

Stopping the Cycle:

A research programme to contribute to solutions to recurring food insecurity and nutrition crises

The Problem

According to the Global Report on Food Crises: 2022 is “the fourth consecutive year of rising levels of food acute food insecurity,” with up to 205.1 million people in 45 countries in crisis or worse (IPC/CH phase 3+) levels of food insecurity¹.

Per the UNICEF/WHO/World Bank 2020 estimates, 6.7% (45.4 million) children are affected by wasting and 22.0% or 149.2 million children are affected by stunting globally².

WFP reports that over 9 million people die from hunger every year, that is 24,000 per day³.

The drivers of food insecurity crises include acute and protracted conflict, economic shocks (including ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine) and the increasing effects of climate change⁴.

These drivers are not likely to improve in the short term, and the cyclical nature of such compounded crises are likely to result in further food insecurity emergencies affecting the health, wellbeing and futures of people in the years to come. It is essential that the humanitarian and research communities work together to identify system solutions to prevent households and communities from falling into crisis, to avoid the long-term impacts of food insecurity.

Introduction

The R2HC continuously monitors current and anticipated humanitarian crises with a view to identifying crisis contexts in which evidence gaps already – or may soon – hinder the ability to conduct effective humanitarian response, and thus minimise morbidity and mortality amongst affected people.

The current food insecurity situation in the Horn of Africa (and beyond), has been compounded by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the ongoing climate emergency. This escalating crisis will have a profound impact in both the short and long term on the nutrition and health needs of already stressed populations and health systems, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Background analysis on the food insecurity crisis and the impact of this crisis on nutrition and health can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

¹ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/featured-stories/news-details/en/c/1155925/>

² <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2021/>

³ <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-wealth-9-million-people-die-every-year-hunger-wfp-chief-tells-food-system-summit>

⁴ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/featured-stories/news-details/en/c/1155925/>

To identify possible areas where R2HC could add value to this and future food insecurity crises, we undertook a consultation process interviewing 12 experts in the field of food insecurity, nutrition and health, the list of which can be found in Annex 1. Through engagement with this group of experts, this Concept Note has been developed, that will bring together the identified gaps in the research and practice evidence base and will suggest the research areas of focus to which R2HC could contribute.

Research Area of Focus: Nutrition and Food Insecurity Preventive Package

A clear gap in evidence-based practice was identified in the lack of a **food security and nutrition preventive package for children under age 5 and pregnant and lactating women (PLWs)**. Given the limited funding available in crises, what funds are made available tend to be targeted to treatment of malnutrition, as opposed to the prevention of it, despite the known negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of PLWs and children when they suffer episodes of undernutrition (e.g. low birth weight infants, anaemia, susceptibility to infection, reduced physical growth and cognitive effects⁵).

Consultations with key informants identified that while there are products and approaches that can be used to prevent malnutrition in these priority age groups (e.g. small quantity lipid based nutrient supplements (SQLNS), targeted and blanket food distributions, good WASH practices, vaccination programmes etc), there is **no standard operational package of preventive measures** that is being implemented in humanitarian settings.

This research initiative (objectives and approach below) proposes the consultative development and testing of packages of cross-sectoral preventive interventions⁶ aligned with the IPC phases, that have clear indicators for activation in IPC/CH phases 1, 2 and 3 to avoid households and communities falling into IPC 4&5.

This work will fill the knowledge gap on what should be included in such preventive packages, and will seek to socialise these packages into the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)⁷ (a multi-partner initiative for improving food security and nutrition analysis and decision-making.) Additionally, this programme of research will seek to identify cost-efficiencies that could result from implementation of such early preventive packages, as compared to the costs (human, financial and social) of food insecurity and malnutrition crises. Ultimately this work aims to influence funders and governments **to invest earlier to prevent cyclical food crises**, acknowledging that such crises are not simply a result of an evidence-gap in how to respond, but that the funding and political will to act earlier is essential.

