



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Advancing Localization Within Feed the Future

A ROADMAP FOR THE USAID BUREAU FOR
RESILIENCE, ENVIRONMENT, AND FOOD SECURITY

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ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
AG	Agriculture and food
FSN	Foreign service national
FTF	Feed the Future
G2G	Government-to-government
GFSS	Global Food Security Strategy
IPs	Implementing partners
MSIs	Minority-Serving Institutions
NAROs	National agricultural research organizations
NPI	New Partnerships Initiative
PSE	Private-sector engagement
OCI/ID	Office of Country Implementation/Inclusive Development
REFS	Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (USAID/REFS) leads the Agency's integrated and inclusive approach to confront two of the most urgent and interconnected crises of our time: food security and climate change. Together, these challenges threaten our global development progress toward a more resilient, environmentally sustainable, and food-secure world. Through REFS, USAID leads [Feed the Future](#), the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative.

REFS's Feed the Future Office of Country Implementation Inclusive Development Division (REFS/FTF-OCI/ID) addresses these challenges by advancing [USAID's localization vision and approach](#) and other equitable development approaches that build on the understanding that individuals and communities, of all diverse identities and experiences, are instrumental in the transformation of their societies.

REFS/FTF-OCI/ID engaged USAID's Partnerships Incubator, a project of [Kaizen](#), A Tetra Tech Company, to conduct a series of interviews and listening sessions with key informants as well as surveys and desk research to develop a roadmap to monitor, advance, and tell the stories about the ways in which FTF advances localization.

A synthesis of the responses, feedback, and ideas shared through those interviews and listening sessions is presented in this report. The following recurring themes and challenges emerged.

- A groundswell of support for the Agency's localization vision exists across FTF staff and implementing partners (IPs). However, there is a lack of consensus around which approaches are most effective and whether the financial and human resource investments localization requires lead to more sustainable and cost-effective development impacts and improved global food security.
- Local organizations—especially those in the agriculture and food (AG) sector, from formal cooperatives to informal producer groups—often lack the administrative and financial capacities to partner with USAID.
- FTF teams at USAID Missions are working with limited bandwidth, making it difficult to invest the time and effort into localization efforts. Staff aim to be responsive to both Agency programmatic priorities and FTF initiative interests inside and outside the Agency, such as congressional directives based on the [Global Food Security Strategy](#) (GFSS).
- Localization is a long-term process that must take into account the unique contextual and operating environments in which our colleagues work. Timelines from Agency leadership and the realities of addressing global food security challenges often do not align with the realities and resources needed to advance localization. For example, addressing organizational capacity challenges faced by subsistence farmers may require significant investment of time and resources.

Findings and priority recommendations presented below are not exhaustive. Rather, they highlight opportunities to advance localization under FTF based on the input from the stakeholders consulted. Further, it is crucial to acknowledge the interconnected and overlapping nature of these challenges. The recommendations listed represent suggestions arising from a holistic understanding of the localization landscape as expressed by interview and survey participants.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

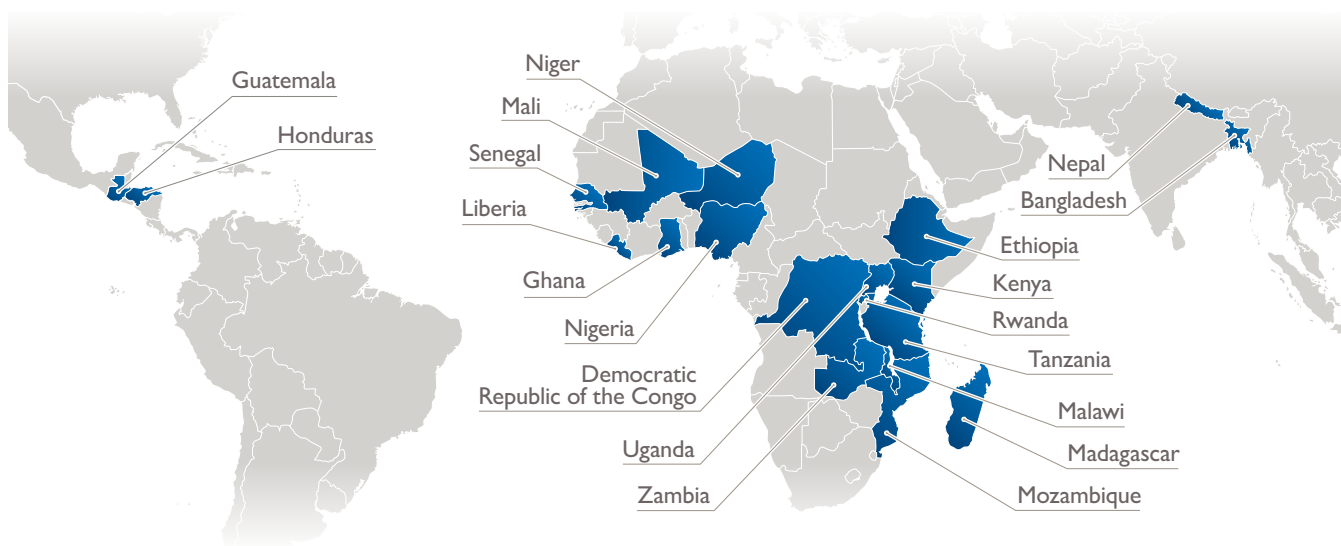
1. **Encourage local capacity strengthening more explicitly and effectively** in FTF awards and measure capacity development as a contributor to the localization vision.
2. **Develop a set of FTF-specific localization benchmarks or learning questions** to better measure progress, value, and impact of FTF localization.
3. **Establish a consortium of local FTF partners** to strengthen capacity and offer commercialization services to other local partners.
4. **Create a USAID/REFS-facilitated Mission support corps** to identify, document, and teach best practices in localization.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

As the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative, FTF brings together partners from various sectors and the U.S. Government to use their unique skills and insights in a targeted, coordinated way to help countries change the way their food systems work. The program invests in countries that are committed to improving their food security and nutrition.

