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Emerging Lessons from
the 2015–2016 *El Niño*
in Southern Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

A devastating, accelerating food crisis is sweeping southern Africa. A severe drought, caused by the *El Niño* weather system, has destroyed harvests, dried up wells, killed livestock, and put approximately 40 million people in need of food assistance.² Across the region covered by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), 10 out of 15 countries have appealed for humanitarian assistance. The situation is expected to deteriorate during the rest of 2016 and into early 2017. Some of the worst-affected areas could be dealt a double blow because forecasters believe there is a high probability that *El Niño* will be replaced by *La Niña*, the inverse weather phenomenon that can bring heavy rains and localized flooding.

The 2015–2016 drought, the worst in more than 30 years, has worn down the coping mechanisms of communities that were already highly vulnerable. Poverty is endemic, almost 4 out of 10 children in the region are stunted, and SADC is home to one-third of the world's People Living with HIV (PLHIV).³ For many countries, the latest disaster was the second consecutive year of either severe drought or flooding.

1. The author thanks everyone who provided information, advice, and support in the preparation of this report and the field work that informed it, particularly USAID staff from Feed the Future and Food for Peace, including Lynn Schneider, Woody Navin, Laura Schreeg, Joseph Mwangi, and Martin Banda; and CSIS colleagues Reid Hamel and Jennifer Cooke. This work was made possible by the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

2. Southern African Development Community (SADC), *Regional Humanitarian Appeal: June 2016* (Gaborone, Botswana: SADC, June 2016), http://www.sadc.int/files/8014/6909/6132/SADC_Regional_Humanitarian_Appeal_June_20160714.pdf. Figures current as of July 2016.

3. Food and Nutrition Security Working Group (FNSWG), *Southern Africa: Food & Nutrition Security Update*, issue 1 (Rome: World Food Program, February 2016), 4, http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp284279.pdf?_ga=1.258126410.1555803899.1459176533.

This was not an unexpected crisis yet the preparations to deal with it were lacking. Governments in some of the affected countries were slow to sound the alarm or clearly communicate their needs to donors. Often, these same governments have failed to take steps to tackle the underlying policy failures that exacerbate food insecurity. The international community, stretched by crises in other parts of the world, was late to respond and at the time of writing was struggling to meet the enormous cost of a humanitarian operation put at \$2.7 billion.⁴

The United States has been the most generous contributor to the emergency operation, having pledged more than \$300 million to the regional response, mainly through cash and food donations to the UN World Food Program (WFP).⁵ These important efforts will undoubtedly save many lives in the months to come. The United States is also the leading source of development assistance to southern Africa, once its bilateral, regional, and UN contributions are taken into account. However, these considerable resources are—by and large—failing to contribute to the short-term relief effort.

The bulk of U.S. assistance to southern Africa comes through presidential initiatives like Feed the Future, President Obama’s global hunger and food security program; and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). These initiatives, in common with U.S. assistance in general, place strict controls on how money can be spent and limit the ability of program implementers to respond to unforeseen crises like droughts and flooding. Onerous program targets cause officials to tie themselves in knots trying to prove “impact” to colleagues back in Washington when their time could be better used testing different models of support. These restrictions not only represent lost opportunities to respond to today’s crisis, they undermine efforts to build the resilience of affected populations to face the next one. These shackles must be removed if programs like Feed the Future are to remain responsive and relevant in a part of the world where climate variability is the new normal. The challenge of meeting program targets must not become disconnected from, or elevated above, the goals of saving and improving lives.

Program implementers must also show more willingness to stray out of their lanes and help bridge the divide between short-term relief programs and longer-term development efforts. It makes no sense for people working on a development program like Feed the Future to keep their eyes fixed on the long-term horizon when an immediate food crisis that risks undermining their program objectives is unfolding around them. Better integration and collaborative thinking are required to see the bigger picture, overcome the bureaucratic obstacles, and forge closer connections between humanitarians and development workers so that their shared endeavors can achieve maximum impact.

In the near term, the United States can help ensure a timely and effective response to the 2015–2016 drought by

- Using diplomatic, development, and advocacy channels to raise global awareness of the disaster unfolding in southern Africa and galvanize other countries to contribute more to the relief effort.

4. SADC, *Regional Humanitarian Appeal: June 2016*, v, “At a Glance.”

5. John Vidal, “Southern Africa appeals for billions to cope with *El Nino* devastation,” *The Guardian*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jul/26/southern-africa-appeals-for-billions-el-nino-devastation-drought>.

- Pressing governments of drought-stricken countries to take more responsibility for unlocking policy, trade, economic, and agricultural barriers to food security.
- Emphasizing a linked-up regional response to the disaster that tries to improve coordination among the affected countries through the SADC *El Niño* Logistics and Coordination Team.

Looking further ahead, the United States should consider ways to

- Bridge the gap between relief and development efforts by designing development programs that are nimble enough to respond to shocks
- Help host governments strengthen their Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans and institutions
- Strengthen Feed the Future by removing some of its bureaucratic constraints and rigid targets so that it can be more responsive to conditions in its focus countries
- Balance the desire for country-led development with the need to ensure that money is well spent and that host governments take good-faith steps to break the cycle of food insecurity. In some cases, applying conditions to future U.S. engagement will be advisable.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In June 2016, a team from the CSIS Africa Program and CSIS Global Food Security Project traveled to Mozambique and Malawi, two countries directly affected by *El Niño*, to assess the scale of the drought and observe the efforts by host governments and their international partners to prepare a humanitarian response. The visit included meetings with host-government officials, U.S. embassy staff, other donor representatives, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in relief efforts, and drought-impacted communities. In Mozambique, the research team visited the capital, Maputo, and Gaza, a province in the south of the country where the drought has been severe. In Malawi, the team held meetings in the capital, Lilongwe, before traveling to Balaka district in the south-central part of the country, where drought had resulted in almost total crop failure.

The main objectives of the trip were to

1. Understand the impact of increased climate variability on already-vulnerable communities and gauge the extent to which climate awareness is being built into the development strategies of the United States and other donors.
2. Observe U.S. efforts to build the resilience of nations, communities, households, and individuals to withstand weather-induced food shocks. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has heavily invested in resilience-building as a strategy to help people move out of perpetual crisis and reduce the need for emergency interventions that are costly, in terms of both lives lost and dollars spent. The research team wanted to see how the resilience agenda was being applied—and to what degree of success—in a context of extreme adversity, in countries that had suffered severe, back-to-back crises.
3. Examine the links between the near-term humanitarian response to the drought and longer-term efforts to boost agricultural productivity and reduce malnutrition through pro-

grams like President Obama's Feed the Future initiative. The team considered the complementarity of these efforts and the extent to which longer-term development activities gave communities better coping skills to withstand the worst effects of the drought.

THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DROUGHT: A SLOWLY UNFOLDING CATASTROPHE

El Niño is a naturally occurring climatic phenomenon associated with increased sea temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. These changes have destabilizing effects on weather systems across the world, leading to failures of monsoon rains and increased drought prevalence in some regions and higher rainfall in others. The 2015–2016 *El Niño* was one of the strongest on record. It has been blamed for causing severe floods as far apart as Peru and India and drought conditions in Haiti and Indonesia. However, parts of Africa have been hit the hardest. Lower-than-expected rainfall in Ethiopia caused the worst drought for 50 years, leaving more than 10 million people in need of emergency food assistance by the early months of 2016.

In southern Africa, *El Niño's* impact could be seen in 11 countries at the time of CSIS's visit, putting approximately 40 million people at the mercy of the worst drought in more than three decades.⁶ While *El Niño* conditions had weakened, its repercussions for food security were expected to peak during the remainder of 2016 and the first quarter of 2017 in southern Africa, which was entering the lean season on the back of what was a total crop failure in the worst-affected areas. Many of the most vulnerable countries were still recovering from another serious drought in 2014 and flooding in 2015. To add to the dangers, meteorologists considered it likely that *El Niño* would give way to *La Niña* conditions in late 2016. *La Niña* is the inverse weather effect that brings the threat of severe, localized flooding to some of the areas already blighted by drought.

