

Session 4: UN system support to the implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)

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DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2021

I. Hunger is on the rise, with famine a real threat in several fragile and humanitarian contexts

1. Hunger is on the rise. According to the May 2021 Global Report on Food Crises¹, 155 million people in 55 countries faced acute hunger in 2020 – 20 million more than in 2019. Forecasts point to a grim outlook for 2021, with famine a very real threat in several countries already facing some of the world's worst food crises.² It is estimated that 34 million people are teetering on the very edge of famine (IPC 4/Emergency), and the slightest shock will push them over into famine, a record 35% rise in a single year. This number has risen from 28.4 million in 2020. Approximately 155,000 people are currently in the grip of famine-like conditions in South Sudan and Yemen.
2. The U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that 272 million people are already at risk of becoming acutely food insecure in 2021 in the 80+ countries where it operates. The COVID-19 crisis continuing to affect countries at a time when the number of acutely food insecure people in the world had already risen nearly 70 percent over the past four years. The 10 worst food crises in 2020 in terms of the number of people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3-5) were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Haiti. These 10 countries alone accounted for two thirds of the global number.

II. Low and middle-income countries have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the ability of affected populations and communities to cope as they risk being forced to navigate the trade-off between lives and livelihoods as they battle the socio-economic fallout from the pandemic. A drastic reduction of livelihood opportunities, employment and income, in addition to natural hazards such as cyclones, hurricanes, flooding and pests, are pushing communities into extreme poverty. Continued restrictions on travel and movement of goods, quarantine measures and the corresponding economic fallout of the pandemic are deepening the impact.³
4. Low and middle-income countries have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic, leading to a food security and nutrition crisis of historic proportions. Health care systems in these countries have been overwhelmed while the combination of a sharp global recession and dependence on volatile import, export, and credit markets threaten trade, income and employment, constraining countries' ability to respond to rapidly increasing needs. Even if COVID-19 can be contained in some parts of the world, slow vaccine roll-out in countries with

¹ The Global Report on Food Crises is an assessment of acute food insecurity situations around the world carried out by 16 partners including WFP. The report provides data which can guide coordinated and strategic humanitarian and development investments. The report measures *Acute food insecurity*, which is when a person's inability to consume adequate food puts their lives or livelihoods in immediate danger. It is more severe than *chronic hunger*, which is when a person is unable to consume enough food to maintain a normal, active lifestyle over an extended period.

² 2021 Global Report on Food Crises Report, available [HERE](#)

³ WFP Global Response to COVID-19: September 2020, available [HERE](#)

poor health services could prolong restrictions, dimming the prospects for swift economic recovery.

5. In these countries, food insecurity and malnutrition are projected to deepen among poor and marginalized populations and expand among groups that were previously able to meet their own needs. People at particular risk include those living in densely populated urban areas and camps, those who rely on markets for access to food, people employed in the informal sector, and school-aged children and their families. Structural and socio-economic inequalities based on gender, age, disability, income and other factors compound the risk of hunger.
6. The large-scale economic disruption is reducing household income significantly, reducing the ability to meet essential needs and weakening both households' and countries' ability for post-crisis recovery. Many households have experienced food price spikes and volatile or reduced food availability or accessibility. Food price spikes have been devastating for low-income households, especially those that depend on markets for basic access to food. As the percentage of household income is spent on food increases, diets become less nutritious and less money is spent on key basic services such as health and education.
7. Despite signs of a turnaround in most parts of the developed world, low- and middle-income countries continue to experience underwhelming economic performance due in part to the integrated nature of economic activity and their dependence on volatile global import, export and credit markets. The negative consequences of these phenomena for trade and employment is straining the already limited fiscal space of governments, restricting many countries' ability to respond to increasing needs.

III. The primary drivers of food security and malnutrition can be prevented or managed

8. Conflict and economic crises – often linked to the socio-economic fallout from COVID-19 – were the primary drivers of hunger in 2020 – alongside climate change. Conflict accounted for nearly two-thirds (64 percent or 99 million people in 23 countries) of the 155 million acutely food insecure; economic downturn for 26 percent (40.5 million in 17 countries); and the impacts of climate change for 10 percent (15.7 million in 15 countries). Shifting conflict dynamics, insecurity and armed violence has undoubtedly contributed to worsening food security outcomes in conflict-affected countries.
9. The perennial threat of poor rainfall and adverse weather events is also likely to continue driving acute food insecurity in many countries, with drought risk in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia alongside the threat of desert locust infestations in East Africa disrupting agricultural production – as La Niña leads to climate extremes in several regions.
10. The food systems in African countries are particularly vulnerable due to several compounding factors, including conflict, and existing country-level economic crisis and disasters such as the desert locust outbreak in Eastern Africa, which is currently spreading to other regions. These

drivers had weakened countries' coping capacity even before COVID hit and are continuing to so today.

11. Most vulnerable to the adversities of the pandemic are people working in the informal economy, particularly women and youths who are overrepresented in the informal sector, and whose livelihoods will be further impacted by reduced remittances, trade and income from sectors such as tourism, contributing to increasing poverty and food insecurity levels.