Current target countries include:



The [U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy 2022–2026](#) guides FTF implementation and reflects a whole-of-government approach to end global hunger, poverty, and malnutrition by focusing on three interconnected objectives.

- **Inclusive and sustainable AG-led economic growth:** FTF does this by fostering growth in the agricultural sector that increases access to and availability of nutritious food and creates sustainable entrepreneurship opportunities.
- **Strengthened resilience among people and systems:** The program increases efforts to sustainably lift communities from entrenched poverty and combat intense shocks and stresses.
- **A well-nourished population, especially among women and children:** FTF promotes access to nutrition, especially during the 1,000 days from pregnancy to a child's second birthday.

Led by USAID, FTF draws on the agricultural, trade, investment, development, and policy resources and expertise of multiple U.S. federal departments and agencies to support its mission. The program also collaborates with a range of organizational partners representing foreign governments, the private sector, civil society, and the global research community.

USAID has increasingly emphasized its commitment to localization, which is defined as a set of internal reforms, actions, and behavioral changes to ensure the Agency's work puts local actors in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities. USAID has set ambitious targets to advance this work:

- By FY 2025, the Agency will direct a quarter of its funding directly to local partners; and
- By 2030, at least half of USAID programs will promote space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation, and defining and measuring results.

Although FTF has always emphasized the value and importance of engaging local organizations in these objectives, opportunities remain to empower local actors and partners and bolster their roles in identifying challenges and designing and implementing solutions to those challenges.

OBJECTIVES

USAID/REFS leads the Agency's integrated approach to addressing food security and climate change, including building stronger food systems, increasing access to improved nutrition, and strengthening resilience to shocks in vulnerable countries. REFS/FTF-OCI/ID seeks to advance localization by centering local partners within FTF programming.

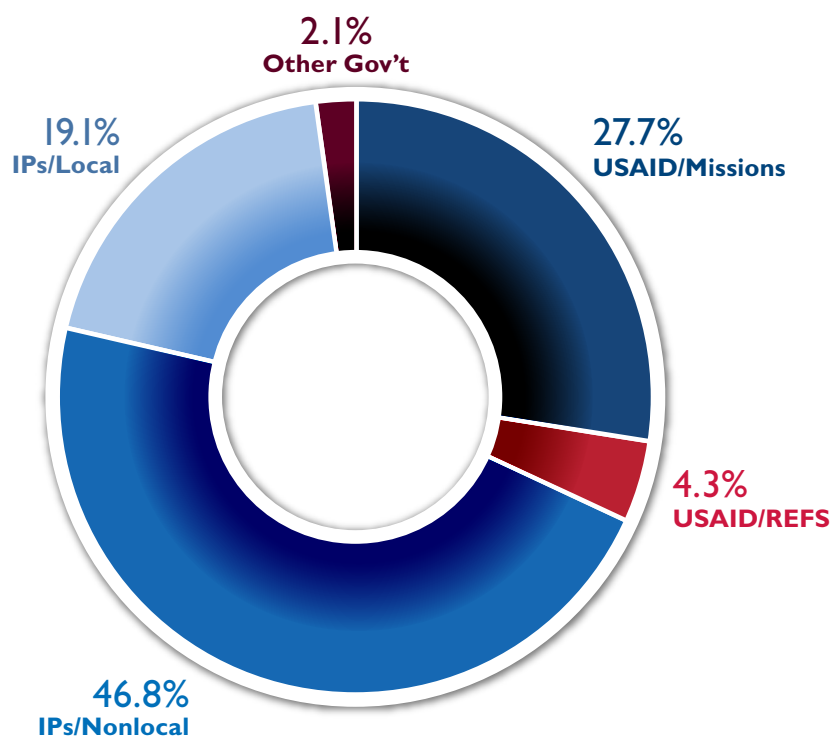
USAID/REFS engaged the Partnerships Incubator to develop and execute a learning exercise to identify, explore, and classify key successes, challenges, and needs for advancing localization under FTF. The exercise informed the development of this report, developing lines of inquiry and recommendations to advance the Agency's localization vision within FTF programming.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The Incubator drew on its previous work to design and conduct a series of interviews ([see Annex 1](#)) and listening sessions with Mission and USAID/Washington, DC, staff, key REFS representatives, and FTF partners. The objective of the listening sessions was to identify and prioritize successes, challenges, needs, and opportunities to further advance localization under FTF programs and activities.

The Incubator also designed a brief survey ([see Annex 2](#)) to gather feedback from USAID IPs and held conversations in person with FTF IPs at an FTF Innovation Lab convening in Washington, DC, during the drafting of this report. The Incubator supplemented information gathered through discussion with desk research.

