in countries like Uganda (5.6%) and Ethiopia (16.5%). With appropriate nutrition during the first 1,000 days, a child will have improved cognitive and physical development, better health, and will be better able to earn an income as an adult compared to a peer who suffers from stunting. According to the World Bank, every \$1 invested in stunting reduction generates \$18 in economic returns.

Stunting is a complex problem with many contributing factors. According to the 2014 Global Nutrition Report, "the idea that nutrition is purely a matter of access to enough food remains one of the most stubborn myths impeding good policy among political leaders. Instead, nutrition should be seen as requiring the right nutrients at the right time along with strengthened health care and social protection, especially during pregnancy and the first 2 years of life." A child's overall nutritional status is determined by interrelated factors like access to diverse, safe and nutrient-rich food; safe water, sanitation and good hygiene practices; availability of adequate health care services; and parents who understand and have the capacity to support a child's healthy development. These factors are influenced by interventions in multiple sectors including nutrition, agriculture, health, and water and sanitation. Beyond the biological determinants of nutrition, we also need to address social determinants such as gender dynamics that do not support safe pregnancy or optimal health and nutrition for young children.

Feed the Future supports both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. Nutrition-specific interventions are directed at the immediate causes of undernutrition, including adequate food and nutrition intake, feeding, caregiving, and parenting practices (optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding), and the prevention (through better hygiene and meal preparation practices) and treatment of diseases that undermine nutrition like diarrheal diseases. Nutrition-sensitive interventions address the underlying causes of undernutrition included food security and quality, such as agricultural practices.

### **Case Study – Nutrition in the Feed the Future Zambia Mawa Project**

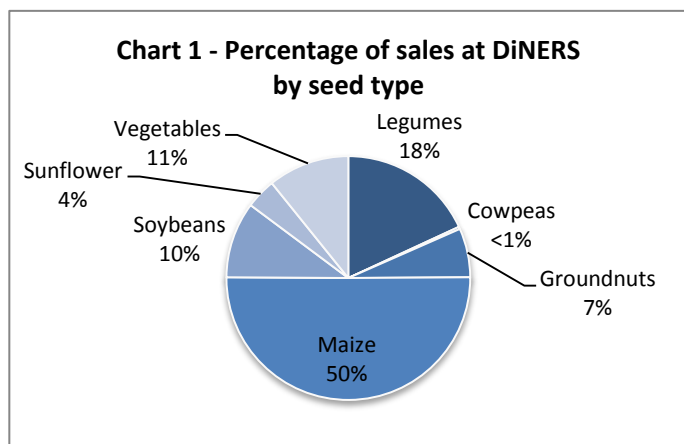
Catholic Relief Services' Mawa project in Zambia provides very good examples of both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions being incorporated into Feed the Future.

In Mawa, Catholic Relief Services supports nutrition-specific interventions through two approaches: Community Led Feeding and Learning Sessions (CCFLS) and Care Groups. The CCFLS, an approach that aims to prevent undernutrition in children, targets growth-faltering children and Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW). It is a peer-to-peer support approach that targets the critical period when complementary foods are introduced into a child’s diet. It promotes locally available foods to support infant feeding practices, new nutrition messaging and practices, and positive behavior change. Participating households are exposed to new food processing and preservations techniques, like blanching vegetables before drying, drying in the shade, and drying vegetables off the ground, all simple changes that better preserve the nutritional content of food. Such behaviors contribute to better storage of food that can be used during the lean season, thus smoothing out consumption across the year. Home-visits motivate the caregivers to apply new knowledge and practices to support child growth. To ensure whole-family involvement in child feeding and support for PLW’s increased nutritional needs, CCFLS hosts “Father’s Day” during the 12-day session, to improve their understanding in nutrition and engagement on child feeding. Male caregivers are also invited during household visits to receive nutrition messages.

Another nutrition-specific approach Mawa uses is the Care Group. Care Groups are made up of volunteers who receive training in various nutrition messages dealing with infant and young child feeding, care, and hygiene practices. These volunteers are expected to share this information with ten neighbor households in their communities through monthly visits. Volunteers distribute Child Health Reminder Cards that households use to help them remember the nutrition concepts they are taught. Participation of households in the program is monitored using a specially designed mobile phone application that registers participants, tracks attendance, records key child measurements like height and weight, and reminds participants of lessons they were taught.

A key nutrition sensitive intervention has been the incorporation of specialized seed fairs know as Diversification for Nutrition and Enhance Resilience (DiNER) Fairs. The project prioritized assistance to vulnerable households that included pregnant women and those with children under two years old. The objective was to provide these households, using a market-based approach, access to a diverse set of crops which is necessary for good nutritional outcomes. Catholic Relief Services organized a number of DiNER fairs throughout Mawa project areas. We worked with the Government of Zambia to ensure seed quality and compliance and small and large seed companies (e.g., Syngenta, Pioneer) to sell their seeds at the DiNER fairs. Seeds sold included corn and soybean, other legumes, and vegetables, many of which are improved varieties that are drought or flood-tolerant. Target households were give vouchers to supplement what cash resources they had to buy products at the fairs.

