



Syrian Refugees – Credit: Dina Elkassaby/WFP

ADAPTING TO AN URBAN WORLD

URBAN CASE STUDY: SYRIA CRISIS (LEBANON & JORDAN)

APRIL 2015



ALNAP

LEARNING • ACCOUNTABILITY • PERFORMANCE
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Steering Committee Members



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List of Acronyms

ACAPS: Assessment Capacities Project
ACTED: Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ALNAP: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
AUB: American University of Beirut
CARI: Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security
CSI: Coping Strategies Index
DRC: Danish Refugee Council
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation
FCS: Food Consumption Score
FES: Food Expenditure Share
GIS: Geographic Information System
JESSRP: Jordan Emergency Services and Social Resilience Project
INGO: International non-governmental organisation
IRC: International Rescue Committee
MEB: Minimum Expenditure Basket
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council
rCSI: Reduced Coping Strategies Index
REACH: Joint initiative of ACTED, IMPACT Initiatives and UNOSAT
VAF: Vulnerability Assessment Framework
VASyR: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees
WFP: World Food Programme
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



Apartment Building in Urban Beirut Credit: Renee Goulet/Independent

Introduction

The Syria Crisis exercise is part of a series of case studies explored within the context of the project *Adapting to an Urban World*. This project was developed to address an identified gap in urban assessment tools. The aim of the project is to develop assessment guidance and tools specifically designed for use in urban contexts. In order to achieve this objective, the project will examine a number of different urban contexts with food insecure populations. These contexts will differ to ensure the spectrum of different factors affecting urban food insecurity are included. It is intended that this will include rapid on-set emergencies, chronic food insecurity, urban refugees, urban slums among others.

The first case study/pilot assessment was conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe in November 2014; it included qualitative primary data collection and field-testing of newly developed tools. For the second case study it was decided, in agreement with the Steering Committee of the *Adapting to an Urban World* project, to focus on Syrian refugees in urban settings in both Jordan and Lebanon through a secondary data analysis and without including a primary data collection exercise.

Since the uprising began in March 2011, Syrian refugees started seeking asylum in neighbouring countries Jordan and Lebanon. At the end of March 2015, in Jordan (where camps have been

established, unlike in Lebanon), 83.1% of all registered Syrian refugees were living outside of camps (521,232)¹.

Syrians fleeing the ongoing violence in their country still constitute the majority of Jordan's refugee population and approximately 20 per cent of Syrian refugees reside in refugee camps, while the remaining live in non-camp settings, mostly in urban areas.

The impact of the Syrian crisis, including on the economy, demographics, political instability, and security, also continues to deepen across Lebanon. With more than 1.3 million refugees expected by the beginning of 2015, Lebanon's hospitality has been extremely stretched over the past 4 years.

The situation in both Lebanon and Jordan is complex, as some refugees have been living in these areas for many years, while others continue to arrive. Over time, as refugees stay longer, a community and some civil society networks are forming. The host community and refugee populations live in close contact in both Jordan and Lebanon, functioning within the same economies, competing for jobs, housing and other resources. As a significant amount of data collection has taken place in both countries, this presented an ideal opportunity for a case study focused on secondary data analysis and qualitative data collection. Note that while findings are focused on urban-specific issues, in this context it is quite difficult to clearly differentiate between issues resulting from the urban context, the refugee context and the middle-income country context; this case study has presented unique circumstances and related assessment challenges.

Objectives

The overall objectives of this case study are to highlight how actors have adapted assessment methodologies within this context, to understand what defines vulnerability for urban refugees, and to acknowledge the primary assessment challenges. This case study aims to take learning from urban assessments in Jordan and Lebanon, and use it to inform the broader project objectives.

The specific objectives include:

- Comparing food security assessments methodologies to determine which have been most useful for urban settings/urban refugees;
- Analysing standard food security indicators (food consumption, income, expenditure, coping strategies, assets etc.) to define how well they reflect the condition of urban refugees and their vulnerability.
- Understanding how the vulnerability characteristics of refugees vary among the various settings (urban/rural/camp);

Methodology

Due to the large amount of assessments and analyses conducted in the region on refugees and host communities, the methodology of the Syria Crisis case study did not include any primary data collection with these populations. Rather, it focused on examining the information that was already available, and collecting primary data from humanitarian actors. More specifically, the methodology included the following components:

¹ UNHCR, 2015

- **Desk Review:** literature review of urban food security assessments/analyses/studies conducted in the Lebanon and Jordan to identify context specific issues and methodological challenges and adaptations;
- **Interviews with Key Stakeholders in the Region:** including NGOs, UN agencies, academia and relevant government units to identify the main challenges, gaps and solutions in conducting food security and vulnerability assessments including:
 - ✓ Sampling and mapping
 - ✓ Data collection modules and indicators used
 - ✓ Analysis methodology
 - ✓ Other determinants of vulnerability

For the complete qualitative data collection tool, please see Annex II.

Limitations: The ultimate objective of the project is developing new guidance and tools, which requires testing of newly developed/adapted tools. As explained above, this exercise included no primary data collection with refugee households. Without testing of tools, it is very difficult to empirically determine which methods work or do not work. As such, this review risks raising more questions than answers. It also relies very heavily on the perspectives of humanitarian actors, therefore is subject to any biases or agendas that may exist.