Proposed research objectives

Objective 1: To conduct a scoping review to understand existing food security and nutrition preventive packages for children and PLWs in humanitarian settings.

Objective 2: To define the preventive package(s) for children and PLWs that would be appropriate to implement in different IPC phases of food insecurity, with particular focus on differential vulnerabilities including IDPs, Refugees, Host Community, Nomadic Groups. This will include a

⁵<https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2021/>

⁶ Including food security, nutrition, health, livelihoods, social protection

⁷https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/communication_tools/brochures/IPC_Brochure_Understanding_the_IPC_Scales.pdf

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matrix of how “wide” the preventive package extends in terms of inclusion of activities in Health, WASH, Livelihoods, Social Protection etc.

Objective 3: To test (refine) how the proposed preventive package(s) interacts with nutrition / food insecurity interventions (and other sectors) in various IPC phases of food insecurity (e.g. malnutrition treatment / food assistance / cash / social protection schemes).

Objective 4: To conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis of the proposed preventive package(s) to both compare to nutrition/food insecurity treatment interventions in food insecure settings and to evaluate joint benefits.

Objective 5: To develop a model for prevention that can be integrated into global policy and guidelines, based on a cross-country analysis of the tested

Research Programme Approach and Budget

R2HC proposes to approach this work in phases.

Inception Phase: Steering Committee

A Steering Committee will be established to guide this research programme and to ensure that outputs are made available to those actors best positioned to influence global and national policy. The Steering Committee will consist of experts in humanitarian Food Security, Nutrition, Health and related sectors, with a particular view to equity of participation with LMIC actors prioritized for inclusion.

Phase 1: Scoping and Preventive Package Development

This formative research phase, will aim to answer Objectives 1 & 2 of this programme of work through a jointly developed methodology. A provider will be sourced through an open competitive tender targeting actors working in the humanitarian food security and nutrition space. We anticipate that the team will comprise operational humanitarian and academic expertise, and that the work will take 12 months, following contracting.

Phase 2: Testing and Cost-Effectiveness

The trial phase of this research programme is expected to be complex, with R2HC launching a call for proposals for academic-humanitarian consortia to evaluate the preventive package, and to conduct cost-effectiveness analyses in a variety of geographies over a 2-year timeframe (following contracting). This work would aim to answer Objectives 3 & 4. We anticipate 8-10 studies to be conducted to test package implementation across a range of IPC phases.

Phase 3: Cross-Country Comparison

Following completion of all field studies, a research team will be contracted to conduct a cross-country comparison of findings, with the aim of developing a model that can then be integrated into global policy and guidelines. The timeline for this work would be approximately 12 months.

Research Geography

Key informants and the background analysis suggest that this research be conducted in multiple countries, to provide insights that are relevant cross-country / cross-region, and to also allow for

differences in the drivers of food insecurity (seasonality/conflict) to be studied. The 6 countries of interest for this research are thus: Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Yemen and Afghanistan.

Anticipated Timeline

| Activity | Completed by Month / Year |
|---|---------------------------|
| Advisory Board & FCDO approval | Nov 2022 |
| Launch phase 1 ToR | Jan 2023 |
| Phase 1 provider contracted | Mar 2023 |
| Completion of phase 1 research | Mar 2024 |
| Dissemination of phase 1 findings | July 2024 |
| Preparation of Call focus & guidelines | April – Oct 2024 |
| Launch of phase 2 call for proposals | Nov 2024 |
| Phase 2 providers contracted | June 2025 |
| Completion of phase 2 research | June 2027 |
| Dissemination + uptake of phase 2 findings | July 2027 onwards |
| Phase 3 Cross-country analysis conducted | July 2028 |
| Advocacy with policy & guideline stakeholders | July 2028 onwards |

Given the anticipated lengthy timeline for completion of this overall programme of research, at appropriate intervals a series of knowledge products emerging from the research (preliminary findings, blogs, update webinars) that will be of benefit to the humanitarian practitioner community are to be released.