IV. Increasing food insecurity will imperil efforts to eradicate poverty and reverse gains made on human capital development indicators

12. In 2020, over 15.8 million children under 5 in the 55 countries facing the worst food crises were suffering from wasting. Nearly half of these (7 million) lived in the 10 worst food crises (by the number of people in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above). The situation was particularly concerning in northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, which accounted for a third of all wasted children in food-crisis countries.
13. The nutrition situation was particularly critical in countries affected by protracted conflict. Of the 10 countries/territories with the highest prevalence of wasting, eight (Yemen, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Niger, Somalia, Chad, northern Nigeria, and Burkina Faso) are affected by protracted conflict. The 10 countries experiencing the worst food crises in 2020 were particularly affected by nutrition and health service disruptions mostly due to COVID-19 restrictions.
14. In six out of the nine countries with data, vitamin A supplementation dropped nationally by at least 25 percent. The drop exceeded 50 percent in Afghanistan, northern Nigeria and the Sudan. In the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the implementation of wasting treatment programmes dropped by 25–49 percent.
15. There are 200 million school children currently missing school meals. The massive impact of school closures has highlighted the importance of school feeding programmes that provide a crucial, widespread safety net that supports children and their families.

V. Governments and development partners are focused on lives and livelihoods, social protection measures humanitarian needs and build resilience for the recovery phase and beyond

16. Governments in the 'high-risk' countries and their partners recognize the complexity of the present crisis and the need for context-specific responses. Many have adopted a "middle of-the-road" approach that combines prevention with some level of economic stimulus. Specific actions include: i) food assistance, including food distribution and cash-based transfers; ii) supply chain and logistics augmentation; iii) social protection, particularly shock-responsive

safety nets and basic income support; and iv) remedial fiscal and monetary measures, including budget support, debt service relief, and the repurposing of funds and programming.

17. Some of the countries are strengthening emergency preparedness and response arrangements and actively employing digital technologies to facilitate a shift to cashless transactions and e-commerce. However, relatively few countries have embarked on resilient building initiatives to mitigate the scale of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, including immediate and direct assistance to cushion against lost income and export earnings, dwindling remittances and decreased government revenue and move to the recovery phase.
18. Several assessments and reports are coalescing around similar conclusions for addressing and maintaining support for food security and nutrition. Workstream 4 of the AU/FAO Task Force on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition Security in Africa identified the following four focus areas for urgent interventions: i) saving lives and livelihoods - humanitarian food, livelihood and nutrition assistance; worker protection, keeping trade corridors open, expanding monitoring systems, and ensuring the most vulnerable are taken care off; ii) putting into place social protection measures – expansion and tailoring of assistance as well as strengthening the health system; and iii) promoting sustainability - transforming food systems, and satisfying the conditions for a more inclusive, green and resilient recovery; and iv) strengthening policies and institutions for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery.
19. The lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable people in high-risk food and nutrition insecure countries must be protected while also strengthening capacities to withstand shocks and risks to agri-food systems thorough resilience building and actions that ensure continuous food supply. These actions and interventions must comply with government measures and health guidelines and should be designed and implemented in partnership and close coordination between governments, and humanitarian and development actors.

VI. WFP's contribution to achieving zero hunger and eradicating extreme poverty: Critical action must address immediate humanitarian needs and build resilience for the recovery phase and beyond

20. Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and its worsening impacts on food security and poverty eradication, it is critical to sustain support for immediate humanitarian needs (including early warning signals and monitoring), simultaneously assess and implement recovery related interventions and continue to make investments in longer term development priorities, particularly livelihood support.
21. The World Food Programme recognizes that empowered and resilient smallholder farmers hold the key to a world free from hunger. However, despite producing most of the food in the developing world, all too often, their livelihoods can only support meagre and unhealthy diets. Their poor incomes are a result of numerous constraints such as lack of profitable markets, low productivity, high post-harvest losses, limited information and poor infrastructure. WFP recognizes that supporting smallholders to increase their productivity

and incomes and building stronger food systems through inclusive agricultural and economic development are key to achieving food security.

22. In response, WFP has developed models that combine wide partnerships, innovative solutions and context-specific support for smallholders and their national governments, with systemic impact in agricultural value chains and broader food systems. These efforts are more than just traditional hand-outs of “food-aid” but rather an enormous range of projects and platforms that empower the most vulnerable to access nutritious food. They include approaches such as the market access-oriented Smallholder Agricultural Market Support (SAMS) initiatives, Farm to Market Alliance and Virtual Farmers’ Market, livelihood-oriented Food Assistance for Assets (FFA), as well as post-harvest loss reduction efforts to strengthen food supply chains.
23. Recognizing it is uniquely positioned to support governments, local organizations, and partners to quickly adapt, design and deliver their own interventions, WFP has developed a Medium-Term Programme Framework to help governments address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The three programme pillars are:⁴
1. **National Social Protection Systems:** WFP will help governments to adapt, design and implement social assistance interventions that respond to COVID-19 and to strengthen shock-responsive social protection systems. This offer draws on decades of experience in safety net programming in crisis contexts and technical expertise in analysis, assessment, programme design, in-kind and cash delivery systems and accountability to affected populations.
 2. **Basic Service Delivery:** WFP can support governments to adapt and ensure essential nutrition and school-based services, protecting children and women, building human capital and enabling recovery.
 3. **Food Systems:** The COVID-19 pandemic is placing significant stress on all components of food systems (production, trade and distribution, and consumption), threatening the food security and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people. Sustaining, protecting, and improving food systems and markets during the crisis is vital to reduce economic and food insecurity risks to communities, especially the most vulnerable, and enable a quicker and more inclusive recovery.

⁴ WFP COVID-19 Medium Term Programme Framework (June 2020), available [HERE](#)