



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://feedthefuture.gov/article/tajikistan-transformed-feeding-future>

## Tajikistan Transformed: Feeding the Future



USAID

Twenty years ago I visited Tajikistan for the first time. Then a young USAID program officer, that journey took me south toward Khatlon Province near the border with Afghanistan.

Tajikistan faced civil conflict, and on that first trip I saw many buildings destroyed by war. I was there to inspect warehouses and observe humanitarian programs helping displaced Tajiks who barely had enough to eat. All the food I saw being distributed came from outside Tajikistan, donated by international donors in an effort to provide immediate relief.

Returning to Central Asia as USAID mission director in late fall 2013, I have since taken several trips to Khatlon Province, all organized around [Feed the Future](#), arguably the single most important U.S. Government initiative in terms of addressing poverty issues in the poorest region of Central Asia. Undernourishment remains a critical challenge today in Tajikistan. Nearly one out of three children under 5 are “stunted” and nearly 7 percent are described as “wasted”—where their muscle and fat literally waste away.

Most households in Khatlon depend on remittances from fathers, sons and brothers working in Russia. Indeed, remittances represent approximately half the GDP, making Tajikistan the most remittance-dependent country in the world. Nearly one out of 10 Tajiks live in extreme poverty, on less than \$1.25/day. Roughly the same proportion of Tajik women are undernourished.

Yet what I saw on these recent trips is vastly different and more hopeful than what I witnessed two decades ago. USAID programs, working with Tajik colleagues and counterparts, are now able to focus on growing food, not distributing emergency supplies. Feed the Future in particular is at the center of this effort, aiming to expand production, reduce poverty and improve nutrition.

Today USAID programs are able to focus on growing food, not distributing emergency supplies. Feed the Future is also training young mothers in Khatlon Province, Tajikistan, on how to prepare more nutritious meals for their children.

An entire younger generation no longer remembers a country that was once torn apart by war—and Tajikistan can finally experience a 'peace dividend' of sorts.

Today, local farmers make their own cropping decisions, no longer forced into blindly following orders passed down from bureaucrats working far away.

A full spectrum of issues is being addressed, ranging from building water-users associations, to educating farmers about their rights, to strengthening production value chains, to educating families about improved nutrition.

Feed the Future is a key driver of this change. Our programs in Tajikistan focus on the neediest districts of the Khatlon Province, itself one of Tajikistan's poorest regions. Our efforts target women of reproductive age as well as children during the crucial '1,000 days' period from pregnancy to a child's second birthday. Feed the Future empowers Tajiks to pull themselves out of poverty and insecurity by giving farmers the tools and the skills to succeed. Reducing chronic hunger is essential to building a foundation for development investments in health, education, and economic growth. It is essential to the sustainable development of Tajik individuals and communities.

This is good for the people Tajikistan. But it is also good for the world, and, yes, for Americans back home. Tajikistan shares a long and porous border with Afghanistan. Our efforts to improve living conditions in Tajikistan therefore have a direct impact on regional security. Today, we have a unique opportunity to partner with Tajikistan as it moves away from a Soviet-style planning system toward country-led economic growth that will lay the foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

One stop in my most recent trip included a meeting with a group of Tajik women. Unprompted, a little girl of about three held by one of them broke loose and walked over to where I was sitting, planting herself firmly in my lap for the rest of the meeting.

While our conversation touched on many topics, what I remember most about that trip is the fact that this little girl is not a number or a statistic or even a "beneficiary" of a particular aid program.

She is a real person, loved by her family and with a future ahead of her—one that Feed the Future is working to ensure is much brighter than would have been the case two decades ago. Projects like this involve real people with real hopes and dreams—and, in this case, a new generation that deserves a much better and more prosperous future.

*This post originally [appeared](#) on the USAID blog.*