Annex 1: Background analysis

The number of people living under Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC)/CH phase 3+ (“crisis” or worse)⁸ conditions is estimated to be up to 205.1 million people across 45 countries and territories according to the IPC mid-year report.⁹ As shown in the below map, countries in the Horn of Africa that are facing seasonal food insecurity, and countries facing protracted conflict including Afghanistan and Yemen are particularly impacted.

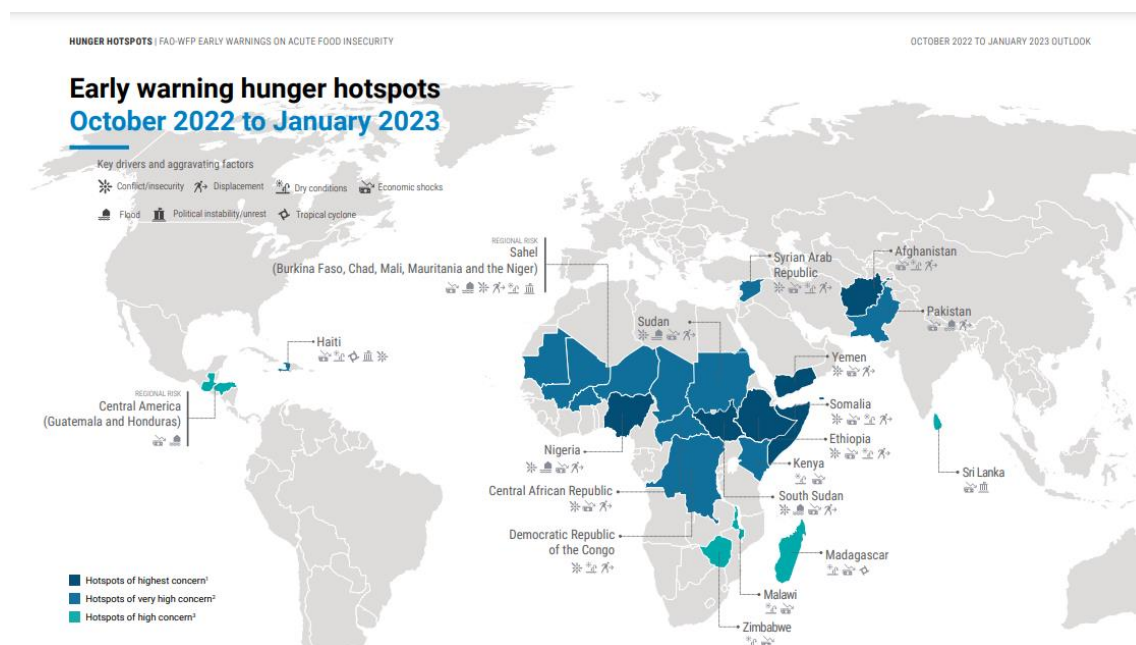


Figure 1: Early Warning Hunger Hotspots Map Oct 2022¹⁰

Famine (IPC Level 5) has been projected in Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan and Afghanistan (figure 1). Other Horn of Africa countries including Kenya and Sudan are showing increasing numbers of people in IPC/CH Level 3 (crisis), and Ethiopia likely has large numbers of individuals at IPC Phase 4, with some at IPC Phase 5 (no mid-year disaggregated data was available for Ethiopia)¹¹.

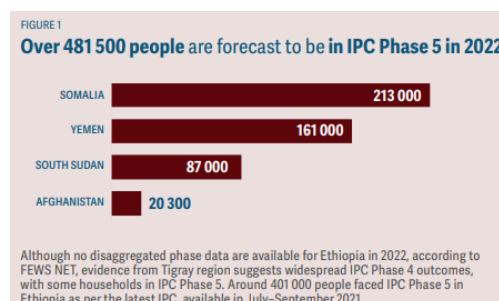


Figure 2: IPC Phase 5 Forecast September 2022

⁸ IPC/CH phase 3: Households either: 1) Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or 2) Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies, for which urgent action is required to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps. [IPC Technical Manual V3.1 \(2021\)](#).