The drought covered a vast region. To date, 7 of Mozambique's 10 provinces have been affected, an area encompassing the southern two-thirds of the country. An estimated 500,000 farmers have seen their entire harvest wiped out because seasonal rains arrived several weeks late and then failed to materialize during a critical stage of the growing cycle.⁷ A needs assessment carried out in March 2016 by Mozambique's Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition, known by its Portuguese acronym, SETSAN, put the number of food-insecure people at 1.5 million, with approximately half requiring immediate help. This was a dramatic escalation from the previous quarter, when SETSAN estimated that 167,000 people were at risk, in three provinces. By July, the U.S.-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) was warning that the worst-affected parts of Mozambique had already reached Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) level 3 (Crisis), just two steps away from famine.⁸

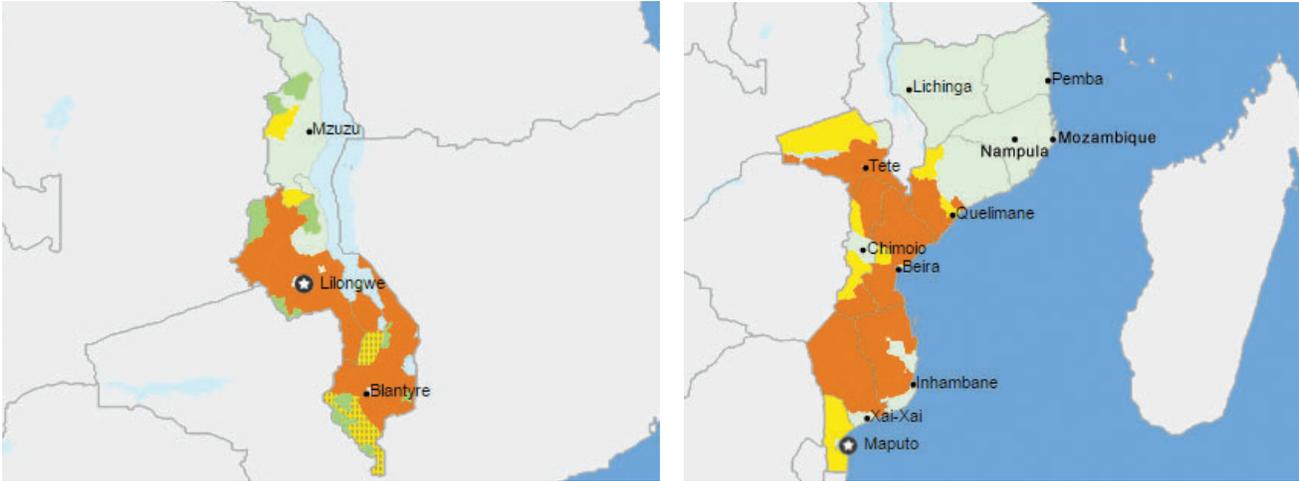
6. SADC, Regional Humanitarian Appeal: June 2016, v, "At a Glance."

7. Humanitarian Country Team, "2016 Strategic Response Plan: Mozambique," April 2016, 4, https://www.humanitarian-response.info/en/system/files/documents/files/mozambique_drought_response_plan_hct_april2016_0.pdf.

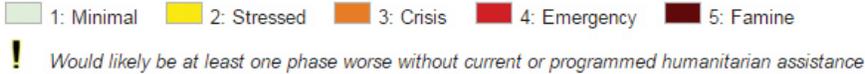
8. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), "Mozambique Food Security Outlook: June 2016 to January 2017," 1, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Mozambique_FSO_2016_06_Final.pdf.

Water as well as food access was a serious problem in communities in Gaza Province visited by the CSIS team. Families reported having to spend many hours at their local borehole extracting drinking water that did not come close to meeting their daily needs. Thousands of cattle in Gaza, the livestock center of the country, had already perished for lack of water.

MALAWI AND MOZAMBIQUE: MEDIUM-TERM FOOD SECURITY OUTLOOK, OCTOBER 2016–JANUARY 2017



IPC 2.0 Acute Food Insecurity Phase



Source: FEWS NET

The situation was similarly bleak in Malawi, where the poorest households in the south of the country had already reached IPC level 3 within a month of the annual harvest being gathered.⁹ Rainfall in the southern and central regions was between 55 and 85 percent of normal levels, devastating the white maize crop used to make nsima, the staple food eaten by the vast majority of Malawians. The maize harvest was down 32 percent on the five-year average, according to FEWS NET.¹⁰ The 2016 harvests of other important cereals, including rice, sorghum, and millet, decreased between 20 and 40 percent on the previous year.¹¹ Malawi’s Strategic Grain Reserve, usually an important source of emergency supplies in lean years, has been almost emptied because of two consecutive years of poor harvests. As a result of this food deficit, at least 6.5 million

9. FEWS NET, “Malawi Key Message Update: Food Insecurity to Persist during Harvest and Post-Harvest Period,” May 2016, 1, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Malawi%20-%20Key%20Message%20Update_%20Thu%2C%202016-05-19.pdf.

10. FEWS NET, “Malawi Food Security Outlook: June 2016 to January 2017: Record High Staple Food Prices Driving Acute Food Insecurity,” <http://www.fews.net/southern-africa/malawi/food-security-outlook/june-2016>.

11. Government of Malawi Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development, “2015/16 Second Round National Agricultural Production Estimates,” PowerPoint presentation, Lilongwe, March 31, 2016.



A mother and her young daughter wait to collect food vouchers, Tsocate village in Gaza Province, Mozambique. Photo by Grant Lee Neuenburg.

people—39 percent of the population—will require emergency assistance before the next harvest, according to a food-security survey conducted in May 2016 by the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee, a group containing representatives from the main donors, host government agencies, and NGOs. This figure does not include an additional 1.9 million people who will need to sell livelihood assets to buy food.

The regional scope of the drought has hampered efforts by affected countries to source grain and other food commodities that they would normally rely upon their neighbors to supply. South Africa, the traditional source of surplus grains, experienced a 30 percent drop in maize production in its 2016 harvest and was planning large-scale imports to meet its own needs.¹² Zambia was the only country in the region to record a maize surplus. While the government of President Edgar Lungu suggested it would supply Malawi with maize, the exact amount was unclear and export restrictions were not due to be lifted until October.¹³

The drought-induced food crisis has triggered a multitude of damaging second-order effects. It has masked and ac-

centuated a broader crisis of poor nutrition, a problem linked to the lack of dietary diversity and—in southern Africa—an overreliance on maize consumption in particular. Four out of 10 children in the SADC region are already stunted, a condition that can lead to life-long physical and cognitive development problems.¹⁴ In Malawi, 47 percent of children under the age of five are stunted, according to Demographic Health Survey data.¹⁵ The 2016 drought is likely to expand the size of this already-vast group and further limit the life prospects of those within it.

12. FEWS NET, "Regional Supply and Market Outlook: Southern Africa," August 3, 2016, 2, http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/SOUTHERN_AFRICA_REGIONAL_SUPPLY_Final20160803_V0_1.pdf.

13. Ibid., 4.

14. FNSWG, Southern Africa: Food & Nutrition Security Update, 4.

15. World Food Programme (WFP), *El Nino: Undermining Resilience: Implications of El Niño in Southern Africa from a Food and Nutrition Security Perspective* (Johannesburg: WFP, February 2016), 31, <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp282004.pdf>.

In addition to its impact on hunger and malnutrition, the drought has had broader consequences on public health. There is a heightened risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases as people resort to drinking water from unsafe sources. Malawi has reported isolated cholera outbreaks originating in fishing communities on Lake Malawi. Two particularly vulnerable, often overlapping, groups are PLHIV and Tuberculosis. One-third of the world's PLHIV live in southern Africa, where 9 of the 10 countries with the highest disease burden are located. Evidence suggests that people taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) are less likely to adhere to their drug regimens and more likely to suffer treatment failure if they do not have enough to eat and drink or lack access to a balanced diet. Furthermore, there is a risk that drought conditions could lead to an increase in HIV transmission. Potential reasons for this include the provision of transactional sex for food and the increased risk of sexual violence faced by women and girls who have to stray further from the safety of their homes to find water. One study of rural communities in Africa with high rates of HIV found an 11 percent increase in HIV infection rates following a drought.¹⁶

Another important consequence of food insecurity is a drop in school attendance. Members of drought-hit communities visited by CSIS in Gaza Province, southern Mozambique, said that before food voucher distribution began, their children had been too hungry and tired to attend classes. Others said they had withdrawn their children from school to help with family chores that were taking longer than usual because of the drought, such as collecting water and sourcing food.