Note that this case study was initially intended to include a secondary data analysis component. However, none of the available data had a clear urban/rural identifier variable, and the geographic identifiers did not allow for differentiation between urban and rural. As a result, the comparison of urban and rural indicators through secondary data analysis was not possible.



Findings from the Desk Review

The literature review focused on key documents/reports from humanitarian and development organizations working on the Syria crisis response in Lebanon and Jordan. None of the reports included in the review provide a clear distinction between urban and rural. Briefly, Action Contre la Faim (2010) describe 'urban' as cities or urban agglomerations where life is divided between individualism and communitarianism. According to the ACF report, urban contexts are comprised of a patchwork of different districts/locations, each with its own particular social organization and methods of accessing services. In the Oxfam, CLER and BRIC Survey on the Livelihoods of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (2013), it is noted that UNHCR figures indicate two-thirds of the Syrian refugees are living in urban areas. In order to inform the sampling strategy of the survey, the urban areas were "divided into larger urban zones around major cities and smaller zones in secondary cities." In addition to this, the survey considered the population distribution across areas; "a small agglomeration was defined as less than 2,000 refugees, a medium one was between 2,000 and 10,000, and a large settlement was more than 10,000 refugees." Thus, in this exercise in Lebanon, the size of the area and the number of registered refugees were used to define the context and inform the sampling.

The majority of food security and vulnerability assessments included in the literature review relied rapid assessment methodologies. These are a relatively quick and cheap way of getting a rough picture of the real situation on the ground. Using this methodology, reports indicated that information was collected from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) already working in the targeted areas; from key informants (mostly local leaders or those who have knowledge of the area), desk reviews and from direct observations (Allen, K. 2004; REACH, 2014). The Assessment Working Group for Northern Syria (2013) cited time, accessibility and security as some of the key limiting factors to conducting more thorough detailed assessments.

With rapid assessments, statistical sampling is rarely used; sampling is often random and purposive. And in urban contexts, statistically representative sampling can be particularly challenging (see section 2b below for more details on this). As one solution to this issue, the CARE 2013 survey in Jordan randomly selected 65% of their sample from CARE beneficiary lists, and the remaining were from recommendations from households visited. This snowball sampling method has some statistical limitations, but is a constructive method to address the constraints faced. Also in Jordan, the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF – for further details see section 4.1) baseline surveys are randomly sampled from the entire registered refugee population, resulting in statistically representative results.

The desk review component of this case study has been limited, given the lack of focus on urban issues within the documents reviewed. Please refer to the bibliography for a complete list of all resources reviewed.

Findings from Interviews with Key Stakeholders in the Region

Qualitative data collection was conducted with UN agencies, NGOs, academic institutions and government representatives. This section will present the results of these interviews, organised by common themes. It will present various challenges and adaptations; first conceptual, then operational and finally specific measurement issues.

1) Conceptual Challenges and Adaptations

Before delving into technical food security issues, this section will present some of the overarching conceptual challenges that emerged through the interviews, and approaches taken by various actors to address these challenges.

1a. Defining Urban and Rural: One of the biggest challenges which has emerged regarding assessment of urban food security in Jordan and Lebanon is how to define urban in these contexts.

In Jordan and Lebanon, there are not simply “urban centres”, “refugee camps” and “rural villages”. There are a mix of other geographies, with a variety of characteristics which sometimes mirror traditionally ‘urban’ areas and in other ways are more like ‘rural’ areas. There are peri-urban areas, very small cities, informal tented settlements and towns which aren't sprawling metropolises but where livelihoods are more ‘urban’ than ‘rural’. There is urban sprawl along transport corridors² – areas with a growing population density but lacking in infrastructure and services (water supply, sewage networks, etc.) which typically exist in urban areas. It should be noted that although this report is focused on both countries, the two contexts are not the same. In Jordan, for example, actors emphasize that it is primarily access to services that determines the location of refugees. The location of informal tented settlements are mostly determined by economic opportunities in proximity to farms and agricultural centres. Thus there is no urban-rural clear dichotomy, and the characteristics used to make these definitions are unclear.

Actors working in Jordan do not agree on what population size defines an urban area; some say >5000 households is urban, others disagree and argue that numbers are not a useful way to frame the urban/rural issue. The government does not distinguish between urban/rural areas. Even the population does not agree – a survey conducted by REACH asked individuals to identify their neighbourhood as urban or rural; many neighbours identified the same area differently, highlighting the difficulties of strict urban vs rural thinking.

Similar issues exist in Lebanon, where many actors feel that, given the interdependence of areas which could arguably be termed more ‘urban’ vs ‘rural’, where individuals may live in a rural area but work in an urban one, and still rely on markets for the majority of their food. The established national poverty line in Lebanon does not distinguish between urban and rural.

Many of the people interviewed for this case study highlighted this issue, and some even questioned the relevance of this issue within these contexts. So why is this a challenge for assessment and response?

