



**Testimony by Evelyn Nassuna
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Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health
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Thank you Mr. Chairmen and members of the respective subcommittees for this opportunity to speak about Lutheran World Relief's work with small-scale farmers in Uganda as well as my initial thoughts on the impact that Feed the Future can have on that work.

Some of you are probably familiar with LWR, but many of you, I suspect, are not. So let me begin by telling you a bit about us.

LWR is a relief and development organization supported by U.S. Lutherans, church bodies, private foundations and a small number of government grants. We are also supported by some remarkable U.S. farmers who work with the Foods Resource Bank to use their farms to raise funds to support farmers in developing countries.

In Uganda, and around the world, LWR works through local NGOs and grassroots organizations to seek lasting solutions to rural poverty. Guided by a philosophy and framework of "accompaniment," we seek to empower local communities by emphasizing shared values and jointly-developed objectives. I have personally been blessed to work for LWR in Uganda since 2004.

Mrs. Bisaso and the Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative Enterprise

One of the organizations I have had the privilege to work with in Uganda is the LWR partner Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative Enterprise. A few years ago, the story of Gumutindo could easily have been a story of failure. In 2006, Gumutindo recorded a loss of US \$200,000. Coffee bean quality was low, production was weak and farmer-members lacked technical knowledge to produce hearty crops. LWR worked with the organization to put in place better financial systems and provided resources to help train the farmers.

Now, Gumutindo has become a booming cooperative. Its coffee beans are high quality, its production is efficient, membership has grown to 10,000 farmers and in 2008, Gumutindo made a profit of US \$250,000. The very banks that refused to work with the cooperative in 2006 are now calling Gumutindo and offering loans.

But Gumutindo's real success is not in numbers. It is in its members, like Mrs. Kasifa Bisaso. Mrs. Bisaso is a widow and a coffee farmer who once struggled to produce enough income from her coffee trees to feed her family.

As a result of her own hard work and training from Gumutindo, Mrs. Bisaso has seen a remarkable transformation in her farming enterprise. She says her trees look better, and she is commanding a higher price for her crop. But she is especially excited by her increased yield, which is more than 30% larger than last season.

With her new income, Mrs. Bisaso is investing in a diversified diet for her family by purchasing a cow and two goats. She is also paying school fees for a granddaughter and saving to buy a pulping machine that will help further increase the value of her coffee beans.

Mrs. Namuli Kate and Voluntary Action for Development

In the Wakiso district, LWR works with a Ugandan NGO and certified microfinance institution called Voluntary Action for Development (VAD) to provide access to credit, training and technology for ten cooperatives of maize, bean and mushroom farmers. Mrs. Namuli Kate is one of the farmers.

A subsistence farmer for the last ten years, Mrs. Kate was struggling to provide food and education for her three children. With the help of VAD, she recently decided to focus on growing produce to provide income as well as food for her family. After being trained in new farming techniques, book keeping and marketing, Mrs. Kate was able to take out a small loan to cultivate two acres of improved maize.

After selling her crop to a local school, she was able to pay off part of her loan, send her children to school and invest in a local poultry project.

Feed the Future

With more than one billion suffering from hunger, the world can learn much from the experiences of Mrs. Bisaso, Mrs. Kate, Gumutindo and VAD.

Key lessons include the need to:

1. Focus on small producers;
2. Empower women;
3. Strengthen organizations; and
4. Consult with affected communities.

Focus on small producers

One of the things I didn't tell you in connection with the story of Mrs. Kate is that much of the food accessible in rural Africa is produced by farmers just like her. I've seen American farms, so I know that her two acre maize patch must not seem like much to

you. But you cannot overlook her — or her maize patch — if you want to help Uganda. What she does is a mainstay of our economy and the primary source of our food. Working with small-scale producers to increase yields and create value-added products, two important components of Feed the Future, is the way forward for Uganda.

Empower women and include men

Feed the Future has also identified “gender” as one of its cross-cutting priorities and I agree strongly with this strategy. Although women like the two I’ve told you about do most of the farming in Africa, they face significant disadvantages compared to men. Challenges include access to land ownership, education and credit. So I look forward to seeing increased efforts to make agricultural inputs and extension services more accessible for women.

At the same time, I hope Feed the Future will be careful not to overlook the husbands, fathers and brothers of these women. Before starting a new project to help women it is also important to consult with the men — to find out what it will take to make them supportive of the project. When men are included in the process and see that what the women are doing is helpful to their communities, they will support progress instead of opposing it.

Strengthen organizations

Another big challenge for Feed the Future will be to scale up work that is already proving successful. LWR, for example, has helped tens of thousands of Ugandan farmers, but there are more than 30 million people in our country, the majority of which derive all or part of their livelihood from agriculture.

And helping rural communities in a developing country is challenging. Each farm is different, and each community is distinct. The only thing you can count on is the fact that the travel to reach them will be difficult.

Supporting organized groups of farmers is the key to scaling up successfully. Feed the Future is a new initiative, and so, the impulse may be to start new groups and organizations. But, I encourage you to focus on the groups that are already there. They may be poorly governed and have little bookkeeping or business knowledge, but, as demonstrated by our work with Gumutindo, there is great potential to turn these groups into good development partners, with built-in community support, who can provide technical education, collective purchasing arrangements, collective credit arrangements and savings opportunities for thousands of farmers at a time.

Consult with affected communities

But the most important lesson I can offer you from my work in Uganda is that Feed the Future must find a way to ensure that the national governments in charge of developing country plans consult with the intended beneficiaries and their local civil society

organizations. In Africa, this means small farmers with limited resources and little time to spare. Civil society organizations are equally stretched, with many staff members holding two jobs just to make ends meet. But these people and organizations must be involved if country investment plans are to be effective, accepted and incorporated broadly.

Governments must have the financial support and the incentive to consult with farmers. In most cases, they cannot do this by email, or even phone. Government officials must meet in person with small farmers and civil society groups and provide adequate time for meaningful consultation. Very literally, this means government officials making trips, or supporting the travel of small farmers and civil society groups to hold consultations.

Something as simple as providing translation is easily overlooked and also critical to consultation success. But this too calls for financial support.

I trust these efforts will be made, but at the end of the day, Feed the Future must ensure that national governments fulfill their consultation requirements by refusing to push forward country plans that do not include the input of affected communities and local civil society.

My final thought on Feed the Future is simply that you should give this program the time and support it needs to succeed, while still remaining vigilant in your roles as overseers. In the agricultural sector, results are rarely immediate, and, if they are, you may want to question them.

Mrs. Bisaso and Mrs. Kate did not improve their families' livelihoods overnight, and, to be honest, they still face challenges. But they have more stable access to food than ever before, and their diets (and those of their families) continue to improve. This important progress came as a result of their own hard work and a little support from people in the United States. Your continued support for Feed the Future will ensure that many more lives are impacted.

Thank you.