Looking beyond the household level, the drought has had negative consequences for national and regional economies, with potential knock-on implications for national security. In April 2016, the International Monetary Fund revised downwards its growth forecast for southern Africa, due in part to the impact of the drought.¹⁷ Regional food insecurity fuels, and is fueled by, the economic crisis. A combination of poor harvests and currency depreciation has led to dramatic increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs. In Mozambique, maize prices in early July were more than twice the five-year average.¹⁸ This is a time of year, shortly after the harvest is gathered, when prices are normally low. The government raised interest rates to 17.25 percent in July in an effort to bring inflation under control.¹⁹ Food price analysis conducted by the WFP in Malawi in the first week of June found that maize prices at markets around the country were up to 50 percent higher than the previous month.²⁰ Public-sector salaries have failed to keep pace with these dramatic increases, placing families in a precarious position.

The specter of potential civil unrest is a major concern in the months ahead, in the same way that food shortages caused riots in at least 14 African countries in 2007–2008. In Malawi, there

16. Marshall Burke, Erick Gong, and Kelly Jones, "Income Shocks and HIV in Africa," *Economic Journal* 125 (June 2014): 1157–89, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eoj.12149/epdf>.

17. Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS), "Revised IMF Growth Forecasts," Policy Brief, May 2016, 2.

18. FEWS NET, "Mozambique Food Security Outlook: June 2016 to January 2017," 1.

19. Club of Mozambique, "Mozambique Central Bank Decreases Huge Rise in Key Interest Rates," July 21, 2016, <http://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-central-bank-decreases-huge-rise-in-key-interest-rate/>.

20. WFP, "Maize Price Update (mVAM)," June 7, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Maize-Price-update_23mVAM_7-June-2016.pdf.

have already been isolated reports of disturbances at depots operated by the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), a state-run enterprise that buys food commodities direct from farmers and sells them to the public at a subsidized price.²¹

Meanwhile, the governments of Mozambique and Malawi have exhausted their foreign currency reserves, making it harder for them to buy their way out of the crisis by purchasing food commodities abroad. In Malawi, the value of the Kwacha plummeted from 450 to the U.S. dollar in July 2015 to 700 to the dollar in May 2016.²² International financial institutions are searching for creative ways to reduce the fiscal pressure on host governments while simultaneously addressing the food crisis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for example, has relaxed Malawi's borrowing limit on the condition that any extra funding secured is spent on foodstuffs turned over to the WFP for distribution.

COPING MECHANISMS UNDER STRAIN

In a region accustomed to regular food shocks, people find ways to cope in even the most difficult situations. However, the accelerating cycle of drought and flooding due to increased climate variability has gradually eroded resilience, particularly among the poorest and most vulnerable. Each passing crisis whittles down the available coping mechanisms, making it that much harder for households, communities, and nations themselves to prepare for future shocks. During visits to communities in southern Mozambique and south central Malawi, CSIS heard that the 2015–2016 drought, the worst for 35 years, was putting people under intolerable strain.

The traditional fallback for most people in the region is to take on extra employment during hard times, often many miles from home. In most villages it is rare to see able-bodied men and women of working age. Casual farm labor is the most accessible form of employment and is ingrained in Malawi, where it is called *ganyu*. This season, however, employment options have narrowed because there were fewer crops to harvest. In most years, South Africa's mines are a vital source of seasonal jobs to the region. Many Mozambicans living in the south of the country are more likely to cross the international border into South Africa for work than seek employment at home. However, South Africa's mining sector has sharply contracted with the global fall in commodity prices, and is laying off staff rather than hiring extra workers.

When CSIS visited Mozambique and Malawi in June 2016, less than two months after harvest time, the poorest households were already resorting to negative coping strategies in order to stay alive. In Mozambique, many households reported selling charcoal as a way of earning an income. So many people were resorting to this activity that the market was saturated with charcoal, causing the sale price to plummet. Charcoal production was also depleting tree stocks, leading to soil erosion that made the environment more vulnerable to flooding and drought in the future. Other

21. Owen Khamula, "Malawi: Police Fire Teargas to Disperse Angry Customers Queuing to Buy Maize at Admarc Depots," *Nyasa Times*, June 14, 2016, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201606140788.html>.

22. FEWS NET, "Malawi Food Security Outlook: June 2016 to January 2017: Record High Staple Food Prices Driving Acute Food Insecurity," Figure 4, <http://www.fews.net/southern-africa/malawi/food-security-outlook/june-2016>.

families were selling off assets, including their livestock. There were few buyers, however, partly because cattle were already emaciated due to the shortage of water and pasture. Other families reported avoiding medical treatment and associated costs; foraging for roots and leaves to provide alternative sources of sustenance; eating seeds provided to farmers by donor organizations for the next planting season; and skipping meals. These various strategies placed long-term health in jeopardy, particularly among children and pregnant women. The most desperate families voiced fears that if the situation deteriorated further they would have to migrate elsewhere.

THE RELIEF EFFORT: SLOW OFF THE MARK AND UNDERFUNDED

International donors—including the United States—raised the alarm early and often about the unfolding food crisis in southern Africa. However, their messages have struggled to attract a broader audience and significant resources with so many other crises competing for attention around the world. Based on observations in Malawi and Mozambique, the countries directly affected by the crisis have failed to mount an effective response or articulate their needs in a clear voice to donors in the way that Ethiopia was able to marshal attention and resources to its ongoing *El Niño* effort. At the regional level, SADC leadership has been low profile, disjointed, and ineffective, even though the drought has directly affected nearly all of its member states. SADC set up an *El Niño* Logistics and Coordination Team in April 2016 and issued a regional funding appeal in June but it has not taken a leading role in dealing with the crisis. Neither has it taken some of the longer-term steps to address chronic food insecurity in the region, such as removing impediments to intraregional trade and synchronizing seed laws.

One of the most important first steps a country can take in the face of a crisis that is beyond its ability to meet is to issue a national disaster declaration. Indeed, the United States' ambassador cannot authorize an official response in an affected country until a declaration is issued. In the case of Malawi, the declaration came very late—in April—several months after other countries in the region had reacted. By mid-July, Mozambique had yet to issue a disaster declaration at all, preferring to wait for a regional appeal by SADC. Instead, a government agency, the National Institute of Disaster Management (INGC), issued an institutional red alert for 90 days for the drought-affected provinces in April.

A number of reasons may explain what at first glance appears to be the ambivalent attitude of host governments to the crisis unfolding under their noses. In Mozambique, the government has been reeling from multiple national crises that have stretched capacity to its limit and damaged its standing with the very donors that would be expected to fund the bulk of the humanitarian response. The civil war between the government of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and fighters from Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) has resurfaced in the center of the country. The violence has affected some of the provinces worst hit by the drought, causing thousands to flee their homes and an estimated 11,500 to cross the border from Tete Province into food insecure areas of Malawi in the early months of 2016. The refugees were housed in poor conditions in a remote location; most headed back home or made ad hoc arrangements inside Malawi when the Malawian authorities moved the camp further away

from the Mozambican border.²³ The insecurity prompted the government to organize military convoys for the transport of goods along the main routes through central Mozambique and into Malawi but these measures failed to prevent attacks occurring, complicating efforts to deliver humanitarian supplies within both countries.²⁴

In addition, an economic crisis erupted after it emerged that the Mozambican government had been concealing almost \$2 billion worth of hidden debt—much of it in the form of state-backed loans—from the IMF. The loans were tied up in dubious defense contracts linked to current and former FRELIMO officials. The revelations caused the IMF to suspend the latest installment of a \$284 million loan and 14 donors to freeze direct budget support to the government. In June, government officials faced a painful set of meetings in Maputo with senior IMF leadership, including its managing director, Christine Lagarde. These developments left FRELIMO distracted, weakened, and deeply compromised in the eyes of donors, making it wary of issuing a funding appeal that might go unanswered.