- Without acknowledging and understanding the characteristics of urban areas, it is impossible to understand their implications for food security and vulnerability.
- Understanding the systems and connections in and between urban areas is incredibly important – this includes connections with rural, peri-urban and urban suburbs. This is especially important given the permeability of urban/rural distinctions in these contexts.
- Lack of consensus between response actors makes it more difficult to harmonise information and approaches.
- In recognition of the need for new approaches to urban challenges, some organisations and initiatives (including the Adapting to an Urban World) have developed urban tools and

² A similar challenge was seen in the West African Ebola response, where outbreaks were concentrated in urban centres and along transport routes.

approaches (though there remains a shortage of urban-adapted tools). To use these, one needs to first be able to identify where they would be appropriate.

Given these challenges, what can be done? There are no clear answers. Below we outline the strategies currently being used and their opportunities/challenges.

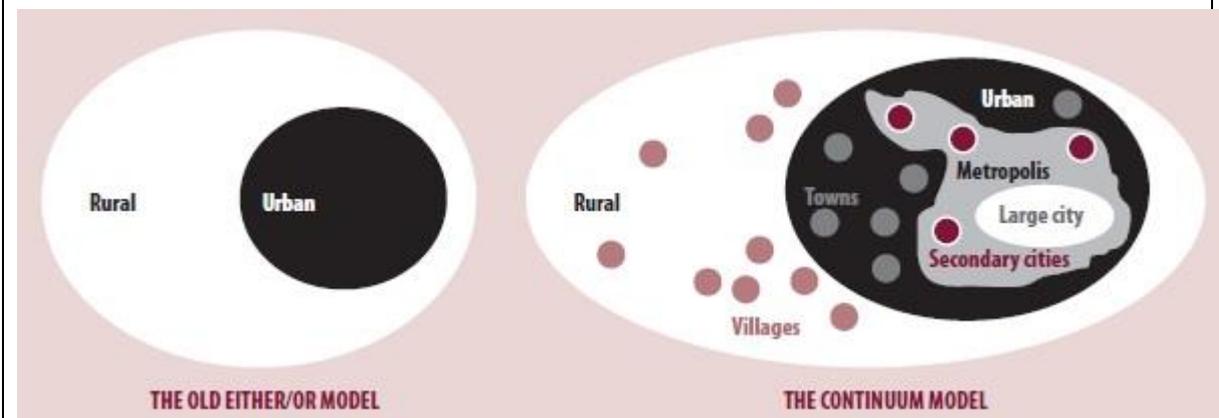
Approach	Who is using this approach?	Opportunities	Challenges
Existing administrative boundaries (municipalities) are used rather than urban/rural distinctions	Some NGOs in both Jordan and Lebanon; Some government actors in Lebanon	Coordination This approach is similar to current discourse suggesting 'area-based' responses are more effective for coordination given the scale of an urban response.	Lack of Cohesion: Administrative boundaries are often drawn without consideration of sense of community, thus do not delineate social networks or areas that share resources and support one another.
Areas are determined to be 'urban' or 'rural' using specific metrics, such as population density, access to services and infrastructure, occupation and how land is used ³ .	Governments, academics and UN development actors	Quality of data This approach is most commonly used by academics and statisticians. Understanding the geography using this method is likely to produce the most statistically valid evidence to classify a certain area, it is also the approach used by most governments which makes the data useful for development work beyond the current crisis.	Time As there is currently no universally agreed, updated map identifying areas in this way, and census data is either unavailable or inaccurate due to the recent changes in population as a result of the refugee influx, organisations must take time to identify areas in this way – and then, to coordinate, time to harmonise with other organisations.
In Jordan, any area non-camp is treated as urban In Lebanon, all areas are treated as urban	UNHCR; some NGOs in both Jordan and Lebanon	Time This approach is quite straightforward and time is not lost trying to define and redefine geographies which are constantly changing anyhow. Movement A large number of responses in Lebanon are delivered through cash-based methods. Mostly, these are delivered through ATM cards which can be used at any bank machine around the country. One organisation operating in Akkar who examined data on withdrawal locations found that while many were in Akkar regions, withdrawals were also made as far as Beirut and Tripoli. Pull Factors This approach avoids the risk of incentivising refugees with resources which create a 'pull factor' to cities.	Geographic differences There are differences between, for example, Amman and the urban sprawl that has emerged along transportation routes which this approach masks. These nuances mean that vulnerabilities and capacities will be different, as access to infrastructure/services/livelihoods are different. Economic differences Not distinguishing between rural/urban areas means the same minimum expenditure basket is used to determine needs across the country – when in reality costs and income opportunities are different between, for example, Beirut (clearly urban) and small towns in northern Akkar region (rural, peri-urban)

³ There is significant academic research, particularly from the health and urban planning sectors, about determining the factors which define 'urbanicity'. See, for example, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/530>

BOX 1: The Urban-Rural Continuum

The debate over a definition for what is 'urban' is not new (see ALNAP, 2012; Cohen, 2013; IFPRI, 2005; World Bank, 2009). Recent experiences in crises such as the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia and the 2015 Nepal earthquake emphasise the reality that there are no clear lines between 'urban' areas and 'rural', and that a much more nuanced understanding of the connections and interdependencies between densely populated centres and their surrounding areas is required. The below diagram (ALNAP, 2012 adapted from a 2009 World Bank model) highlights this complexity.

However despite a growing recognition of the limitations of 'urban' vs 'rural' thinking (UCL, 2015), this discourse largely persists in the humanitarian sector, and is not effectively being considered in discussions about 'urban' response.