FIGURE I. INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS



STAKEHOLDER	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWEES
USAID/Missions	13	47
USAID/REFS	2	8
IPs/Nonlocal	22	27
IPs/Local	9	10
Other Gov't	1	1
Total	47	93

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The Incubator team conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders, both internal and external to USAID, from February 29 through March 22, 2024. The team generally limited discussions to 60 minutes, with follow-up exchanges by email when appropriate.

As noted in Figure I, the Incubator conducted interviews with nearly 100 individuals representing USAID and local and nonlocal IPs. More than half of participants represented USAID. The agreed-upon timeline for completion and availability of stakeholders limited the Incubator team's ability to engage a broader set of relevant stakeholders. Access to inputs from IPs, particularly those considered local¹ and working directly with USAID, was limited. This aligns with report findings that there are relatively few direct local partners under FTF. Feedback received from surveys and through interview sessions was largely self-reported and based primarily on personal experience with FTF and USAID's localization vision.

¹ The definition of a local entity found in USAID's ADS 303 provides more detail on the types of local development actors with which the Agency seeks to partner: "A local entity means an individual, a corporation, a nonprofit organization, or another body of persons that is legally organized under the laws of; has as its principal place of business or operations in; is majority owned by individuals who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of; and managed by a governing body the majority of who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of a country receiving assistance from funds appropriated under Title III of this Act."

KEY FINDINGS

Localization is not a new concept. The development industry for decades has shifted ownership and leadership of development agendas and programming to countries and communities in which they are implemented. The Agency's [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#) reaffirms this commitment and serves as a guide for why and how USAID invests in the capacity of local partners to better achieve its development objectives. With her 2021 announcement of a localization vision,² USAID Administrator Samantha Power committed to making development resources more accessible, equitable, and responsive, and the Agency has accordingly outlined detailed measures, or practices,³ to track its work in this space.

This section outlines findings from surveys, desk review, interviews, and listening sessions conducted by the Incubator team with internal and external FTF stakeholders. In addition to developing a roadmap to enhance localization efforts within FTF, this report highlights localization successes and strengths. For example, there is strong support for localization across the map of FTF stakeholders. There remains, however, a lack of consensus around which approaches are most effective and whether the financial and human resource investment that localization requires leads to more sustainable and cost-effective development impact and improved global food security compared with more traditional, donor-centered approaches to programming.

Findings identified a range of integrated challenges to advancing localization under the initiative, primarily in the following areas.



² <https://www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-lays-out-her-vision-for-usaid-102003>

³ <https://www.devex.com/news/money-matters-usaid-sets-out-new-measures-for-localization-targets-106510>

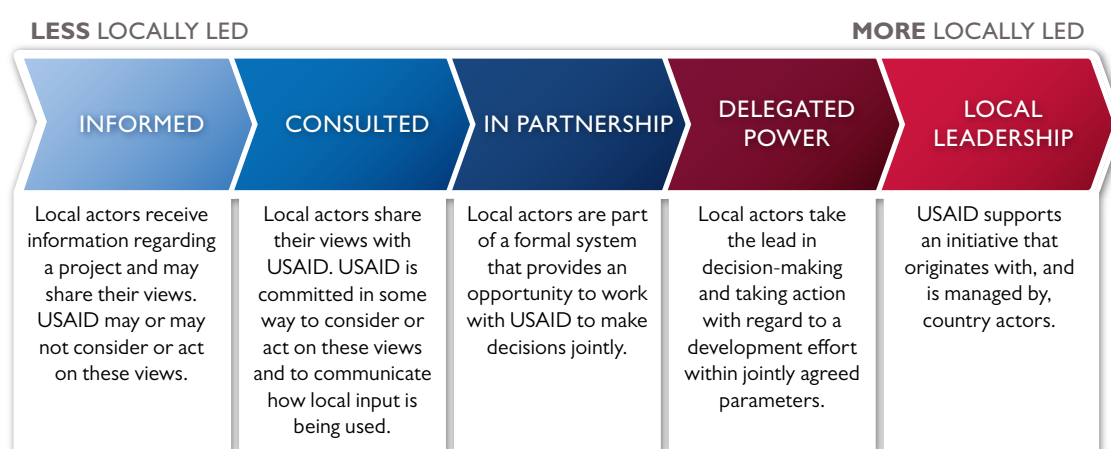
- **Support organizational traction:** There is strong appreciation for and acceptance of the localization vision across USAID's FTF Missions, USAID/REFS, and external stakeholders, though a clear articulation of how best to implement that agenda is lacking. There is no quick, easy, "one-size-fits-all" model of success for engaging and partnering with local organizations.
- **Build more equitable partnerships:** USAID and FTF have increasingly adopted a shift toward greater locally led development, implying a shift in power dynamics. Greater emphasis on co-creation, co-design, and collaboration is an important first step, but more must be done to empower and center local partners.
- **Strengthen local AG research ecosystems:** Although many local organizations in the agricultural sector have critical technical expertise and knowledge of local operating environments, they often are not yet "ready" to partner with USAID in terms of their organizational capacities.
- **Learn, adapt, and innovate:** Interest in guidance, tools, and resources varies greatly among FTF stakeholders, but there is high demand for tailored support and greater and more meaningful knowledge sharing and exchanges within the FTF ecosystem.

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL TRACTION

Although there is a groundswell of support for the vision, localization is not a quick, one-time task. There is not a single model, as engaging local partners to initiate, design, and implement development projects requires years of relationship building in unique and often challenging contexts. Two sub-themes emerged in this area: one around metrics and measurement to communicate progress and another on aligning human resources and programmatic priorities with localization.