In addition, limited, late, or faulty data on the scale of the developing crisis made it difficult for donors to get an accurate assessment of the numbers affected and plan an effective response. The problem was particularly acute at SETSAN, which conducts needs assessments in Mozambique. There was a delay of several weeks before the release of an assessment conducted in the final quarter of 2015. When it was finally released in December, the report suggested that 167,000 people were in need of assistance in three provinces. International NGOs were dubious about the figures, believing the problem was much worse. Their fears were justified when an updated assessment released in March estimated that 1.5 million people were at risk across seven provinces.

Host governments have tried to respond to the crisis but the resources deployed to date are far short of what is required. Mozambican authorities have dug and rehabilitated boreholes in the southern provinces, trucked water to parched communities, organized seed fairs, and provided other limited assistance, but the total amount directed to the response was less than \$10 million at the time of CSIS's visit.²⁵ At the unveiling of Malawi's food insecurity response plan in July, President Peter Mutharika committed \$50 million to the effort, out of a total estimated cost of \$380 million.²⁶

23. An upsurge of fighting in August, following two calmer months, led to a fresh movement of Mozambican refugees into Malawi. See "Mozambicans Flee to Malawi Again as Fighting Restarts in Tete," *Zitamar News*, August 12, 2016, <http://zitamar.com/mozambicans-flee-malawi-fighting-restarts-tete/>.

24. See, for example, "Two more Malawian trucks attacked in Mozambique yesterday – VOA," Club of Mozambique, June 21, 2016, <http://clubofmozambique.com/news/two-more-malawian-trucks-attacked-in-mozambique-yesterday-voa/>.

25. As of mid-June, the government has committed 580 million Meticals to the effort—approximately \$8.9 million (using an exchange rate of 65M to the USD, current as of July 15, 2016). Interview with senior government official, Maputo, June 15, 2016.

26. "Mutharika Launches Malawi Food Insecurity Response Plan: Outlines Strategy to Avert Hunger," *Nyasa Times*, July 13, 2016, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/mutharika-launches-malawi-food-insecurity-response-plan-outlines-strategy-avert-hunger/>.

The main international donors have provided various types of humanitarian assistance, deployed through different funding sources, and delivered through a range of partners. In keeping with tradition, the United States has been the largest bilateral contributor, through direct donations made in a bilateral or regional capacity, and indirect contributions to UN agencies engaged in the relief effort such as the WFP and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). In addition to providing direct support to food-insecure populations, the United States has played an important role in gathering national and regional data and conducting surveillance on the unfolding drought. Most notably, FEWS NET has offered timely updates on weather patterns, crop production levels, humanitarian need, and food prices.

By the end of August, the U.S. contribution to the southern Africa *El Niño* response in FY 2015–2016 had surpassed \$300 million.²⁷ The vast majority of this assistance came through USAID’s Office of Food for Peace for immediate relief, with the remainder coming through USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and geared toward early recovery efforts. In Malawi, Food for Peace had by August donated \$92 million in cash and 75,000 metric tons of commodities such as sorghum, pulses, and oil to the WFP. Approximately \$60 million of this support was for in-kind food assistance, while the rest was spent on local and regional food procurement, including transporting white maize from the host government’s Strategic Grain Reserve.²⁸

In Mozambique, the U.S. contribution to the humanitarian response in FY 2016 had reached almost \$30 million by the end of August, directed through OFDA and Food for Peace. The single-largest contribution was a Food for Peace donation of \$4 million to support WFP food distribution efforts in Sofala and Tete provinces. In addition, \$3.9 million was directed to COSACA, a consortium of four international NGOs, to support relief efforts in Nampula and Zambezia provinces.²⁹ Smaller amounts of money were directed to other UN organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF to provide nutrition and water and sanitation support. These efforts, while important, were also fairly limited contributions to a much larger, unmet need.

In its response to the food emergency, the United States has used a mixture of in-kind food assistance, cash transfers, and vouchers, depending on local market conditions, funding authorities, and host government preferences and sensitivities. In Malawi, the United States was considering ways to tie assistance to work programs that would build community resilience to climate variability, through group labor projects such as water harvesting and infrastructure maintenance. These food- or cash-for-assets programs are also favored by the FRELIMO government in Mozambique, which is opposed to unconditional cash transfers, claiming that the money could be misused by recipients. Some critics have suggested that the potential of such programs was not being maximized because people were being deployed to work on projects that served no useful purpose other than to satisfy FRELIMO’s ideological opposition to free handouts.

27. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), “Southern Africa—Drought,” Fact Sheet #5, Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, August 23, 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/USAID-DCHA%20Southern%20Africa%20Drought%20Fact%20Sheet%205.pdf>.

28. *Ibid.*, 4.

29. *Ibid.*



Food voucher distribution in Madjatimbute village, Gaza Province, Mozambique. Photo by Grant Lee Neuenburg.

Big gaps remain in the relief response to *El Niño* in Mozambique and Malawi. The most obvious one is a funding gap that shows no sign of being filled. Mozambique's emergency needs, estimated at \$204 million, were only 38 percent funded at the end of August,³⁰ despite extra funding pledges from the World Bank, UN organizations, Japan, the European Union, and others. Similarly, U.S. officials in Malawi pointed out that the United States had provided approximately 60 percent of the emergency response so far and expressed frustration that other donors had failed to come in with significant contributions. Limited funding has already disrupted programs, interrupted crisis planning, and cast uncertainty over the response in the months ahead, when the situation is likely to get worse. In Mozambique, both the WFP and COSACA were forced to scale back or interrupt food and voucher distributions in the early summer because funds had been exhausted. In Malawi, WFP cut rations in July and August for the same reason.³¹ The WFP's Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation in Malawi was 82 percent unfunded at the end of July while the deficit in Mozambique amounted to 79 percent.³²

The funding shortfall means that all but essential, life-saving tasks are being neglected. One particularly underserved area is support to host-country disaster preparedness and response institu-

30. UN Office of the Resident Coordinator, "Mozambique: Drought," Situation Report No. 5, August 26, 2016, 3, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Mozambique-UNRCO-Situation%20Report%205_Drought%202016_Final%20version.pdf.

31. USAID, "Southern Africa—Drought," 4.

32. WFP, "Southern Africa: Emergency Dashboard," July 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wfp286378.pdf>.

tions, which are struggling to keep pace with the quickening cycle of weather-related shocks. A study by the WFP found that of the approximately \$363 billion of development assistance spent around the world between 2000 and 2009, no more than 1 percent was spent on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).³³ While organizations like the INGC in Mozambique have effective mechanisms to deal with rapid-onset natural disasters like cyclones and floods, they are less accustomed to managing the slow-burn crisis of a drought. Another comparatively neglected area is postcrisis recovery planning. Donors talk a lot about the importance of building resilience but there are concerns that the funding gap will squeeze efforts to help communities rebuild assets in the immediate aftermath of the current emergency. Other underfunded areas mentioned during meetings in Mozambique and Malawi were support to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programs; contingency planning for food crises in urban areas; and malnutrition surveillance.

DROUGHT: ACT OF GOD OR MANMADE DISASTER? ASSESSING THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR FOOD SECURITY

The governments of both Malawi and Mozambique are quick to blame the weather when describing the food crisis but downplay the role that human agency and policy shortcomings have played in exacerbating the situation. It is true that environmental conditions in both Malawi and Mozambique make it difficult to register a food surplus at the best of times and that droughts and floods are disrupting agricultural activity with increasing regularity. In Malawi, a large, increasing population contributes to high levels of poverty and food insecurity and places further strain on the environment, causing people to live on flood plains and in other high-risk areas.

While climate variability can be described as a crisis multiplier, the driving forces behind food security in Mozambique and Malawi are poor governance, resource capture by elites, and dependency on donor assistance. Donors must also share a portion of the responsibility for failing to help governments address these root causes despite years of close engagement with their hosts and the disposal of large amounts of development and humanitarian assistance.