1b. Level of Vulnerability Analysis: In both Jordan and Lebanon, the level of vulnerability analysis is a key complication related to assessment. There is ongoing discussion in both countries around whether the humanitarian community should focus analysis on cases, households or communities. These complications could arise across rural and urban contexts, but are exacerbated in urban areas due to the close proximity in which people live.

UNHCR registers refugees in cases, which are a processing unit and usually include the principal applicant and his/her dependents. In Jordan, a case corresponds to the nuclear family. In the initial phase, a case may be defined by the grouping of people who arrive in the host country together, but over time registration records are corrected and verified. UNHCR considers emotional and physical dependencies as well as familial relationships, so protection concerns may also factor into the decision around how to group cases. ProGres (UNHCR registration software) data is recorded at case level, and cases related to each other are linked.

On the other hand, a household is defined as people living together, eating from the same pot and sharing the same budget which is managed by the head of the household. As such, there are many scenarios in which multiple cases live in the same house. For example, parents of household heads are usually registered as separate cases from the household, but are generally part of the same household. UNHCR explains that while multiple cases may live together, they may not pool their resources; "sharing a common roof may signify sharing rent and utility bills (cheaper living costs) however we currently do not have data which reliably confirms this."⁴ However many of the indicators used in food

⁴ VAF 2015b

security assessments are designed to be used at household level, so applying them to cases may pose analytical problems when the case does not equal the household.

In Jordan, the commonly agreed upon Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF, further discussed below) analyses vulnerability at case level. And in Lebanon, the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) and the targeting exercise uses household level analysis, but the multipurpose cash assistance is provided based on analysis at case level. There is no consensus on the appropriate way to deal with this issue, so analyses continues to be conducted at differing levels.

While the current vulnerability analysis is conducted at household and/or case level, there is an ongoing discussion about the importance of community level analysis. Across contexts, it is generally accepted that specific characteristics of an individual household (such as demographics, income, housing, access to services, etc.) can contribute to food insecurity and economic vulnerability. However, in Amman and Beirut, many actors are advocating for more of a community-level focus. Geographic areas can define the services households have access to, such as water, electricity and sewage. In this context many families are sharing a single house, increasing inter-household connections, both economic and social. And almost all actors raised the issue that among the refugees, there is high dependence on sharing/borrowing of resources. Depending on context, this social capital may help buffer shocks and improve food security outcomes, thus the community network and resources must be taken into account.

In a related issue, host communities are intertwined with the refugees, as they function within the same economies and are dependent on the same resources. This highlights the importance of understanding social cohesion. While some actors have found social cohesion indicators helpful as a proxy for measuring community resilience, the majority of actors continue to focus on household or case level analysis, with most assessments focused exclusively on refugees.

All these context-specific factors contribute to high levels of interdependence between households, particularly in urban areas. As a result, some actors argue that analysing individual households misses an important piece of the puzzle, and that community level analysis would allow more insight about economic vulnerability and food insecurity. For example, ACTED in Beirut mentioned decreasing the geographic scope of interventions to allow for a more concentrated approach in fewer areas. This will support better understanding of communities, facilitate data collection, and increase community ownership and engagement.

There is a lack of agreement on this point so far, and challenges remain in exactly how to define communities within urban settings. In addition, there are very limited tools allowing for standardized community level vulnerability analysis.

1c. Middle-Income Country Context: Higher socioeconomic levels in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria pose a challenge to existing humanitarian approaches. Food energy standards are one key example. While the commonly used Sphere Standards list minimum food consumption of 2,100 calories per person per day, the minimum standard established in Jordan⁵ is established based on the abject poverty line of JOD28 per person per month, which allows for 2440 kilocalorie daily intake.

Similarly, in Lebanon the World Bank poverty line is \$112 per person per month, or \$560 for a household of five people. However the cash coordination group has calculated a country-wide survival Minimum Expenditure Basket of \$435. Thus in Lebanon, we see that the calculated standard for refugees is below the established standard within the country, linked to the higher socio economic

⁵ WFP, 2013

context. Note that the context is different in Jordan, with the Minimum Expenditure Basket actually higher than the Jordanian poverty line.

For many of the measurement issues listed in section 3, it is hard to distinguish whether these are urban/rural challenges, or simply a result of the socioeconomic context – which is obviously quite different from many contexts humanitarian actors are used to working in. For example, asset lists have been modified to include laptops, vacuum cleaners and air conditioning units, and Food Consumption Score thresholds have been modified by some actors because the standard thresholds are considered too low. Similarly, standard tools are not designed to capture the consumption of snacks/sugary foods – but is this an urban-specific issue or a socio-economic issue? Many of the established standards are based on a diet that is considered very restrictive in these contexts. In Amman and Beirut, many of the assessment challenges are linked to a combination of the urban context and the socioeconomic levels of households; distinguishing between the two is difficult.

1d. Economic vulnerability vs. Food Insecurity: Economic vulnerability and food insecurity are always strongly related concepts, whatever the context. But in these urban contexts, the overlap becomes larger; the two ideas are more intertwined in urban areas where people meet all of their food requirements from markets, as opposed to in rural areas, where populations may have alternative sources of food.

In this context, are these two different concepts? Or simply different thresholds on the same scale? In Lebanon and Jordan, there are different approaches and measurements used to determine economic vulnerability (often linked to cash assistance) and food insecurity (often linked to food vouchers), and results are not always aligned. Given these confusing discrepancies, some actors questioned the need for two distinct approaches to measurement.