Metrics and Measurement to Communicate Progress

Existing metrics and measurements—as well as guidance, resources, and tools—do not take into account that Missions or Mission FTF programs are not starting from the same point along the locally led development spectrum. For example, although some FTF Missions engage extensively with local partners, with more than 25 percent of funds programmed directly to local organizations, others are seeking to simply understand the landscape of potential local partners and are navigating internal challenges such as staff turnover and shortages or non-permissive environments. Some Missions work primarily through nonlocal IPs to strengthen local capacity and engage local organizations indirectly, often with the aim of supporting these partners on their journey to becoming direct recipients of USAID funding.



As a result, **current localization metrics and measurements do not fully reflect these Missions' work or impact of their efforts** to engage local partners in programming. Much of the work being done under FTF does not technically “count” or is not fully reflected in current impact measurement frameworks. One IP noted it had funded more than 2,800 local partners in 2023, disbursing \$188 million—including \$119 million to 1,457 local grantees and \$69 million to 1,422 local subcontractors—but there is confusion as to whether and how that support counts toward Agency localization metrics. Also, as Mission teams work to advance localization, there is limited data demonstrating an attractive cost-benefit ratio to show that time and resources invested in working with and empowering local organizations leads to greater development impact.

Aligning Human Resources and Programmatic Priorities for Localization

Overwhelmed and understaffed Missions are common across USAID, as staff respond to multiple Agency priorities and operate in complex environments. Staff in Mission economic growth offices, which typically host FTF teams, lack the bandwidth to fully commit to what is needed to implement the localization vision. **Time, workload, staffing, and security constraints limit how much staff can invest to “do things differently.”**

Mission staff are working within these constraints, but localization efforts require greater efficiencies. Engaging local partners and building relationships takes significant staff time, resources, and capacity. The effort required to manage contracts and grants is high, regardless of award size—a \$500,000 award often requires the same level of oversight as a \$5 million award. **A shift toward more direct local awards often requires Agency staff to manage a larger number of smaller awards**, often at the same level as larger contracts and grants due to local partners' capacity limitations. Contracting staff—including Contracting Officers/Agreement Officers and Contracting Officer's Representatives/Agreement Officer's Representatives—are not necessarily equipped to manage this increase. At the same time, Agency and Mission leadership often encourage larger, flagship programs under initiatives such as FTF, challenging what is feasible given internal constraints and local partners' limitations.

BUILD MORE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

The ability of local partners to manage USAID resources was the most consistent challenge raised across all stakeholders. Many interviewees acknowledged local organizations often have the technical expertise, are well equipped to address FTF objectives, and maintain a strong understanding of the local contexts, markets, and systems; however, they lack organizational capacities. Local organizations in the AG system, in particular, are not ready to partner directly with USAID, perceptions exist regarding power imbalances, and there is a lack of partner diversity.

Local Organizations Not Ready to Partner

Many local organizations within the AG sector **lack the financial management, knowledge management, reporting, and other organizational capabilities required to partner directly with the Agency.**

As a result, Missions and partners feel forced to provide an unsustainable amount of capacity-building support and adopt award structures they are not equipped to manage. They are also often left with a limited pool of potential local partners with whom they can work. In many Missions, for example, FTF staff are providing robust one-on-one staff support to local organizations in the areas of financial management and reporting. This is often unsustainable or not possible in certain contexts. One stakeholder also noted that such efforts are limited because they are neither recognized nor incentivized, for example, by current key performance indicators. Such findings reflect the interrelated nature of the challenges and opportunities for advancing localization—in this instance, the relationship between the themes of organizational traction and equitable partnerships.

Although Agency leadership seeks to achieve significant changes in a short period of time, developing capacity or readiness to partner with USAID—as well as any internal cultural shift—requires time. As one REFS employee stated, “It’s not just about giving them money. This requires a change in [USAID’s corporate] culture, which happens during a 20-year period.”

Perceptions of Local Engagement

External partners have acknowledged the cultural shift within USAID, as efforts to co-create, co-design, consult, and collaborate have increased markedly. However, stakeholders raised concerns about when, in the Agency Program Cycle and Project and Activity Life Cycle, that engagement occurs. **There is a perception that USAID approaches local actors and potential partners only after the Agency has identified a solution, rather than earlier in the cycle to collaboratively identify and prioritize the problems that need solving.**

Much of this reinforces the longstanding power dynamics that USAID’s localization vision aims to reform. Partners, Innovation Labs in particular, were quick to credit the Agency’s approach; however, they also noted the Agency and FTF are not leveraging their positions to forge new types of relationships between local and nonlocal and large and small IPs to further incentivize empowerment of local organizations.

A Need for Greater Diversity

FTF and its Innovation Lab model are well positioned to advance both localization and the Agency’s [Minority-Serving Institutions \(MSIs\) Program](#) to engage MSIs, including historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions. With more than 80 U.S. universities and colleges serving as Innovation Lab leads or collaborators, MSIs offer existing relationships in FTF countries as well as expertise, talent, and experience partnering with underserved communities in the food and agricultural sector, bringing new perspectives to the FTF and localization vision.