The problems begin at the farm level. Small farming plots that are subdivided among family members with each passing generation mean that the vast majority of farmers are only able to produce enough to sustain themselves and rarely have a surplus to sell. Crop yields are low because farmers lack the necessary inputs and receive little outside training and assistance to improve the way they farm or to adopt new technologies.³⁴ Rain-fed agriculture is the norm for almost 80 percent of farmers in the SADC region, placing them at the mercy of rains that are becoming more erratic.³⁵ Quality seeds, tools, fertilizer, and mechanized equipment are all in short supply and distribution networks are poor. In Malawi, the national preference for white maize as a staple food

33. Presentation given to CSIS staff, WFP offices, Lilongwe, June 20, 2016.

34. The director general of a foreign agricultural company with operations in Mozambique estimated that maize yields in Mozambique were less than 1 ton per hectare, compared with up to 14 tons per hectare in neighboring South Africa. Meeting, Maputo, June 16, 2016.

35. SADC, *Regional Humanitarian Appeal: June 2016*, 10.

means that most farmers grow the same crop year after year, even though climatic conditions are becoming increasingly unsuitable for maize production, especially in the south of the country. The minority of farmers who manage to grow a surplus generally fail to get a good price for their produce because they lack market information and access. One agricultural expert working with a large grain trader in Mozambique summarized the situation in stark terms: “The problems here are endless. Farmers basically don’t know how to farm, they don’t have proper inputs, they don’t know when to plant, they monocrop; they do everything wrong.”³⁶

At the policy level, there is a weak enabling environment to facilitate agricultural growth.³⁷ Arable land lies fallow because insecure land tenure means there is little incentive to invest in it. Limited research capacity, legislative gaps, and government monopolies mean that seed production moves at a snail’s pace. Insufficient attention is given to tackling crop diseases and molds such as Aflatoxins that cause postharvest loss and threaten public health. Donor-driven efforts are under way to encourage dietary diversity and cut malnutrition by promoting the production of a wider variety of crops but there is a long way to go.

In Malawi, the government’s policy positions reflect a preference for state control and the protection of vested interests over a desire to free up the market and facilitate agricultural investment. Arbitrary export bans create uncertain conditions for potential investors. Private companies are forced to compete with ADMARC, which does not appear to be bound by rules about when, and at what price, it can enter the market. ADMARC is supposed to promote market stability, smooth price fluctuations, and help ensure a fair price for producers and consumers, yet Malawi has the highest maize price volatility in the region.³⁸

A state-run program to deliver subsidized inputs to farmers, the Fertilizer Input Subsidy Program (FISP), is a huge drain on resources. At one point, the FISP consumed 80 percent of the government’s entire agriculture budget.³⁹ Although productivity increased in the early years of the program, experts do not agree on whether the FISP or favorable climatic conditions were responsible. The FISP and more than a dozen other social safety net programs are muddled, poorly targeted, disconnected, and fail to provide a path to graduate out of support. The number of FISP recipients, for example, has been reduced in size following pressure from donors but it remains unclear whether it is a program aimed at assisting the poorest farmers or whether

36. Phone discussion with Mozambique-based senior representative of multinational agriculture company, June 8, 2016.

37. Mozambique is one of 60 countries surveyed by the World Bank in its *Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2016* index. The report suggests that while Mozambique has an effective system to regulate seed, it performs poorly in other areas, such as weak laws and regulations for agricultural finance. See World Bank, *Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2016: Comparing Regulatory Good Practices* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016), 2 <http://eba.worldbank.org/~media/WBG/AgriBusiness/Documents/Reports/2016/EBA16-Full-Report.pdf>.

38. Based on a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute of regional price volatility between 2005 and 2015. Brent Edelman and Bob Baulch, “Are Malawi’s Maize and Soya Trade Restrictions Doing More Harm Than Good? A Summary of Evidence and Practical Alternatives,” *IFPRI Malawi Strategy Support Programme Policy Note 25*, June 2016, <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/130439>.

39. Interview with senior U.S. official, USAID mission, Lilongwe, June 20, 2016.

its primary aim is to boost agricultural productivity, which would mean targeting farmers better able to make good use of the assistance. This year, FISP recipients were chosen at random through a lottery system. As the FISP reduces in size, the government has unveiled plans to divert resources toward large-scale irrigation projects instead. While irrigation can provide part of the answer to food insecurity, there are many problems with the strategy, not least the concern that large, costly projects provide an opportunity for graft unless carefully monitored and managed in an accountable way.

Policy confusion also clouds Malawi's efforts to prepare for and respond to drought and other natural disasters. The agency responsible, the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA), does not have a dedicated budget line and has to wait instead for an annual allocation from a government fund for unforeseen circumstances. Poor coordination among government agencies hampers disaster preparedness and response. In another example of poor planning at the strategic level—or bad luck, depending on which account you listen to—the government bought drought insurance from an African Union program, the African Risk Capacity (ARC), but failed to receive a payout. The ARC determined that nationwide rainfall was in line with an average year and—because Malawi did not insert payout clauses for individual, specifically drought-prone districts—it received nothing.⁴⁰

The government in Mozambique shares similar policy frailties that hobble an effective response to the food crisis and hamper efforts to boost agricultural productivity. Tight controls on the economy and restrictive policies toward investors make it a tough operating environment for doing business. Firms find it difficult to obtain export licenses, bring in foreign expertise, and access capital. Corruption and nepotism are serious problems and the imprints of FRELIMO officials can be found on the most lucrative enterprises. Furthermore, the discovery of major gas reserves off the coast of Mozambique has turned heads toward the potential—but far-off—possibility of a natural resource boom and distracted attention from an agricultural sector that is a much more realistic prospect for wealth and job creation.

U.S. POLICY ENGAGEMENT: GOOD ACCESS BUT LIMITED INFLUENCE?

The United States has been a long-standing, significant donor to both Mozambique and Malawi yet its investments have inspired modest rather than transformative improvements to the policy environment for agriculture in each country. Furthermore, the balance of emergency and development assistance expenditure suggests that neither country is making progress in strengthening its capacities to prepare for and effectively manage food shocks (see annex for historical data). For example, an eye-watering amount of money is spent on foreign aid to Malawi—more

40. For an alternative view, critical of the ARC, see "ARC's Covenant: A Worthy Insurance Scheme Goes Awry," *The Economist*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21705856-worthy-insurance-scheme-goes-awry-arcs-covenant>.

than \$300 million in Fiscal Year 2016⁴¹—and the share that is allocated to emergency assistance is rising. At the time of CSIS’s visit to Malawi, USAID’s Office of Food for Peace had already contributed more than \$72 million of emergency funding to Malawi in FY 2016, compared with \$24 million in 2015 and nothing at all as recently as 2011.⁴² This sum is a vitally important humanitarian contribution that will undoubtedly save the lives of many Malawians in the months to come. However, as a senior U.S. official in Lilongwe noted, it is also an outsized price tag relative to the sum of U.S. interests in the country.⁴³

Furthermore, emergency funding by donors arguably helps perpetuate dependence by a host government that to date has shown little willingness to undertake the necessary reforms that would boost agricultural productivity and increase food security. These include meeting public commitments made as part of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, an initiative by the G8 nations to catalyze agriculture-led growth in Africa; and separate pledges to fund and accelerate agricultural growth made under the African Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). Frustrated U.S. officials describe meetings with ministers and heads of parastatals who listen politely to calls for reform, then carry on as before. One USAID official noted that the United States enjoyed good access to its host-government counterparts but questioned whether it translated into influence. Ultimately, host governments know that the United States and other leading donors will not walk away from them when lives are at risk.

There are some reasons for optimism. U.S.-funded policy experts from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) are stationed inside Malawi’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, where they provide on-site research and analysis for ministers and civil servants. Years of patient advocacy about the need for reform of the FISP has started to pay off, leading to tentative efforts to scale back the program. The donors—including the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, and the government of Flanders—injected further impetus into the discussion by rejecting a government request to frontload contributions to the FISP until reforms were made.⁴⁴ There is, however, a suspicion that reform is possible only until it begins to encroach on vested interests. Conversations about ADMARC, for example, appear to have made little progress because of the close connections between the organization, its budget, and the elites surrounding the presidency.

