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## Hope on a Hillside: Helping Small Farmers Help Themselves

Somewhere in Rwanda, a rural farmer is dreaming of providing an education for her children. Not just high school, but maybe even a university degree. Such a dream used to seem out of reach. Like boosting the harvests on her hillside plot. Or multiplying her earnings. Or preventing topsoil from washing down the hilly slope when it rained. But now, an ambitious terracing program is working to reshape Rwanda's landscape, helping farmers limit erosion, improve irrigation, and boost their yields. And, in the process, it will help transform the landscape of rural poverty, empowering smallholder farmers to provide a better life for their loved ones.

Imagine sparking a similar transformation in the lives of millions of people worldwide by helping them provide for themselves and build a self-sufficient future. Imagine delivering this support with remarkable flexibility and speed. Imagine helping humanity advance on many fronts simultaneously -- from gender equality to nutrition and health to stability and peace.

You don't have to imagine. It's already happening.

How? Through the [Global Agriculture and Food Security Program](#), a trust fund to help the world's poorest farmers reap bigger harvests and greater income. Don't let its cumbersome name fool you. GAFSP is impressively nimble, dispensing its first round of grants only two months after its public launch and promising to reach more than 2 million people from Africa to the Americas to South Asia. The Rwanda hillside terracing program is one of GAFSP's first beneficiaries, along with similarly promising projects in Bangladesh, Haiti, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

GAFSP was created with \$880 million in commitments from the United States, Canada, South Korea, Spain, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The United States' support of the fund was meant to inspire others to follow, as we saw last year when U.S. leadership at the G8 meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, leveraged \$22 billion in international funding commitments for food security.

The need for investments in agricultural development is great. More than one out of every six people is chronically hungry. More than 3.5 million children die each year because they are malnourished. Two years ago, rising food prices led to riots worldwide. This year, wheat prices have skyrocketed more than 60 percent since June, and experts fear a poor harvest in Russia could result in a global shortage.

The next round of GAFSP funds will be disbursed in October, and more than 25 countries are expected to apply. Will the financial resources be adequate to the task? To be sure, in a difficult budget climate it's hard to support bold new programs. Yet, we've come so far. Now is the time to press forward, not to waiver or fall back.

That's the message I heard loud and clear in a meeting I attended recently in Washington, D.C., with Treasury Under Secretary for International Affairs Lael Brainard and embassy officials from more than a dozen African countries. African nations, which are already investing in agriculture at home, are looking to the United States and the international community to keep our pledges on behalf of food security.

GAFSP allows donors -- large and small -- to maximize their collective impact.

First, by focusing on smallholder farmers and agricultural productivity, GAFSP helps nurture several areas of human development at once. It tackles poverty through agricultural sector growth, which has proven to benefit the poor between two and four times more than growth in any other economic sector. It empowers women, who produce up to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. And studies show that when women's incomes grow, they tend to reinvest their earnings in their families -- meaning better nutrition, better health, and better education for children, and communities as a whole.

Second, by prioritizing assistance for countries with the greatest need and a proven commitment to food security progress, GAFSP drives funding to where it is likeliest to yield the most meaningful results.

Third, by combining donor resources, it improves coordination and efficiency.

Put simply, support for agricultural development is a sound, strategic investment on behalf of a better world -- a force multiplier for limited resources that can help people lift themselves out of hunger and poverty.

Smallholder farmers, like the hardworking woman in Rwanda, will be essential to feeding the developing world. With GAFSP, these rural farmers can succeed -- and cultivate a brighter future.