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Food Security & Nutrition Programs in Africa

*U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04), Chairman
Hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations
Excerpts of remarks
Oct. 7, 2015*

Good afternoon. We are here today to address the topic of “Food Security and Nutrition Programs in Africa.”

As many of you know, I am the sponsor of the Global Food Security Act of 2015, a bill which in its prior iteration passed the House of Representatives. The Global Food Security Act, H.R. 1567, will help provide a long-term strategy to combat global hunger by authorizing the existing national food security initiative coordinated by USAID commonly known as Feed the Future. It is a bill with broad bipartisan support, including the original co-sponsorship of my friend and colleague subcommittee Ranking Member Karen Bass as well as Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking Member Eliot Engel.

I see we are also joined by my prime Democratic cosponsor Betty McCollum, with whom both me and my staff have worked tirelessly in seeking to pass the Global Food Security Act. I particularly want to thank Betty, as well as her dedicated staffer Jenn Holcomb, for all their hard work and dedication in promoting food security.

I also want to acknowledge other subcommittee members who have joined as cosponsors of this legislation, Mark Meadows, Scott DesJarlais, and David Cicilline.

Investing in global food security is a policy that is both penny wise and pound wise.

This program strengthens nutrition, especially for children during that critical first 1000 day-window, from conception to the child's second birthday.

Indeed, there is perhaps no wiser investment that we could make in the human person than to concentrate on ensuring that sufficient nutrition and health assistance is given during the first one thousand days of life: A thousand days that begins with conception, continues throughout pregnancy, includes the milestone of birth and then finishes at roughly the second birthday of the child.

Children who do not receive adequate nutrition *in utero* are more likely to experience lifelong cognitive and physical deficiencies, such as stunting. UNICEF estimates that one in four children worldwide is stunted due to lack of adequate nutrition.

By addressing nutrition during the first 1000 days of life, we help lay the groundwork that the next 25,000 days—or whatever the number is that our Creator has allotted – are filled with good health.

As our three witnesses will attest, enhancing food security is also transformational in the lives of thousands of small holder farmers throughout the world, particularly women. Feed the Future teaches small-scale farmers techniques to increase agricultural yield, thereby helping nations achieve food security, something that is in the national security interest of the United States as well.

It is also economical in the long run, and should lead to a reduction in the need for emergency food aid. The approach we have taken in the Global Food Security Act is fiscally disciplined, authorizing an amount for 2016 which is less than what we appropriated for food security programs in 2014. USAID is nevertheless able to do more with less by leveraging our aid with that of other countries, the private sector, NGOs and, especially faith-based organizations, whose great work on the ground in so many different countries impacts so many lives, and who will be ably represented at today's hearing by Carolyn Woo of Catholic Relief Services.

By statutorily authorizing this existing program, which had its roots in the Bush Administration and was formalized by President Obama, we are also increasing our oversight by requiring the Administration to report to Congress.

Political will is absolutely essential to enacting a global food security policy that will continue. It is one thing that I hope this hearing will bring to light, that such interventions in the lives of so many people in Africa, particularly in the first 1000 days of life, are not only cost-effective but morally imperative.