Donors have had some success in coordinating their messages on the need for a more sustainable approach to crisis prevention and response. In Malawi, they speak of “breaking the cycle” of food insecurity. The United States has taken a leadership role in this conversation. The more optimistic officials describe the current food crisis as an opportunity—if such a suggestion is appropriate when so many lives hang in the balance—to jolt host governments out of their business-as-usual approach, sensitize the idea that climate-induced shocks are predictable, and make the point that better plans and policies can be undertaken to prepare for them rather than beginning each year afresh. Donor consensus on tactics and messaging makes sense but it is

41. Figure current as of June. Interview with senior U.S. official, U.S. embassy, Lilongwe, June 24, 2016.

42. USAID PowerPoint presentation to CSIS staff, USAID mission, Lilongwe, June 20, 2016.

43. Interview, U.S. embassy Lilongwe, June 24, 2016.

44. Discussion with key donor group, USAID mission, Lilongwe, June 20, 2016.

important to avoid perceptions of browbeating African governments. It must be acknowledged that reform takes time, host-government capacities are weak, and many civil servants are genuinely committed to improving the policy environment. At the same time, the United States has a duty to its taxpayers to ensure that assistance is spent in a sustainable and transparent manner and that reform efforts are protected from interference by host-country politicians.

U.S. AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS: ADDRESSING THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY

In addition to promoting a conducive policy environment for agriculture and food security, the United States works directly with farmers to boost productivity, build value chains for specific crops, and—in the process—stimulate economic growth, address poverty, and tackle poor nutrition. These interventions are meant to increase food security so that people in targeted communities are more resilient when drought, floods, or other crises strike.

The flagship effort is President Obama's Feed the Future initiative, which operates in 19 countries, including Mozambique and Malawi. Launched in 2010, Feed the Future has a sizable presence in both countries. Its budget request for FY 2017 is \$19.5 million in Mozambique and \$16 million in Malawi.⁴⁵ Feed the Future is bound by a common set of objectives that apply to each of its focus countries. Its overarching priorities are to reduce the prevalence of rural poverty and stunting by assisting farmers from the subsistence level right up to the large-scale producer. Its various approaches include the provision of inputs, technology, finance, and specialist advice; building agricultural research capacity; linking smallholder farmers to markets and developing agricultural value chains; and promoting nutrition, dietary diversification, and related healthy behaviors.

The impact of Feed the Future programs is measured by USAID's Bureau for Food Security, which oversees the initiative on behalf of 11 federal agencies using a detailed set of highly ambitious targets. In Mozambique, they include reducing overall poverty levels by 15 percent between 2011 and 2017 in the target regions in which Feed the Future operates and cutting stunting among the under-fives by more than 9 percent. The targets for poverty and stunting reduction are even more exacting in Malawi: at 20 percent for each indicator. However, analysis of the Feed the Future programs in Malawi and Mozambique suggests that despite the shared objectives, the initiative is interpreted very differently on the ground. In particular, USAID country staff have differing opinions about the degree to which Feed the Future should be responsible for addressing the current food crisis and preventing the next one.

Feed the Future engages in similar sets of activities in both Mozambique and Malawi although the strategy in each country is shaped by local conditions and an evaluation of the potential for market growth. For example, Feed the Future focuses on expanding different value chains in each country; in Malawi it favors orange-fleshed sweet potato, groundnuts, and legumes while

45. U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Assistance: Summary Tables, Fiscal Year 2017," 33, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252735.pdf>.



A recipient of support from the USAID Food for Peace Njira Program displays her kitchen garden, Balaka Province, Malawi. Photo by Adack Pafupi.

Mozambique has a broader set of target crops that includes groundnuts, cashews, sesame, and cow peas.⁴⁶ Each country can point to data showing higher levels of crop production for these priority crops over the past five years but it is not possible to attribute these successes to Feed the Future alone.

In terms of its direct assistance to farmers, Feed the Future helps smallholder farmers improve productivity by expanding their access to finance, extension services, technology, and inputs such as improved seed. A big part of the strategy is to promote conservation agriculture techniques such as intercropping and mulching. Farmers are encouraged to align their activities with market opportunities by, for example, growing different crops that are more in demand and/or allow for higher profit margins. Crop diversification also fits into the nutrition component of Feed the Future, which seeks to address stunting through public education about the importance of dietary diversity and the promotion of vitamin-rich foods such as orange-fleshed sweet potato. At all steps of the process, Feed the Future seeks to engage and involve the private sector, facilitate women's participation in agriculture, and promote climate-smart development.

46. Feed the Future Malawi's choice of priority value chains has been questioned by some. One official, based at the U.S. embassy, said that because soy's main commercial market was the animal feed sector it was unlikely to directly improve human nutrition. The official questioned whether the high level of investment in orange-fleshed sweet potato justified the modest increase in production. Email communication, September 8, 2016.

As part of Feed the Future, USAID’s Office of Food for Peace engages in complementary efforts to promote long-term food security. This work is in addition to its short-term emergency assistance. In Malawi, Food for Peace operates two Development Food Assistance Programs (DFAPs) that are co-located with Feed the Future activities in the southern districts of Balaka and Machinga. The DFAPs aim to increase the income of the poorest farmers; improve health, hygiene, and nutrition; and build community resilience. Mozambique does not have Food for Peace development programming, so its short-term emergency activities are managed from the U.S. embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

While this longer-term development work continues, program implementers have been confronted by the near-term food crisis caused by this year’s drought. Within Feed the Future, big differences emerge between the programs in Mozambique and Malawi in terms of how they have engaged with this crisis. Feed the Future does not take a national approach in the countries in which it operates, focusing instead on specific regions—what it calls “zones of influence.” In Mozambique, the 26 Feed the Future districts are mainly in the north of the country, a significant distance from the areas worst affected by this year’s drought, which are in the south and center. Feed the Future staff at the U.S. embassy in Maputo do not view this lack of alignment as problematic, arguing that their mission is unrelated to the relief effort and should remain focused on agricultural development. In Malawi, an explicit effort has been made to expand and align Feed the Future districts to include those directly affected by the current food crisis, bringing the program into closer contact with colleagues from Food for Peace. An official from Food for Peace explained the thinking behind this shift: “The rationale behind it is that you can’t allow a situation where one part of the country is doing well and the other is suffering perpetual food shocks.”⁴⁷

The drought in southern Africa appears to have exposed a fundamental difference of opinion among Feed the Future staff. Some believe that Feed the Future should stay true to its mandate and focus on long-term development rather than divert into reactive, short-term relief efforts. Furthermore, they argue that the rigid structure of Feed the Future, with its strict monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements and geographic zones of influence, make it ill-suited to act in a nimble, responsive way, that takes account of unforeseen events on the ground. Others argue that there is room for flexibility within Feed the Future and that it makes no sense to doggedly pursue a far-off goal of food security that fails to take account of a near-term food crisis that risks derailing those longer-term objectives. A senior official at the Bureau for Food Security acknowledged these “tensions” but rejected the idea that program implementers faced a binary choice between doing long-term development and short-term relief.⁴⁸ The official noted that Feed the Future-type activities such as seed distribution could be done through other agencies such as Food for Peace and OFDA.

Another source of tension within Feed the Future relates to the very different objectives that drive it—boosting agricultural productivity and generating economic growth while at the same time tackling hunger and malnutrition. These objectives are difficult to pursue in tandem, in the same geographic zones. The criteria that Feed the Future uses for selecting its zones of

47. Telephone discussion with official from USAID’s Office of Food for Peace, June 2, 2016.

48. Telephone discussion with official from USAID’s Bureau for Food Security, July 14, 2016.

influence reflects this rather fragmented approach: one is the level of need among the population, another is the potential opportunity for agricultural growth. Developing viable agricultural markets entails working with productive farmers, those who have a surplus to sell. Alleviating hunger and malnutrition means targeting the poorest of the poor, the subsistence farmers. In Mozambique, the decision by Feed the Future to focus on northern provinces like Nampula appears to have been driven by an assessment of the greater market potential there. Indeed, any food surplus produced by northern provinces covered by Feed the Future is more likely to be exported than directed southward to drought-stricken and food-insecure areas due to poor domestic road links and expensive port facilities. It is more expensive to ship a container from the port of Nacala in the north to the port of Maputo in the south than it is to ship the same container from Nacala to India.⁴⁹

In Malawi, the problem is a different one. There are few productive farmers; approximately 80 percent of produce is consumed at home and never reaches the market. As a result, Feed the Future activities appear to be primarily aimed at the very poor and the lines between its activities and those of Food for Peace are blurred. This reality raises questions about Malawi's suitability as a Feed the Future country. Malawi's needs are certainly immense but its opportunities appear limited. In addition, Feed the Future views the private sector as a major partner for advancing its objectives but neither Malawi nor Mozambique has a dynamic private sector and official policy in both countries can be unfriendly to business. A handful of private-sector actors control all agricultural sectors, but Feed the Future has not succeeded in convincing these entities to invest and increase production along agricultural value chains, which would also create opportunities for new entrants.