⁹ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/featured-stories/news-details/en/c/1155925/>

¹⁰ http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/fileadmin/user_upload/fightfoodcrises/doc/resources/HungerHotSpots2022.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/featured-stories/news-details/en/c/1155925/>

Drivers of Food Insecurity

Conflict and insecurity was considered the primary driver of food insecurity across 24 countries in 2021, in which 72% of people in IPC/CH 3+ conditions were living.² Trends in global displacement, along with climatic shocks exacerbated by the global climate emergency have further complicated food insecurity, particularly in regions with pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Economic shocks have further compounded food crises, with an increase in food prices complicated by the inequitable global recovery from COVID-19

and pandemic-related supply chain disruptions. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has further disrupted the global food supply: Ukraine and Russia produce approximately 30% of the global wheat supply,¹² with Ukraine's production expected to decline by at least a third in 2022.¹³ The FAO's food price index reached its highest in March 2022, driven in part by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.¹⁴

| | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | DRC | DRC | YEM | YEM | YEM | YEM |
| 2 | AFG | YEM | DRC | DRC | NIG | ETH |
| 3 | ETH | AFG | AFG | AFG | ETH | AFG |
| 4 | YEM | SYR | VEN | ETH | DRC | NIG |
| 5 | NIG | SUD | ETH | SYR | AFG | SYR |

Table 3: Countries with the highest number of people in IPC/CH phase 3+, 2016-2021

A number of food commodity-importing countries are expected to be further impacted by disruptions to production and export from Ukraine. Additionally, WFP purchases at least 50% of its wheat from Ukraine,¹⁵ and as such is expected to see major disruptions to the food aid supply chain and the procurement costs associated with essential commodities. This is likely to have a significant impact on those people who are dependent on external food assistance; at least 89 million people received in-kind food aid from the WFP in 2021.¹⁶ Persistent funding shortfalls and rising operational costs had already prompted the likes of the WFP to cut food aid rations prior to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.^{17,18}

Food insecurity and malnutrition

Food insecurity represents a significant driver of malnutrition, with the latest projections suggesting a dramatic increase in the prevalence of undernutrition worldwide (Figure 2).¹⁹ As of 2021, global projections suggest that none of the key nutrition targets will be met by 2030.

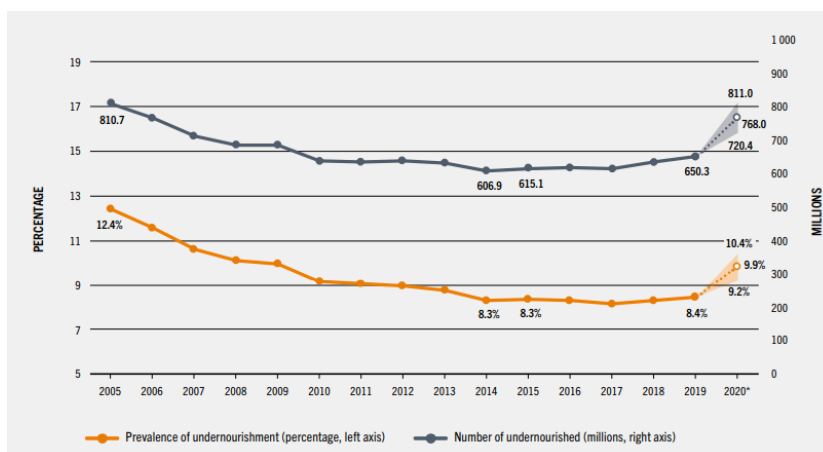


Figure 2: Prevalence of global undernutrition, 2005-2020 (projected)

¹² The Guardian, [Apocalypse now? The alarming effects of the global food crisis \(2022\)](#).