For example, Delaware State University—a historically Black land-grant research university with expertise in plant breeding, biotechnology, and chemical analysis in USAID and FTF partner countries in Africa and Asia—recently joined the FTF Climate Resilient Cereals Innovation Lab led by Kansas State University. As a core program partner, Delaware State University will join a network of U.S.-based and local research institutions in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America to advance breeding of sorghum, millet, wheat, and rice and make these cereal crops more available to populations most at risk for hunger and malnutrition.

STRENGTHEN LOCAL AG RESEARCH ECOSYSTEMS

The FTF program needs a robust and coordinated research and innovation ecosystem to leverage innovative, scalable products and practices to improve AG-led growth, resilience, and human nutrition. The Incubator team found two key challenges that will need to be addressed to strengthen this ecosystem: The first is the overarching lack of local leadership; the second is inadequate coordination and collaboration between research and commercial opportunities.

Too Few Local Partners Leading

A consequence of the capacity limitations noted above is a concentration of partnerships: Missions are often making multiple awards to only a few local organizations rather than broadening the field of partners. It is also not uncommon for local research institutions and partners to engage simultaneously with multiple Innovation Labs. One research institute in West Africa, for example, has partnered on more than 20 Innovation Lab activities. This impacts the capacity of existing partners, as their attention

shifts from owning their unique vision and research priorities to managing multiple engagements with U.S. partners. The Agency may mitigate such concentration by effective, across-the-board capacity strengthening of local partner organizations. Further, as noted in the next section, greater knowledge sharing and exchanges across U.S. and local research actors may model and encourage new ways of working to support an ecosystems approach to strengthening local agricultural research and innovation capacity.

Building Bridges Between Research and Commercial Opportunities

FTF has been a leader in advancing the Agency's [private-sector engagement \(PSE\) policy and vision](#) and shows promise in engaging local private-sector actors, including for-profit companies, business associations, and financial institutions as co-creators, co-investors, and direct recipients of USAID funding. Leveraging private-sector expertise, innovation, and resources creates market-based solutions and sustainable advancement of the objectives of the GFSS. Partners reinforced that FTF should continue building capacity of local companies as a scaling vector. These local entities know the needs of their customers—consumers and farmers of all sizes—but often lack the capital and research and development capacities to establish technical know-how required for sustainable operation.

LEARN, ADAPT, AND INNOVATE

Interest in guidance, tools, and resources varied greatly by stakeholder group. Across FTF teams, both in Missions and in Washington, interest in toolkits and new tools generally appears to be waning. At the same time, Mission staff were keen to find bespoke support for their work in advancing localization and expressed a strong desire to better understand which tools to use, how to use them, and with *whom*.

Tailoring Existing Resources

As noted previously, Mission staff expressed concern that localization is not a one-size-fits-all model—political and operating environments greatly impact a Mission's ability to engage with local partners. **Localization guidance, resources, and metrics must take into account the unique contexts in which USAID Missions and partners operate.** Currently, however, most Mission staff are unaware of more tailored resources and support. Mission-to-Mission learning is helpful but should focus on sharing knowledge and lessons learned between those experiencing similar challenges and successes or working in similar operating environments.

Useful Approaches to Advancing Localization

Though not typically identified as tools, there were several approaches cited repeatedly among Missions that shared examples of localization successes. These included [Locally Led Development](#) and [Global Development Alliance](#) Annual Program Statements, transition awards, cross-Mission localization working groups, and local “road shows” or outreach events, which were identified as particularly useful approaches to advancing localization. At the same time, lower-bandwidth Mission FTF teams and those working in more challenging operating environments noted the effort and time required by staff to understand and use some of these tools.

Greater Knowledge Sharing and Exchanges Inside and Outside USAID

Externally, partners expressed greater desire for resources, particularly around knowledge sharing and capacity building of local partners. Given the management constraints most local partners face, they sought administrative support primarily in the areas of financial management, reporting, and registering for opportunities. Several interviewees noted how difficult it is for local, non-U.S. organizations to establish foundational eligibility for awards or work within established cost-rate agreements. Moreover, although many resources may be available to potential partners, they are often difficult to find or access and are often not readily available in local languages.

One group of IPs, Innovation Labs, expressed a desire for more thoughtful and intentional knowledge exchange among host universities and with FTF Missions. Currently, communication and coordination focus largely on the technical side of programming rather than the management challenges associated with working with local partners. They also noted that engagement with IPs and Missions was inconsistent, leaving Innovation Labs feeling disconnected from other FTF programming in countries where they operate and unable to support the uptake of their research. USAID/REFS, in particular, is well positioned to leverage its convening power to facilitate and mandate greater collaboration, learning, and adapting among partners.

SPOTLIGHT ON GHANA: Advancing Localization Under FTF

USAID/Ghana engaged the Partnerships Incubator to develop a database of local partners according to technical areas and priorities, such as support for indigenous groups in the north of Ghana. This database will be useful for establishing a localization pipeline for the Mission. It addresses the unique operational dynamics within Ghana's Northern Zone, underscoring the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach in advancing localization, which can vary not only from country to country but also across regions within one country. This exercise also enabled the Incubator team to gain insights into USAID/Ghana's localization efforts.

Innovative Approaches

USAID/Ghana's localization approach is guided by its government-to-government programming (G2G), or local capacity-building teams. This cross-Mission group collaboratively supports localization decision-making and partner support, including proactively reaching out to identify support needs related to upcoming deliverables or financial requirements. With the support of G2G, the Mission has embedded "start-up" phases⁴—implementation and learning support in the initial stages—into awards for new partners as a standard practice. Additionally, the Mission proactively shares templates and other tools with local organizations to make it easier for them to respond adequately to Requests for Information (RFIs) or other opportunities. "It involves a lot from all of us," noted one Mission staff member. "It is a full team approach [to advancing localization]."