These conundrums raise questions about the consistency of Feed the Future's objectives and their relevance in challenging settings like Malawi and Mozambique that are beset by climate-related food shocks. Does it make sense for a single program to simultaneously try to tackle hunger and agricultural market development in the same locations, or should the two goals be separated when local conditions demand it? If the goals are separated, what distinguishes Feed the Future from other U.S. programs aimed at alleviating hunger and malnutrition, like Food for Peace?

Finally, the drought in southern Africa raises questions about whether Feed the Future is sufficiently climate smart in its approach. It is true that climate-smart development is a focus area of the initiative and efforts are under way in both Malawi and Mozambique to develop and market drought-resistant seed and promote the use of more drought tolerant crops. However, the current drought has exposed the size of the challenge of climate adaptation in this part of the world and the need for existing efforts to be scaled up. Rain-fed agriculture will not be enough, yet Feed the Future is not pressing for irrigation and other forms of water control, concerned—understandably—about host-country failures to maintain earlier schemes. An insufficient response to climate change is not a problem unique to Feed the Future. An OFDA official interviewed about his agency's drought response in southern Africa said that seed distribution

49. Meeting with director general of agricultural trading firm with operations in Mozambique, Maputo, June 16, 2016.

would be a priority area in the coming months. However, he added that these seeds would not be flood-tolerant even though forecasters have warned that a *La Niña* weather system will likely bring higher-than-average rainfall in the coming planting season.⁵⁰

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY

The constraints that prevent Feed the Future from straying too far from its core objectives are shared by other programs that—if unencumbered—could play a more significant role in responding to the drought in southern Africa. The reality is that every single dollar of U.S. assistance to Malawi is earmarked, removing nearly all the latitude that mission staff have to respond to changing circumstances. One USAID official noted that the constant exhortations by colleagues at headquarters in Washington to think creatively were sharply at odds with the reality on the ground, where policy space is limited and missions are understaffed. While some programs contain crisis modifiers that allow some priorities and spending to be shifted in emergencies, procurement regulations place strict limits on the amount that can be moved.

To date, one of the biggest missed opportunities that prevents a larger, more effective U.S. response to the food crisis in southern Africa is that its single-biggest program, PEPFAR, has not been able to play a more central role. PEPFAR represents an outsized share of the U.S. assistance budget to southern Africa, totaling 100 percent of development funding to Lesotho and Swaziland and the largest single source of support to Mozambique and Malawi.⁵¹ PEPFAR program goals could be badly damaged by the drought and its impact on food and water security, particularly as it is in the midst of an intensive push to accelerate progress to reverse the HIV epidemic.⁵² However, PEPFAR has an inflexible program platform and strict funding regulations that prevent it from making a significant contribution. PEPFAR officials in both Mozambique and Malawi have been consulting colleagues to brainstorm potential ways to complement relief efforts. One idea is that PEPFAR programming could assist with nutrition screening and support to vulnerable populations. However, despite these efforts, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the most PEPFAR can do is tinker around the margins of the problem. Too often, U.S. officials at mission level are expected to do their jobs with one hand tied behind their backs due to conditions imposed—albeit with the best of intentions—by policymakers and members of Congress in Washington.

50. Telephone interview with Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) official, Washington, DC, June 7, 2016.

51. The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) planned to spend \$95 million in Malawi in FY 2016, while Mozambique's FY 2016 budget request was \$298 million. See PEPFAR, "Malawi Operational Plan COP16: Strategic Direction Summary," July 1, 2016, 79, <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/257638.pdf>; and U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Assistance: Summary Tables, Fiscal Year 2016," 57, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238223.pdf>.

52. PEPFAR has aligned itself to the 90-90-90 goals of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAID). According to the goals, by 2020, 90 percent of people living with HIV (PLHIV) will know their status, 90 percent of PLHIV will be receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 90 percent of people on ART will have achieved viral suppression.

RESILIENCE: BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN EMERGENCY RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, donor organizations, including USAID, have devoted considerable effort and resources to the question of how to help the poorest and most vulnerable communities absorb perennial shocks. Building resilience—of individuals, households, communities, even nations—has become a focal point of development thinking and programming. The rationale is that while it might not be possible to prevent crises such as natural disasters and food shocks, it should be possible to strengthen the ability of people to deal with them, and even to become stronger over time. Resilient people will be unlikely to need emergency assistance, lives and money will be saved, and a larger share of external support can be directed toward development work rather than humanitarian response.

Resilience is a compelling conceptual framework that has been incorporated into programs like Feed the Future but events in southern Africa since the end of the 2015 are testing the limits of the concept and causing practitioners to reassess what is possible. The stark reality is that building resilience is hard in settings like Malawi, where some communities have experienced back-to-back droughts and others have alternated between flooding and drought. These events have destroyed livelihoods and, in the process, exhausted the coping strategies of individuals, households, and communities. U.S. embassy officials in both Mozambique and Malawi argue that the scale of need in both countries and the funding shortfall facing the drought response mean that this year will be about saving lives and not much else. In the words of one USAID official: “On resilience, it won’t be a question of building it up, but minimizing its erosion.”⁵³ The impact of this year’s drought will be felt for several years to come, as people begin the painstaking task of rebuilding their assets and livelihoods.

It is hard to find fault with resilience as a concept but the ongoing drought in southern Africa demonstrates the difficulties of operationalizing it. Much of the focus—and impact—of programs to date has been at the household and community levels but there has been less success in building resilience at the national level. The government of Malawi in particular has been exposed to the language of resilience by donors but has shown little inclination to make policy reforms that would strengthen its own ability to absorb shocks in the future. Building resilience at this level requires political buy-in, good governance, and strong cooperation between all sectors of government to ensure—for example—that effective, synchronized social safety net programs are in place. These enabling features are largely absent in Malawi and Mozambique. While this is a dispiriting state of affairs, it does not mean that positive change is impossible. Some countries have made progress in building resilience because the concept was embraced by officials at the highest levels of government. Kenya has built an effective National Drought Management Authority to lead and coordinate programs in arid parts of the country. Ethiopia has a well-established Protective Safety Net Program (PSNP) that has played a critical role in assisting vulnerable populations during times of food insecurity, including the drought caused by the 2015–2016 *El Niño*.

53. E-mail communication with USAID official, U.S. embassy, Malawi, June 16, 2016.

Donors themselves could do more to embed the concept of resilience into programs. In many of the countries they work in, periodic shocks are such a regular occurrence as to be almost predictable. Climate variability is speeding up this cycle. It makes sense, therefore, to build shock response into programs at the design stage so that crises can be better absorbed during the implementation phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Observations of U.S. programs in Malawi and Mozambique prompt the following suggestions of ways to strengthen the short-term response to the 2015–2016 drought and the longer-term effort to increase food security.

Emergency Response

Inject more urgency into the humanitarian relief effort. The response to date has been too slow. The risks posed by *El Niño* were well-known but when the drought materialized donor funding was not in place and host governments were unprepared and distracted. It is not too late to prevent today's crisis from becoming tomorrow's catastrophe. Decisive action now will save many lives but more funding is required and better coordination is needed between donors, host governments, and regional organizations. The United States has emerged as the leading donor to the relief effort—as is traditionally the case. However, it cannot be expected to take on the overwhelming share of the burden each time a crisis hits and should therefore pressure others to increase their commitments. Going forward, a serious discussion is required about how to give greater priority to slow-onset disasters that attract attention and resources only when the humanitarian cost becomes too hard to ignore.

Increase support to U.S. embassies in drought-affected countries. The United States should assign more staff to its humanitarian assistance programs. During the CSIS visit in June, at a critical phase in the planning of the *El Niño* response, the U.S. missions in Maputo and Lilongwe were experiencing a serious staff shortage, with gaps being filled with personnel on short-term assignments. Both missions would benefit if a more streamlined process was put in place by USAID to surge personnel capacity during times of crisis.