To ensure uptake, prior to DiNER Fairs beneficiaries received education on the importance of dietary diversity and they participated in household decision making discussions to facilitate joint decisions to meet all household (including nutrition)



needs. After the fairs participants were interviewed to find out what they purchased, how much it cost, and what motivated their purchasing decisions. Vendors were also interviewed to determine what was in greatest demand and how much they received in vouchers and cash. Initial results indicate that DiNER Fairs have led to the purchase of more diverse and nutritionally significant seeds (see Chart 1). Understanding such trends will ultimately help programs to better direct resources to achieve desired outcomes.

### **Global Food Security Act**

To date, Feed the Future has been an Administration led initiative. While its activities are broadly permitted and authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act, actual guidance by Congress on how the program is implemented has been relatively limited thus far. Under the direction of Chairman Chris Smith and Representative Betty McCollum, H.R. 1567, the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) provides important Congressional direction and oversight to the activities conducted under the auspices of Feed the Future (as does companion legislation in the Senate, S. 1252). Catholic Relief Services supports H.R. 1567 as marked up by the House Foreign Affairs Committee earlier this year, and encourages Congress to enact this legislation.

As noted earlier, Catholic Relief Services has been a supporter of Feed the Future for some time. That said, we are also on record identifying needed improvements for the program. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2012, we noted that Feed the Future 1) lacked adequate focus on providing assistance to the most vulnerable households (in the Recover segment of our Pathways model), 2) that contracts were favored more than cooperative agreements when the latter are more appropriate for development activities because they provide more flexibility to respond to communities' felt needs and adapt quickly to unanticipated changes on the ground, and 3) there was a lack of inclusion of international and local civil society input in program design. We are pleased to say that USAID has improved its practices to varying degrees on all three fronts. More work needs to be done, however, and the GFSA will help accomplish this.

First, the GFSA prioritizes assistance to small-scale producers, who are defined by the bill as smallholder farmers with five or less hectares of land. This will help direct and ensure adequate Feed the Future resources are focused on the most vulnerable households, who by delimitation have very small amounts of land available to them. Second, through the GFSA it is the Sense of Congress that "open and streamlined solicitations" and "the most appropriate procurement mechanism[s]" are to be used in funding Feed the Future projects, which as we discussed above are cooperative agreements if the objective is sustainable development outcomes. Coupled with greater reporting requirements that provide "detailed accounting of spending," including by recipient, we will have a better picture of how contracts and cooperative agreements are used in programming and Congressional support to make adjustments if this mix is not the most appropriate to achieve development outcomes. Lastly, the GFSA requires USAID to establish meaningful platforms for regular consultation and collaboration with a host of stakeholders, including faith-based, private voluntary, and local nongovernmental and civil society organizations.

In addition to addressing our outstanding issues with Feed the Future, we would also like to note other aspects of the bill that we strongly support. These include its recognition of nutrition-related activities, especially during a child's first 1,000 days of life, importance of land tenure rights, recognition that faith-based organizations have significant and valuable

contributions to make to development objectives, and recognition that resilience is a fundamental part of programming. We hope the latter will allow Feed the Future to make necessary investments in natural resources management and revitalization of farm land (i.e., improving soil health, access to water) that will help smallholder farm families who are dependent on increasingly degraded environment. Indeed, this is good example of the interconnectedness of development work, where we may be improving the lives of children through better nutrition, but unless they have a thriving environment in which to live, our efforts to improve their lives overall will be diminished.

### **Conclusion and Closing Recommendations**

Much of the work of Catholic Relief Services is directed to moving vulnerable, subsistence level smallholder family farms up our Pathway to Prosperity model through greater production, increased capacity, market engagement, and improved nutrition, so that ultimately they can lead healthy, self-sufficient lives. Feed the Future supports this process, by not only focusing on smallholder farmers who are most market ready, but also reaching those farmers who are most vulnerable. Catholic Relief Services is proud to implement Feed the Future programs that do just that.

While Feed the Future's emphasis continues to be on agriculture-led development, it has also incorporated much needed nutrition-related programming. We strongly advise that Feed the Future work continues this trend and that nutrition related interventions are incorporated in all Feed the Future projects from the start. Nutrition is, and must continue to be a vital component of food security and agriculture, and not an afterthought.

Additionally, we strongly advise Congress to pass the GFSA in the near term, to solidify USAID's course corrections and make permanent its focus on important aspects of development like nutrition. Indeed, by integrating improved nutritional outcomes, especially for women and children, into a global food security and agriculture strategy, the GFSA can maximize the full range of United States' investments in development.

Lastly, we strongly urge that nutrition remain a priority not just in Feed the Future, but all foreign assistance programming. It is essential to ramp up investment in nutrition in order to end preventable child and maternal deaths and we hope that the U.S. government will take the opportunity at the up-coming Nutrition for Growth Summit in Rio next summer to become a global leader on this issue.