2) *Operational Issues and Approaches*

This section focuses on the common themes which emerged from interviews related to operational issues; the logistical and technical difficulties of data collection within Amman and Beirut.

2a. Mobility: A critical assessment challenge mentioned by many actors is the mobility of the refugee population. This mobility is often due to increasing rent prices; households may choose to leave as their rent increases, and there are also frequent evictions in both Amman and Beirut. Additionally, many households move in search of economic opportunities. This serves as a pull factor into urban centres, but many NGOs reported that households continue to move, even within the urban areas. Despite this, UNHCR's 2015 home visit report showed that less than 10% of cases changed governorate from year to year. While UNHCR registration lists provide addresses for all refugees, many actors mentioned that actually finding these households is extremely challenging, particularly within urban centres. The frequent deactivation of mobile phones is an additional complication, making tracking down households much harder. This poses problems for data collection of any kind, including assessments, verification exercises and post-distribution monitoring.

2b. Sampling: Representative sampling for urban assessments has been identified as a challenge by many actors. Firstly, it is difficult to identify clusters in a densely populated area, and population proportionate to size techniques are problematic in areas where census data is outdated and refugee numbers fluctuate.

Many actors mentioned that the UNHCR registration lists have been used as a sampling frame for assessments. Using these lists, refugees can be selected at random for assessment purposes. UNHCR registers individuals up to Admin4 level, and updates the information on an annual basis. Moreover, UNHCR and partners conduct thousands of home visits per month, which helps to corroborate the

location data. However, the above-mentioned mobility limits the use of the lists. In addition, the UNHCR lists are useful only for registered refugees; if an organisation wishes to include any other populations (which may include non-registered refugees, Palestinians, Jordanians or Lebanese), alternative methods are required. To sample non-registered populations, organisations have used local partners, though this often results in purposive rather than random sampling.

In response to these challenges, some actors sample at higher administrative levels (e.g. governorate), and simply use administrative boundaries. Others have developed more innovative techniques. The Jordan Emergency Services and Social Resilience Project (JESSRP) done by REACH used population density mapping to identify dense populations and then selected areas (GPS points) at random. Using GPS on mobile phones, field staff were able to then easily reach the selected GPS points.⁶ And at the American University of Beirut (AUB), they have developed a rigorous methodology involving a combination of aerial maps and snowball sampling.⁷ Another researcher at AUB mentioned using a private company who has more reliable census information, and have defined clusters using some specific characteristics – for example, they must not have a major road passing through. It should be noted, however, that these AUB techniques were used specifically for assessments of Lebanese communities, who are perhaps less mobile than the refugee populations.

In urban areas, ‘random’ household sampling can be additionally difficult due to challenges in finding specific households, and because people are often not home in the day or unwilling to participate in the assessment. This constraint was reported by some NGOs interviewed, however UNHCR notes that they were only unable to visit 1-2% of households. High levels of distrust exist, in addition to security concerns (detailed below) resulting in frequent refusal to participate. It was mentioned that many wealthier houses in urban Beirut have guards blocking entry, which poses an additional logistical constraint in speaking with the randomly sampled household. To adapt to these challenges, actors mentioned increasing sample sizes to account for high levels of non-response, providing monetary incentives, and relying on key informants.

In this section, it is critical to mention the issue of data protection. There are various efforts to collect detailed information on refugee households, and to streamline and coordinate various humanitarian work, the data is often shared between organisations. In this context, protection of the data is extremely important, and common data protection protocols are lacking.

2c. Insecurity: Though this is closely linked to sampling constraints, insecurity is worth highlighting as a separate operational issue, posing challenges to data collection in urban areas of Lebanon. This was particularly relevant in Beirut, where actors mentioned the difficulties of data collection exercises in southern, Hezbollah controlled areas. Linked to insecurity, actors mentioned that households in urban areas are less likely to open their door to strangers, in comparison to more rural areas. And, as noted above, some households in urban Beirut have guards blocking entry – this is not found in more rural areas.

3) Measurement Challenges and Indicator Modifications

This section will explain common themes around specific measurement issues including indicators, thresholds and analysis.

3a. Food Consumption: A basic measurement of food consumption is the number of calories consumed per person per day. As mentioned above, the Sphere minimum standards, generally used

⁶ REACH (2014)

⁷ Ghattas (2014).

by humanitarian agencies in designing food assistance programs, use 2,100 kcal/person/day as a basic requirement. However, the Jordanian food poverty line, as calculated by the national Department of Statistics, allows for 2,440 kcal/person/day. This food poverty line calculation is partially a result of the relatively high cost of diverse diets which are consumed across Jordan, which has typically urban food consumption patterns – including mostly purchased food, and consumption of pre-prepared and processed foods.

