

**STATEMENT OF JENNIFER NAZAIRE
Rwanda Country Representative for Catholic Relief Services**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN
RIGHTS AND OVERSIGHT**

AND

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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I would like to thank Chairman Payne, Chairman Carnahan, Ranking Member Smith and Ranking Member Rohrabacher for calling this important hearing on the Feed the Future program. I know that we are in the process of reviewing the implementation process of the Administration's new global food security strategy. I am Jennifer Nazaire, Catholic Relief Services Country Representative for Rwanda. CRS has had a presence in Rwanda since 1960 and we have worked since then in poor communities throughout the country, and many others, on agricultural production, food security and nutrition initiatives. CRS has maintained steadfast relationships with these communities and local partner organizations throughout the changes in development approaches over more than four decades. During the 20 years of neglect of agriculture by major development donors, CRS used our limited private resources to continue work with farmers and rural communities because we recognized the crucial role that agriculture plays in rural economic development and its direct link to reducing poverty and hunger.

CRS would like to emphasize that the purpose of Feed the Future should be to build food security for the poorest people in the poorest countries, and not just to increase food production through agribusiness or other large-scale schemes. The measure of the success of the program should be how families grow more food, earn more income, and are able to provide a healthy diet for themselves and their children, and that the other factors needed for household food security are in place. Congress should ensure that Administration monitoring, evaluation and reporting focus on household level indicators for food security, and not just production.

In our experience, a focus on households and food security can only be accomplished when people are involved in defining their needs and the solutions that will work for them, including the adoption of new technologies. In Rwanda and elsewhere, international NGO's such as CRS help local NGOs, the Church, and civil society organizations to organize responses that are participatory, tailored, comprehensive and effective. We also help adapt new approaches to local conditions and make sure that their benefits are equitably available.

Governments must play a national leadership role, but do not always have the

orientation and capacity to reach the poorest farmers in a comprehensive way. To develop effective and representative responses governments need to engage with local civil society and international NGOs about the best approaches for solving problems of food security.

CRS has a long, proud history of partnering with the Government of Rwanda and civil society organizations in agriculture, food security and nutrition programming. CRS' agriculture, food security and nutrition programs have evolved significantly over 50 years, from nation-wide school feeding activities to complex and comprehensive nutrition and livelihoods projects reaching Rwanda's most vulnerable populations. Today's programming also includes value chain/marketing initiatives involving strategic food commodities such as cassava, orange fleshed sweet potato and coffee, to name a few.

CRS/Rwanda is widely recognized as an industry leader when it comes to reaching the poorest of the poor with agriculture, food security and nutrition interventions, particularly with respect to working with farmer groups, associations and cooperatives in meaningful, cost-effective ways. We are equally respected for our cutting edge use of technology in agriculture projects, such as our Great Lakes Cassava Initiative, which uses GIS mapping and field-level mini computers for cassava disease diagnostics and learning. We are also well known for our capacity to bring community-based nutritional care and support to persons living with or affected by HIV, including pregnant women and children, particularly orphans and vulnerable children. CRS/Rwanda also has significant supply chain management experience and a solid management culture that has produced tangible positive results across several decades. CRS integrates economic strengthening activities across our program sectors as we view economic capacity as a central link to food security and household-level integral human development. Finally, CRS is particularly well known for our partnership model and we pride ourselves on the duration and quality of our relationships with both the Government of Rwanda and civil society organizations, including Caritas. CRS has over 50 years' experience investing in capacity-building activities with our partners.

The Government of Rwanda's current agricultural sector strategy aims to increase rural incomes, enhance food security and convert agriculture into a viable sector by moving away from subsistence to market-based activities, CRS/Rwanda's programming model completely aligns with this strategy.

During my testimony today, I will discuss:

- 1) The important role of CRS and our Rwandan partners in agricultural development, food security and nutrition;
- 2) My observations on the involvement of civil society during the initial phase of Feed the Future's country-led approach in Rwanda; and finally,
- 3) Recommendations on how to better involve civil society in country investment plans and Feed the Future investment strategies.

CRS and Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition

For over 35 years, CRS/Rwanda has partnered with the Government of Rwanda and various civil society partners, to implement large-scale food security, agriculture and nutrition projects.