Tried and True Methods

USAID/Ghana relies on proven international IPs to support local partners as subawardees. Given the constraints of Mission bandwidth, coupled with the substantial support new partners require to comply with USAID requirements, these international IPs play a significant role in ensuring local partners are successful in their award management. IPs conveyed in interviews that they are aware of their role in the localization pipeline: They meet quarterly with USAID/Ghana to provide updates on support to subawardees and regularly organize field visits for USAID staff.

Proposed Initiatives

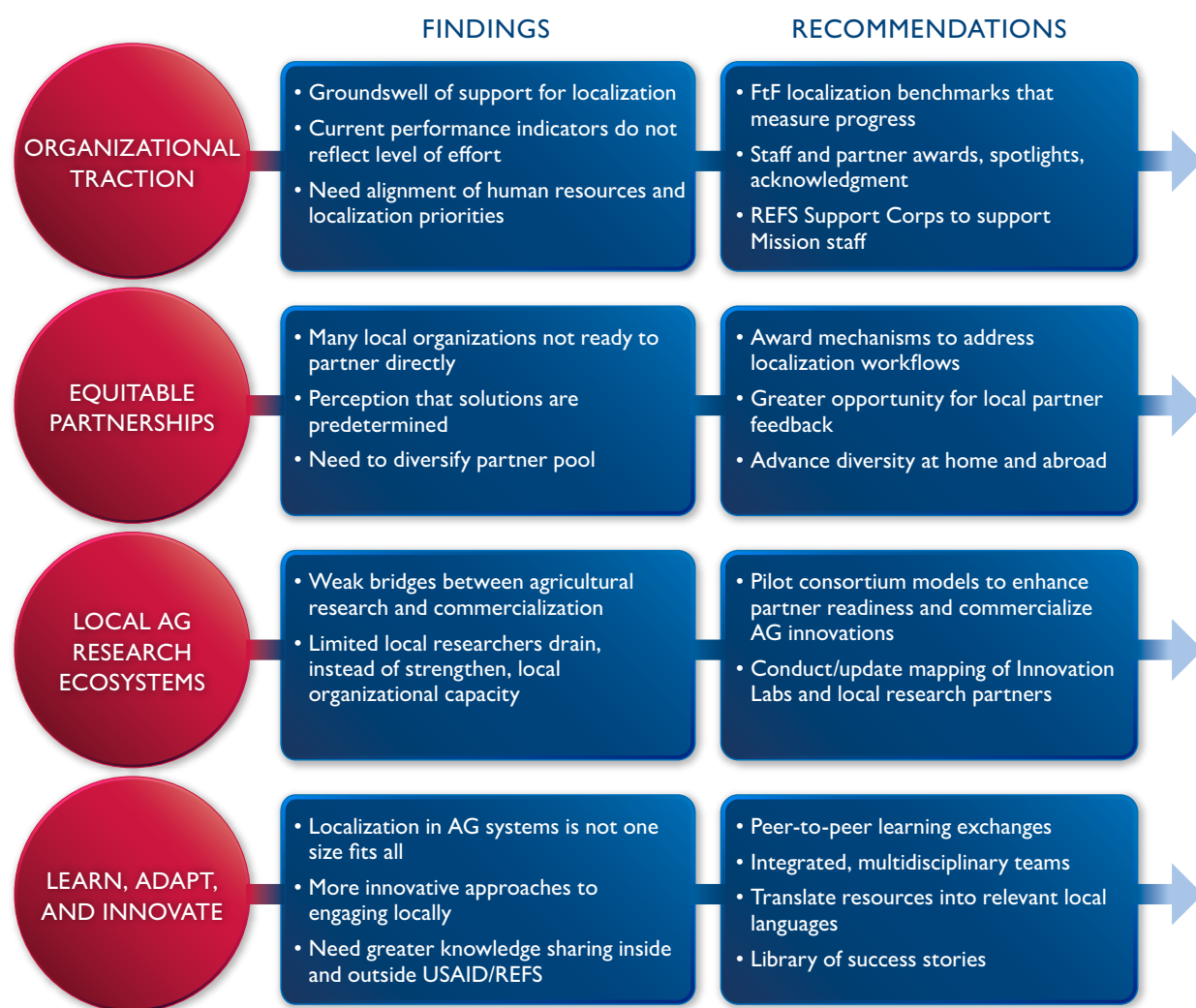
Local partners described the ways in which USAID/Ghana could continue to improve its localization efforts. Suggestions included expanding capacity-strengthening support and resources available to the wider FTF ecosystem (not just Agency partners), engaging subnational government structures to align on needs and priorities, and creating communities of practice among local partners operating in similar sectors or environments.

⁴ Also known as refinement periods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is crucial to acknowledge the interconnected and overlapping nature of the challenges outlined above. The same is true of the recommendations below; they arise from a holistic understanding of the localization landscape as shared by interview participants.

FIGURE 2. ADVANCING LOCALIZATION WITHIN FTF



SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL TRACTION

- **Develop a set of FTF-specific localization benchmarks or learning questions** to better measure progress, value, and impact of localization. These should be incorporated into programs to more accurately measure, monitor, and communicate *effort* and *progress* as well as the value and impact of localization. This may include milestones or measurements of a local organization's readiness to partner directly with USAID—or engage, receive, and manage funding directly from the Agency. This will ensure that the initiative is not limited to Agency-established localization indicators.