When considering other food consumption measurement issues, a number of different issues arose related to the Food Consumption Score (FCS).⁸ In a similar issue to the above mentioned kilocalorie measurement, the national Department of Statistics had previously used a poor food consumption threshold of 45 (in comparison to the standard 21 or 28). The threshold was modified because they found the standard thresholds to be too low in their context. However, the emergency analyses are using a poor threshold of 28 – again, making the standards for refugees different from normal within this context. These thresholds are not urban/rural specific, thus the issue is more closely linked to the middle-income country context and related dietary habits. However as most of Jordan is generally considered to be urban (see discussion above), with diverse food consumption purchased from markets, this issue still relates to the question of measurement in urban areas. The diversity of consumption pushes up food consumption scores (and other measures of dietary diversity) – hence the decision to increase the thresholds. However these diverse diets are not necessarily higher in quantity or quality of foods.

In another issue linked to food consumption measurement, a common problem is how local food habits can be misleading and difficult to classify within standard measures like the FCS. For example, one interview mentioned that households do not typically consider chicken to be meat, thus enumerators must be well trained to probe for this.

Standard food consumption measurement tools, such as the FCS or the Household Dietary Diversity Score, list foods by basic food groups – such as cereals, tubers and pulses. In urban areas, there is higher consumption of complex, processed foods, which may contain multiple ingredients. Survey respondents may not be aware of all the ingredients contained within these processed foods, and/or the quantities included. As a possible example of this, a forthcoming FAO study on Jordanian households found a relatively low rate of consumption of pulses. Analysts noted that in a culture with frequent consumption of hummus and falafel, this indicates a potential measurement error.

Another frequently noted issue related to the measurement of food consumption is high consumption of sugary foods, snacks and junk food. The typical tools used (e.g. the FCS) do not have a way to account for this, and the majority of interviewees said they had not adapted modules. As a result, measurement of food consumption risks being inaccurate and/or inconsistent. In one example of adaptation, at the AUB, a study on Iraqi refugees modified the dietary diversity module to include 'sweets' as a line item.⁹ Further analysis demonstrated that respondents understood sweets to relate to more traditional desserts, rather than biscuits, chocolate and other processed foods. Resulting from this, an ongoing study at AUB has included an expanded junk food category in the diet module. Initial analysis of the study found that as expenditure decreased, consumption of more expensive foods (such as meat) decreased. However, the decrease in junk food consumption was much slower, indicating cultural influences on consumption patterns. While these studies are not focused on Syrian

⁸ WFP (2008)

⁹ Ghattas, 2014

refugees, consumption patterns are likely similar, so humanitarian actors working with Syrians could learn from the lessons of the AUB work.

In a related issue, in urban contexts with frequent consumption of sugary and processed foods, there is often an issue of high rates of overweight/obesity in combination with micronutrient deficiencies. In a few interviews this was acknowledged as a potential issue, however assessment tools have not been adapted in order to account for this.

Previous studies have observed that collecting household level data on food consumption (as is typical for the FCS and Household Dietary Diversity Score) can be problematic in urban contexts because of intra-household differences in consumption – for example, a husband may eat lunch at work, or children may eat at school. When probed about this issue specifically, no actors mentioned having adapted modules for this. And some felt this was not an issue within this context, as households continue to eat the same foods; consumption outside the home was minimal.

However, some interviews noted that reduction in meals cooked at home was listed as a coping strategy, while the number of meals consumed remained the same – implying that there is an increase in food consumed outside the home. In the VASyR in Lebanon (more details below), one question asks specifically if the household is able to cook at home at least once day, and if not, why not. Therefore understanding patterns of food consumption outside the house could have important implications, both economic and nutritional.

3b. Income: Income data can be useful in order to differentiate between poorer and wealthier households (by comparing absolute amounts of income earned), and to group households for analysis (by comparing income sources). However, it is widely acknowledged that income data can be difficult to collect and unreliable. In Jordan, this issue is exacerbated as most refugees are unable to work legally and are reliant on many temporary jobs. As a result, income data is particularly unreliable. Without income data, grouping households to facilitate analysis (for example, creating livelihood zones) is very difficult. In response to this, in some data collection, organisations have asked simply or sources of income, rather than absolute amounts. This allows for some groupings, but avoids the more sensitive and unreliable data.

In an interview with FAO, they explained an issue with the income measure included within the Building Resilience through Asset Creation and Enhancement (BRACE) program. The indicator, designed to measure income source reliability and sustainability, asks for three income sources, weights each source from one to three according to its reliability/sustainability, and aggregates the score. This process essentially classifies households with only one income source as poorer than others. I.e. the assumption is that more income sources is related to food security. In a middle-income country context, and in urban contexts, when households may have only one job, this assumption does not hold.

3c. Expenditure: Expenditure is often used a proxy measure of income or welfare. In both Jordan and Lebanon, expenditure (or predicted expenditure) is used as an essential measure of welfare. See the sections below on the VASyR and VAF to understand more details on how expenditure is calculated and used.

The Minimum Expenditure Basket (M.E.B.) has been calculated in both countries in order to define thresholds. First, it is important to note that this is a challenging indicator given changes in context which have directly affected expenditure. For example, changes in health care mean that Syrians in Jordan no longer get free health care, but must pay the subsidized Jordanian rate. Obviously, changes like this have direct implications on the M.E.B., requiring new calculations.