Until the late 1980s, CRS implemented a large-scale nation-wide school feeding program. Also in the 1980s, CRS increased its focus on small enterprise development and agricultural production. In the early 1990s CRS provided USAID food aid and non-food items to respond to the needs of a population suffering increasingly from unrest in the northern part of the country.

In June 1994 through 1997, CRS initiated a response to the short-term emergency needs of a ravaged country torn by war and genocide. CRS distributed food and non-food items to thousands of displaced persons. CRS also initiated several agricultural rehabilitation programs to give returnees and internally displaced people the necessary seeds and tools to re-launch agricultural activities—the chief livelihood of rural Rwandans. Between 1997 and 2001, CRS programs moved from emergency aid to “transition” programming. Agriculture activities focused on lowland development and watershed management to increase household crop productivity for the most vulnerable. Microfinance efforts also began in this period.

At the turn of the millennium through 2005, the CRS program moved out of transition activities into more focused livelihood interventions and formally entered into key food security value chains, including bananas and cassava. CRS, through a USAID Title II Development Assistance Program (DAP), continued its lowland development and watershed management project, supporting landless farmers in the southern diocese of Butare, one of the poorest areas and most affected by the genocide, while also supporting HIV-affected households with food aid for the first time. With the end of agricultural activities in 2005, CRS won approval for a Title II Closeout Amendment, which lasted until September 2009. CRS increased support to the most vulnerable households, especially those affected by HIV. Support to these households included food aid, improved techniques in bio-intensive agriculture, nutritional education and participation in savings and internal lending communities.

In 2006-2007, CRS increased agricultural activities in Rwanda through implementation of a regional USAID-funded Crop Crises Control project (C3P), which focused on stemming the impact of cassava *mosaic* and banana wilt, diseases that threaten two of Rwanda’s most important staples. The C3P was followed by the Great Lakes Cassava Initiative, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, currently in its third year to more robustly address the pathological threats to cassava and improve the quality of cassava crops. Improved cassava varieties that are resistant to cassava mosaic disease are

then distributed through on-farm vouchers to vulnerable households in CRS' other projects.

Civil Society Involvement in Feed the Future's Country-Led Approach

On December 7 and 8, 2009, I was one of a number of NGO representatives invited to a two-day country-led consultation process for Feed the Future in Kigali, hosted by the Government of Rwanda. The meeting focused on agricultural production and food security as part of the signing of a compact between the Government of Rwanda and the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). As you know, Rwanda was the first Feed the Future target country.

The meeting was interesting and very well done, with excellent presentations from the Rwandan Ministries of Agriculture and Finance about the role of agriculture in the economy and the Government of Rwanda's 10% budget commitment to agriculture. There were opening statements by the World Bank, the U.S. Government, and the African Union. The meeting focused on what the Government of Rwanda is currently doing in agriculture to achieve its goals, and officials presented the government's plan for agricultural transformation, the elements already funded and elements that still need funding.

Rwandan civil society was mentioned sporadically during the meeting and was acknowledged because of its close association with farmers. It was mentioned that Rwandan civil society had been consulted in developing the government agriculture and food security strategy, and that they are continually part of ongoing agriculture and food security working groups. However, there was minimal involvement of civil society and international NGOs in the meeting discussions. It was evident that the Government of Rwanda and donors *do* recognize that we in the international NGO community are filling an important gap until necessary capacity has been built in government and local civil society sectors. But there were no specifics on how we, or even our local civil society partners, would be involved in the government's plan for agricultural transformation to improve food security.

The only interactions I had with the U.S. Government delegation at this meeting was at coffee breaks, during which I approached them and introduced myself. I asked whether there could be an opportunity for INGOs to meet with some of the delegation outside of meeting hours, but there was no follow up. I also offered to arrange a visit to CRS agriculture activities for the day after the meeting ended, but the USAID mission instead organized a visit to a big agribusiness project they are supporting together with JICA and another donor.

We observe that USAID and other donors tend to see CRS and other INGOs as mostly focused on subsistence and safety net agriculture, and not as cutting edge leaders in integrated food security programming. However, , international NGOs are doing a significant amount of these types of programs, in addition to the important safety net and subsistence agriculture initiatives we have been doing for decades. We are also building

the capacity of local civil society to contribute more substantively and more accountably to improving food security and other sectors.