- **Establish awards or other recognition for efforts to advance localization** within FTF. Spotlights and acknowledgement at the staff, Mission, and Agency levels should recognize efforts that do not necessarily “count” toward formal targets (i.e., not included in key performance indicators) but instead advance the “spirit” of localization. To improve internal coordination across Mission staff and contribute to the development of a diverse set of champions, consider developing a Foreign Service National (FSN)-specific recognition.
- **Leverage and strengthen the USAID/REFS Localization Working Group and a USAID/REFS-facilitated Mission support corps** to provide advisory services to Missions on an on-call basis. A USAID/REFS-led support corps would help Missions and partners “do things differently” through learning and knowledge management. Composed of Agency staff across regions with practical experience in advancing localization, a support corps would identify, document, and teach best practices in localization. It would also serve as an opportunity to elevate FSNs as critical players in implementing the Agency’s localization vision. The support corps might also consider encouraging greater diversity of expertise among, for example, Mission Office of Acquisition and Assistance and Office of Financial Management staff, adjusting hiring practices to emphasize business advisory skills to support organizational capacity strengthening of local partners.

BUILD MORE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

- **Encourage local capacity strengthening more explicitly and effectively in FTF awards**, and measure progress in partner capacity development as a contributor to localization. USAID/REFS and FTF Missions should consider requiring IPs to provide capacity-strengthening support to sub-partners within awards by incorporating clear milestones for advancement and tying payment to milestone achievement. Awards could, for example, require periodic assessments to measure local partners’ progress resulting from capacity-strengthening support by the prime IP, a milestone that could trigger the release of payments to the prime.
- **Offer USAID/REFS-managed buy-in opportunities to address localization workflows** that go beyond what USAID staff have the capacity and bandwidth to execute. By leveraging different award mechanisms, USAID/REFS has an opportunity to ease the burden on Mission staff and provide a window for operating units to access a range of services they otherwise could not deliver. This may include conducting partner landscape assessments and developing a range of products to prepare for and manage engagement with local partners.⁵ USAID/REFS may also consider supporting Missions in leveraging transition awards and “[refinement periods](#)” at the startup phase of awards to support building readiness to engage directly with USAID.
- **Advance diversity and inclusion under FTF, both in the United States and overseas**, by better understanding the landscape of local partners and engaging new and underrepresented organizations. Leveraging new partners, such as MSIs, offers an opportunity to bring talent, expertise, experience, and local networks to bear in FTF target countries. USAID/REFS could map FTF local partners to better understand who is working in local AG systems and how USAID and Innovation Labs might best engage.
- **Create ways for local partners to share honest and open feedback** about working with USAID and larger IPs. For example, in conjunction with the FTF Localization Working Group, USAID/REFS could facilitate a dialogue series to amplify efforts to listen to and understand local actors’ experiences. This will support a shift in power dynamics and demonstrate the value of local partners’ input. These exchanges should occur regularly and without prime IPs to enable local subcontractors and subgrantees to speak candidly.

⁵ The Partnerships Incubator has recently launched the USAID-KickStart Training Program for new assistance awards to local partners, as well as a Chief-of-Party to Chief-of-Party podcast series. These, and other useful resources for engaging local partners, can be found on [WorkwithUSAID.gov](https://www.usaid.gov/workwithusa).

STRENGTHEN LOCAL AG RESEARCH ECOSYSTEMS

- **Develop country- or region-based consortia governed by local entities to:**
 - » Design and implement REFS-managed capacity-strengthening programs that enhance organizations' readiness to partner with USAID and other donors; and
 - » Commercialize innovative agri-solutions through sustainable business models, partnerships, and marketing strategies.

This is an opportunity to implement USAID's [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#) by leveraging guidance, strengthening organizational and network capacity, and supporting commercialization and sustainability of innovations in AG security.⁶

- **Map Innovation Labs and local research partners.** USAID/REFS brokers engagement across Innovation Labs, USAID/Washington, and USAID Missions. Better understanding the Innovation Lab ecosystem of projects and partners will help the Bureau identify and address overlaps and facilitate robust collaboration. USAID/REFS could reform or complement Innovation Labs' hub-and-spoke structure to facilitate peer information sharing within and among Innovation Labs, other agricultural research prime partners, and national agricultural research organizations (NAROs). USAID/REFS could further provide guidance and resources to support, engage, and strengthen the organizational capacity of NAROs and other local partners to uptake and commercialize food security research.