The M.E.B. is established country-wide. There is some discussion around whether there should be urban rural specific M.E.B.s, as expenditure tends to be higher in Amman and Beirut in comparison with the rest of Jordan and Lebanon. As an example, average rent across Lebanon is \$193/month, while in Beirut and Mount Lebanon it is \$320/month.¹⁰ However, this may be a Beirut specific issue, rather than generalizable to all urban contexts in Lebanon. There is therefore a related discussion around setting governorate specific M.E.B.s. However some actors feel that as assistance amounts are calculated using the M.E.B., in such a small country, varied M.E.B.s could create a pull factor into certain areas. Additionally, as previously mentioned, while refugee households may be registered at one address, they often change location, so actual domicile (and therefore M.E.B.) is hard to verify.

The Food Expenditure Share is a key indicator used by WFP as an indicator of economic vulnerability. It is underpinned by Engel's Law, which states that as incomes rise, the proportion of income spent on food decreases. Thus poorer households spend proportionally more of their total expenditure on food than richer households. Two issues arise when applying this indicator in urban contexts, both of which were raised in interviews with partners.

The first is around the basic theory that food is the most important, basic expenditure of any household. The assumption is that as incomes decrease, households must maintain some level of expenditure on food, which becomes proportionally more important as other expenses decrease. However, in Amman and Beirut, where rent is a significant part of household expenditure, this assumption is called into question. One interviewee indicated that many refugee households might actually choose not to eat for a few days, if that would allow them to pay their rent and avoid being homeless. Thus the assumption that food is more important than shelter is questionable in these urban contexts.

The second issue related to the Food Expenditure Share is the established thresholds. The thresholds were established by IFPRI, ranging from 75% of expenditure on food (very high; very vulnerable to food insecurity) to <50% (low).¹¹ Partners found these thresholds to be quite high when applied in Amman and Beirut, where non-food expenditure, such as rent and utilities, can be expensive. There no clear solution for this issue, as thresholds are often designed to allow for cross-context comparison. However many partners found the indicator (assumptions and thresholds) inappropriate in this context.

3d. Coping Strategies: When asked about modifications to specific indicators, the Coping Strategies Index was the most commonly cited by interviewees. Issues were raised around the strategies themselves, and also the weights.

In almost all interviews, it was acknowledged that the standard list of livelihoods coping strategies used is not appropriate for the urban contexts in which the majority of refugees are living. Strategies around selling livestock or consuming seed are simply not useful questions in this context. In a similar vein, "taking on high risk work" is a commonly listed strategy. As the vast majority of refugees in Jordan are not legally able to work, all work in this context is high risk, with repercussions including deportation or being sent back to the camps. Therefore many typically used strategies are not useful in these urban contexts.

In reaction to this, a number of different organisations, including IRC, Mercy Corps and WFP mentioned efforts such as analysis of all coping strategy data to understand which are more relevant,

¹⁰ ACTED, 2014

¹¹ Smith and Subandoro, 2007

and qualitative data collection to define a list of appropriate strategies. These efforts are likely to result in a more useful list of coping strategies which can be used among the refugee populations.

The standard reduced Coping Strategy Index includes five consumption related coping strategies and universal severity weights. In the rCSI, borrowing food has a severity weight of 2, which is worse than three other strategies (with weights of 1). Many different partners noted that in this context, borrowing food is a normal strategy used by many families, and should not be weighted this heavily. Therefore the 'universal' severity weights do not seem appropriate in this context.

Similarly, the CSI manual¹² explains that context specific severity weights (rather than the universal weights used in the rCSI) should be determined through focus groups in order to construct the index. Many organisations noted that as they had not yet determined appropriate strategies, they also had not determined context-specific weights. In response to this, many partners are not constructing an index, but instead are reporting on the frequency of use of specific strategies. Thus the way in which the information is analysed and reported has been modified.

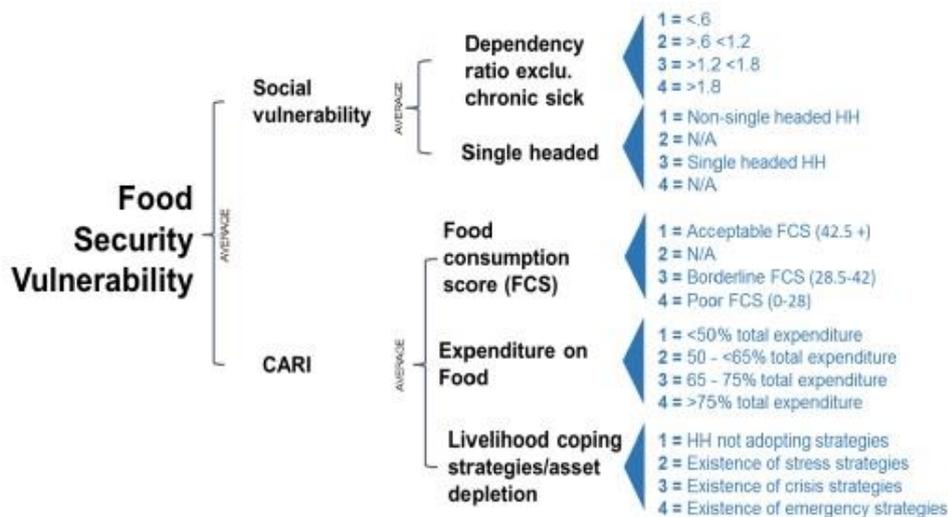
4) New Vulnerability Assessment Tools: the VAF and the VASyR

This case study did not find many examples of urban-specific adaptations of tools and methods. However, two key assessment tools are featured below, which include many of the indicators discussed above. In Jordan, the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) has been developed for food security assessment in urban areas. And in Lebanon, the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) is a standardised methodology used to assess vulnerability of Syrians across the country.