Work through, not around, SADC to strengthen the drought response. The scale of the drought is so vast that piecemeal efforts, conducted on a bilateral basis, will not be sufficient. A linked-up approach that looks strategically at the whole picture and stresses the importance of regional coordination will be the most effective way forward. For example, port capacity is limited and all countries will have to work together to ensure that relief supplies arrive and are distributed in a timely and orderly manner. SADC has many limitations as a regional body but the shared crisis faced by its member states provides an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and strategic direction.

Be responsive to the economic dimensions of the food crisis. Food insecurity in southern Africa is compounded by slowing economic growth, a liquidity crisis, price inflation, high levels of public debt, and governments' limited access to foreign exchange. In Mozambique, the situation has been exacerbated by the bad loan scandal and the crisis of trust it has provoked among

donors. Major donors, including the United States, are justifiably frustrated by the conduct of the Mozambican government but should refrain from punitive responses that could worsen the economic situation at a moment when ordinary people's lives are at risk. In Malawi, donors should also look for ways to address the economic causes and consequences of the drought and promote macroeconomic stability, while imposing strict conditions on the government. The decision of the IMF to raise Malawi's borrowing limits on the condition that additional funds are used to buy food managed by the WFP is a positive step and should be a prelude to additional efforts by other partners.

Step up preparations for a La Niña response. Forecasts suggest the likely onset of *La Niña* weather conditions in late 2016 and early 2017. Programs should be built into the ongoing relief effort that help prepare for this eventuality. Preventive measures include cash- or food-for-assets programs that engage in work to strengthen riverbanks, irrigation systems, and dams. *La Niña* preparations should also anticipate the potential upside that increased rains could bring to smallholder farmers by ensuring that seed stocks are replenished and fertilizer and other inputs are delivered in time for the next planting season.

Longer-term Development

Demand greater accountability for good governance from partner countries. The United States should use the severity of this year's drought to push hard for host governments to undertake reforms that will put them in a better position to withstand the next crisis. A mixture of threats and incentives should be deployed. The United States—in concert with other donors—should consider imposing conditions on governments that fail to take steps to strengthen food security. It should also use positive examples from other African countries to inspire their hosts, such as the PSNP in Ethiopia and drought programs in northern Kenya. It should consider increasing support for civil society, the media, parliaments, and political parties so that they are empowered to hold their governments to account and apply pressure for reform. This means increasing U.S. funding for democracy and governance programs, which has declined in recent years across Africa. Ultimately, the question of host-government commitment must be confronted in order for countries like Malawi and Mozambique to “break the cycle” of food insecurity and donors like the United States to escape costly, open-ended financial commitments.

Make Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) a funding priority. Donor governments find it difficult to secure funding for DRR because it is harder to prove its direct impact in saving lives. However, strong DRR institutions and plans provide vulnerable countries with better tools to prepare for the new normal of recurrent drought and flooding. In particular, national and sub-national disaster response institutions need more help to improve their mechanisms for dealing with slow-onset disasters.

Refine the objectives of Feed the Future and inject more flexibility into the initiative. As Feed the Future embarks on a new chapter following its reauthorization by Congress,⁵⁴ now is a good

54. On July 6, 2016, the U.S. Congress passed the Global Food Security Act, enshrining the approach of Feed the Future into law and authorizing the United States to undertake a comprehensive approach to address global poverty and hunger by advancing food and nutrition security. For text of the bill, see <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1252/text>.

time to assess the progress made so far and look for ways to strengthen its contribution in future. One central issue to consider is whether Feed the Future can simultaneously—and in the same zones of influence—address hunger and stunting while developing agricultural productivity and markets. This is an extremely broad and ambitious agenda that reduces the autonomy of program implementers, limiting their ability to adapt to conditions on the ground and capitalize on opportunities as they arise. Currently, Feed the Future ties itself in knots with onerous M&E studies to try to demonstrate that its programs are directly stimulating economic growth, cutting poverty, and reducing stunting, all within a specific geographic area. A more flexible mandate and looser targets would enable Feed the Future to become a more adaptable program that could ultimately deliver greater benefits. In some countries, increased flexibility could involve separating out the locations and target groups of activities based on an assessment of which areas have the most need and which ones present the best opportunities, rather than trying to do everything in each zone of influence. Feed the Future should also consider ways to better integrate climate adaptation into its core programs in countries like Mozambique and Malawi, where weather shocks are becoming an almost annual occurrence. A clearer strategic direction and less rigid, more realistic targets will help strengthen Feed the Future as it embarks on a new phase.

Restore the balance between relief and development work and bridge the gap between the two efforts. The increasing frequency of weather and food-related shocks in Mozambique and Malawi and the large share of humanitarian assistance they continue to rely upon suggests that both countries are headed in the wrong direction. They appear to be becoming more vulnerable to climate change and less able to cope with it. U.S. policymakers must adapt their programs to take account of this reality. Resilience building should be cemented into programs and there should be closer links between staff working in emergency and development programs. Members of the latter group should not be “chasing droughts,” as one official described it, but neither can they cordon themselves off from the reality that food insecurity today undermines their program objectives tomorrow.

One way to improve integration would be to make U.S. programs more shock responsive in the most vulnerable countries. Programs like Feed the Future and PEPFAR will be more relevant and more successful in building resilience if they have the mandate and funding flexibility to respond to changing conditions on the ground. In regions like southern Africa that are highly vulnerable to climate variation, it makes good sense to factor into programs an expectation that shocks will occur at some point during implementation. Programs should contain contingency plans and the possibility of additional funds and flexible targets so that in the event of a shock, extra support can be directed to vulnerable households and communities.

Improve coordination with other donors. In both Mozambique and Malawi, the donors have improved efforts to coordinate messages to their hosts. The economic crisis and associated corruption scandal in Mozambique have prompted donors to harden their demands for accountability and transparency. In Malawi, the Development Committee on Agriculture and Food Security has been a useful venue for donors to push the government of Malawi to come up with a better response to the food crisis. However, there are areas where better coordination by donors could increase their impact. For example, there is unnecessary duplication of technical assistance to the

Ministry of Agriculture, with several donors providing advisory services in addition to IFPRI. Donors complicate the humanitarian relief effort by taking different approaches—providing cash, food-in-kind, or vouchers—based on preferences as much as on local conditions. Coordination on resilience building is important because its crosscutting means engaging with multiple ministries yet donors have not convened an appropriate forum to have these discussions. The United States should consider organizing such a platform, given its thought leadership on resilience.

ANNEX

U.S. Assistance to Malawi and Mozambique through Food for Peace and Feed the Future

		Malawi \$	Mozambique \$
2012	FFP Development Food Assistance	21,418,300	17,785,600
	FFP Emergency	11,971,200	-
	Feed the Future	13,000,000	14,400,000
2013	FFP Development Food Assistance	16,520,300	-
	FFP Emergency	25,487,748	1,700,001
	Feed the Future	17,198,000	21,700,000
2014	FFP Development Food Assistance	16,000,000	-
	FFP Emergency	6,886,500	1,500,000
	Feed the Future	17,000,000	18,300,000
2015	FFP Development Food Assistance	20,363,500	-
	FFP Emergency	23,752,300	2,000,000
	Feed the Future	16,000,000	20,800,000
2016	FFP Development Food Assistance	11,840,000	-
	FFP Emergency	92,655,234	22,441,295
	Feed the Future	16,000,000	22,500,000

Source: Figures provided by USAID Food for Peace and USAID Bureau for Food Security.

About the Author

Richard Downie is deputy director and a fellow with the CSIS Africa Program, as well as a consultant for the CSIS Global Health Policy Center. In these roles, he analyzes emerging political, economic, social, health, and security trends in sub-Saharan Africa with the aim of informing U.S. policymakers, the U.S. military, and members of Congress. Downie joined CSIS following a decade-long career in journalism, primarily at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where he worked as a senior broadcast journalist. Downie holds a master's degree in international public policy from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and a B.A. in modern history from Oxford University.

COVER PHOTO ADACK PAFUPI

Dorothy Mnemula, care group volunteer for USAID-funded Njira project, in front of home, Balaka district, Malawi.



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