LEARN, ADAPT, AND INNOVATE

- **Develop peer-to-peer learning exchanges between FTF staff across Missions.** Matchmaking, mentoring, and facilitation of Mission-to-Mission learning among those working in similar contexts would make available more bespoke support and create a network of champions across FTF Missions.
- **Facilitate integrated, multidisciplinary Mission- and Washington, DC-based teams** to collaborate across programmatic areas and toward a shared learning agenda. This could include bringing in contracting staff to collaborate on ways to work with and through local partners, including the private sector. It could also include gathering input from localization experts with Inclusive Growth, Partnerships, and Innovation, the Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships, and New Partnerships Initiative; experts from USAID's PSE hub; gender leaders from the Inclusive Development Hub; and contracting and procurement staff. This approach reflects the fact that FTF objectives, such as enhancing locally produced seeds or crops, may serve other Agency objectives, such as import substitution and broader economic growth priorities, scaling the impact of FTF initiatives.
- **Translate all Mission learning and support resources into relevant local languages.** Make tools and resources more accessible to promote knowledge exchange across the FTF ecosystem. Information about working with USAID is available at [WorkwithUSAID.gov](https://workwithusaid.gov) in [Spanish](#), [French](#), and [Arabic](#), with translated resources such as ADS documents and other foundational tools available in the site's Resource Library. For other translation requests pertaining to local assistance partners, the REFS team can inquire with the USAID Translation Program ([here](#)).
- **Work with FTF Mission teams to identify, document, and promote a library of success stories.** This would record and communicate how FTF activities are supporting the shift of power to local partners and capture their experiences.

⁶ The Partnerships Incubator prepared a case study of a local consortium focused on capacity strengthening titled "Dominican Republic: Partnerships Consortium Roadmap" (Annex 3).

CONCLUSIONS

Improving AG systems is a complex programmatic endeavor; advancing localization equally so. USAID/REFS should consider the recommendations above as elements of an integrated approach to advancing localization under the FTF initiative. By addressing internal and external weaknesses and taking a holistic approach to improve stakeholder dynamics and overcome systemic challenges, USAID/REFS will cultivate a collaborative ecosystem of stakeholders with local partners leading progress toward greater food security.

ANNEX I. INTERVIEW AND LISTENING SESSION PARTICIPANTS

ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED
Akademiya2063
Agriculture and Forestry University
Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)
African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP)
Chemonics
DAI Global, LLC
Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
Hawassa University
International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
International Center for Evaluation of Development (ICED)
Kansas State University
Michigan State University
Mississippi State University
Nepal Academy of Science and Technology
Palladium
Pyxus Agriculture Limited
Seeds2B Africa
Texas A&M University
Tufts University
University of California Davis
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Illinois
University of Nebraska

US African Development Foundation
USAID/Democratic Republic of Congo
USAID/Ethiopia
USAID/Ghana
USAID/Guatemala
USAID/Kenya
USAID/Madagascar
USAID/Malawi
USAID/Mali
USAID/Mozambique
USAID/Niger
USAID/Nigeria
USAID/REFS
USAID/Rwanda
USAID/Senegal
USAID/Tanzania
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

ANNEX 2. SURVEY QUESTIONS

The Incubator team used this survey to gain partner perspectives on localization under FTF.

Introduction: USAID's Partnerships Incubator, a project of Kaizen, A Tetra Tech Company, is seeking information and input from FTF stakeholders and partners to better understand opportunities, challenges, and examples of success related to USAID's efforts to integrate the Agency's [localization vision and approach within FTF](#) programming. Your responses will not be used for any purpose other than that noted above. Quotes, examples, and feedback will not be attributed to any individual or organization, unless you have provided explicit approval to share examples of positive success stories. Thank you for sharing your experience; we look forward to your responses.

ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

1. What organization do you represent? Where is your organization located? [Short answer]*
2. Is your organization considered a local organization?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

For the purposes of this survey, "local organizations" are defined as: (1) USAID prime contractor or recipient; (2) legally organized under the laws of, and has as its principal place of business or operations in, a country classified as "developing"; (3) and, an organization providing assistance in the same country as its principal place of business.

3. What type of organization do you represent? Please check all that apply [Checkboxes]*
 - ☐ Civil Society Organization
 - ☐ Cooperative (Formal and registered)
 - ☐ Government
 - ☐ Private Sector Firm
 - ☐ University or Educational Institution
 - ☐ Research Organization (Non-university/Non-degree granting)
 - ☐ Other: (fill in)
4. How is your organization currently supporting FTF, or how has your organization supported FTF in the past? Is, or was, this your first time working directly with the U.S. Government, USAID, and/or FTF? [Paragraph]
5. In which FTF target country/countries do or did you work? (Short answer)

ADVANCING LOCALIZATION

6. *USAID has prioritized localization across the Agency, a set of internal reforms, actions and behavior changes it is undertaking to ensure programs strengthen local systems, are responsive to local communities, and put local actors in the lead. More specifically, USAID aims to increase funding directly to local partners and promote space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation and defining and measuring results.*

With this in mind, please tell us about your experience with localization under FTF. (Paragraph)

7. Opportunities: What have you found is working well to advance localization under FTF? What do you think has made this possible? Can you share a specific example with which you are familiar? (Paragraph)
8. Challenges: What do you find are the biggest challenges to advancing localization under FTF? What might be needed to address these challenges? Can you share a specific example? (Paragraph)
9. Tools: What tools or resources do you use to advance, monitor, and facilitate localization? What new tools, resources, and/or support do you think might better advance localization, either globally or in a specific context? (Paragraph)

SHARING YOUR STORY

10. Please share an example of a localization success under FTF with which you are familiar. (Paragraph)

11. Would you be open to sharing and promoting this story further? (Multiple choice)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe, would need to discuss further

12. Would you be interested in speaking briefly at a time convenient to you, to discuss your responses in greater depth? (Multiple choice)*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. If yes, please share contact information where we can reach you. (Short answer)

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with localization under FTF? (Paragraph)

Note: * = required question

ANNEX 3. USAID PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR CASE STUDY: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS CONSORTIUM ROADMAP

(PDF Shared separately)