¹³ The Guardian, [Ukraine's wheat harvest may fall by 35%, raising fears of global shortage \(2022\)](#).

¹⁴ FAO, [FAO food price index \(2022\)](#).

¹⁵ The Week, [World Food Program chief: Ukraine war has damaged global food security, creating 'a catastrophe'](#).

¹⁶ WFP, [Annual performance report for 2021 \(2022\)](#)

¹⁷ Devex, [WFP costs up 50% since 2019, with Ukraine set to make matters worse \(2022\)](#)

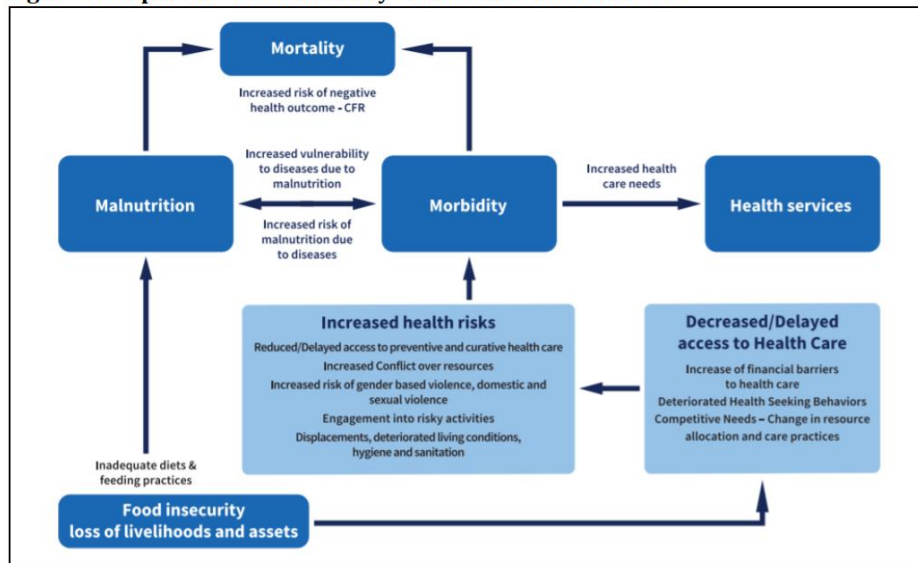
¹⁸ The Guardian, [Food rations to 1.4 million refugees cut in Uganda due to funding shortfall \(2020\)](#).

¹⁹ [The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2021](#).

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the constraints from reduced services and inadequate diets, on child undernutrition are still yet to be fully realised. In 2021 a report by UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Group estimated that the pandemic could have resulted in a 15% increase in children affected by wasting due to reductions in household finances, and disruptions in food and nutrition services²⁰.

The below diagram (from the not-yet-published WHO strategic framework²¹) demonstrates how food insecurity can lead to increased needs for health services, increased health risks, decreased/delayed access to health care and related increases in morbidity and mortality.

Figure 2: Impact of food insecurity on health risks and needs



²⁰ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2021/>

²¹ Food Insecurity and Health – Strategic Framework - FINAL V1 DRAFT_EDITED May 2022 (NOT YET PUBLISHED)

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Annex 2: Consultation

| Interviewee Name | Organization |
|---------------------|---|
| Abigail Perry | WFP |
| Chytanya Kompala | Eleanor Crook Foundation |
| Egmond Evers | WHO |
| Erin Boyd | USAID BHA |
| Esperanza Martinez | ICRC |
| Flavia Calisti | WHO |
| Ines Lezama | Ethiopia Nutrition Cluster |
| Marie-Sophie Witney | ECHO |
| Mutahar Al Falahi | Yemen Nutrition Cluster |
| Paul Spiegel | Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health |
| Simon Karanja | Somalia Nutrition Cluster |
| Tanya Khara | Emergency Nutrition Network |
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