There is an important role for International NGOs as well as for local civil society in Rwanda's agriculture sector. International NGOs can and do play an important role in building capacity in local NGO partners so they can become better at implementing programs on the ground and also serve as an advocacy voice for the poor and marginalized. International NGOs can also voice concerns that local NGOs cannot through our relationships with national governments and the international donor community. Likewise, there is a key role for faith-based organizations in that we have deep links with both communities of faith in rural areas as well as in the global faith community. We believe it is important that this role not only be recognized by the national government and donor community, but also be utilized so that communities and local organizations can play their part in feeding the future.

How to Better Involve Civil Society in Feed the Future

Local civil society organizations provide a voice and a vehicle for action by the public. Their inclusion in meaningful ways in the consultation process can bring the public into policy making. Among local civil society organizations, there are advocacy groups, faith-based organizations and others that serve as watchdogs for local government policies and budgeting, improving transparency and accountability and representing people at the margins of society. There are also local operational NGOs in these countries, and these too can enhance accountability, while also implementing programs that advance food security.

Advocacy groups and other special interest organizations in the U.S. are mostly funded by citizens and private foundations, aided by U.S. tax laws that encourage charitable donations. These funding mechanisms barely exist in the developing world. This fact, coupled with the lack of a culture of philanthropy in many countries, means that local civil society organizations are operating with small resource bases. They lack needed personnel, travel and operating budgets, and the general capacity to be effective. General civil society organization capacity building and financial support needs to be addressed—funded and monitored, so that impact over time can be documented and replicated.

Local operational NGOs are advancing food security development efforts in significant ways in all Feed the Future target countries. National investment strategies do not reflect this. Local NGOs have developed programs and activities over many years that advance food security to fill a void caused by lack of attention by national governments.

It is important to point out that in the Feed the Future country-led approach, all stakeholders except local civil society are involved in technical assistance and financial transactions. The whole Feed the Future effort is about technical assistance, capacity building and policy change, all through funding commitments. Local civil society

organizations have been completely left out of this process, and yet they play a crucial role in ensuring success.

Recommendations:

CRS's perspective on Feed the Future is influenced by our holistic vision of human development, which Pope Benedict XVI recently articulated in terms of global hunger:

“The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. This can be done by investing in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level, while guaranteeing their sustainability over the long term as well. All this needs to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land. In this perspective, it could be useful to consider the new possibilities that are opening up through proper use of traditional as well as innovative farming techniques, always assuming that these have been judged, after sufficient testing, to be appropriate, respectful of the environment and attentive to the needs of the most deprived peoples.” (#27)

Caritas in Veritate
Benedict XVI
June 29, 2009

Based on this vision, and our experience in Rwanda and around the world, we offer several recommendations:

- The measure of success for Feed the Future should be how families grow more food, earn more income, and are better able to provide a healthy diet for themselves and their children, and that the other factors needed for household food security are in place.
- We need to ensure that national investment strategies have mechanisms within their budgets for funding civil society organizations to further the goals of Feed the Future.
- We would also like to see governments formalize mechanisms for citizen participation. Establishing participatory budgeting or ombudsmen's offices to address citizen complaints can both empower citizens and provide governments with greater understanding of societal problems. These and other mechanisms for ensuring participation in country strategy development can also serve as a foundation for greater transparency and accountability.

We recognize that this may be difficult or even impossible to achieve in some countries at this moment.

- U.S. government representatives in Feed the Future target countries need to arrange regular meetings with civil society, including international NGOs, local NGO partners, faith-based groups and other pertinent members of civil society. These meetings should include discussion of the country investment plan and the extent of civil society participation in both decision making and implementation, with the goal of identifying best practices and mechanisms for scaling up successful efforts.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony before the Committee. As you continue your oversight of the Feed the Future initiative, we look forward to working with the Committee to continue to offer our observations and suggestions with hopes to help maximize the effectiveness of the Feed the Future initiative. Feed the Future is an exciting departure from the past as it seeks to address the complexities of global hunger through a comprehensive approach that brings all stakeholders into the process. It is our conviction that civil society plays a key role in that process. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.