4.1. Vulnerability Assessment Framework: In January 2014 the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) process was launched in Jordan. The VAF is an inter-sector, inter-agency effort to define a common methodology for vulnerability measurement of Syrian refugees in urban Jordan. It is a new tool, developed specifically for the challenges of scale experienced in the Syrian refugee response in Jordan. The VAF uses predicted expenditure as a proxy measure of welfare – i.e. using predicted expenditure as an indication of economic vulnerability. The World Bank supported UNHCR by providing in-depth data analysis, and identifying the key characteristics to be used in an econometric model to predict expenditure at household level. For more information on the VAF's development, see box 2.

In addition to the overall welfare model formula, the VAF includes sector-specific vulnerability rules. These are essentially algorithms to determine vulnerability across five different sectors, including food security. Still a work in progress, the draft rules for food security in the VAF are pictured in the diagram below.

¹² Maxwell and Caldwell (2008)



Coping strategies (scoring based on most severe per HH):
 Stress: Spent savings, sold HH goods, bought food on credit
 Crisis: Sold productive assets, reduce essential non-food expenditure,
 Emergency: Sent adults or children HH members to beg, high risk/legal/socially degrading jobs

VAF Challenges: So far the methodology has been accepted as valid and useful. Some interviews indicated that when the VAF was initially rolled out, it was in a survey representative above governorate level (i.e. groupings of governorates), which limited the utility of the results. Despite this, the standardized methodology is still proving useful.

One potential challenge of the VAF is that some of the data is collected at household level, some at individual level some from a subset of the household. The analysis has not yet determined the impact of aggregating all of this information into one case classification. A final point, as noted above, the VAF analyses at case level – yet many indicators are designed for use at household level. Where cases and households do not exactly align, this may have implications on the results.

Box 2: What is the Vulnerability Analysis Framework?

The Vulnerability Analysis Framework (VAF) is a tool developed for the Syrian regional response by ACAPS, UNHCR and an inter-agency steering group¹³. The VAF uses a number of data sources including agreed vulnerability indicators which are measured on a scorecard (including gender, age, dependency ratio, involuntary relocation of household, ratio of household members to functional latrines, strength of social safety net, availability of ID, literacy and numeracy and several others¹⁴). It uses a statistical model to predict economic vulnerability at the household level, and combines these results with sector-specific 'resilience rules' which address non-monetary vulnerabilities and capacities. It was designed in response to the challenge of large-scale refugee influxes, where basic assistance is given to all newly arriving refugees.

Sample questions to assess vulnerability at each level of analysis¹⁵:

Dimension: Access to an income

District Level: What proportion of the households in the district have an income?

Urban Settlements: What proportion of the Syrian refugee families living in the area have an income?

Household/Individual Level: How many family members aged 18-59 earn a regular income?

Based on analysis done in 2014, the best predictors for expenditure were identified as: house crowding, coping strategies to meet basic food needs, savings, debt, income and family size¹⁶.

The first draft of the VAF was released in 2013, since then a great deal of work has gone into its development and a revised version is due for release later in 2015. More information can be found on the VAF Working Group's page on the Syria Regional Refugee Response's Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal here:

http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=107&Id=69

4.2. Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR): The VASyR is a multi-sectoral household survey, representative at national level, resulting from a collaboration between WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF, with ACTED carrying out the data collection. The VASyR aims to determine the vulnerability criteria of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, enabling the humanitarian community improve targeting and programming. A variety of data is used to provide the profile of the population according to indicators reflecting economic vulnerability, education, food security, health, non-food items, protection, shelter and water and sanitation.

Based on the results and inter-agency and multi-stakeholder discussions, eight sector-level vulnerability criteria were defined and households are classified into four categories (low vulnerability, mild vulnerability, moderate vulnerability and severe vulnerability) under each of the eight sectors. The sector specific scores are then combined so each household receives a final classification of overall vulnerability. Households with an overall classification of severe or high vulnerability are determined to be in need of assistance to cover their basic needs.

¹³ ACAPS & UNHCR, 2013; VAF, 2014a

¹⁴ VAF 2014d

¹⁵ ACAPS & UNHCR, 2013

¹⁶ VAF, 2014b

Most NGOs interviewed in Lebanon were using WFP and UNHCR provided data collection modules, and none had conducted other statistically representative surveys. Thus the VASyR – the modules and analysis – has served to define vulnerability among the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The cash consortium, comprised of six international NGOs (Save the Children, IRC, CARE, ACTED, Solidarities International and World Vision International), target the lowest tranche of the VASyR classification – severe vulnerability.

Related to the VASyR, Lebanon is currently undergoing a Targeting Verification exercise, using sector specific analyses to verify household classification. As an example, the cash consortium is using a proxy means test index, developed using regression analysis to determine significant predictors of per capita expenditure. This is similar, methodologically, to the VAF. According to interviews, the initial results of the exercise (still to be reviewed and finalised) demonstrate unexpectedly low levels of economic vulnerability in more urban areas like Beirut and Mount Lebanon, in comparison to more rural regions like the Bekaa valley. This may be a result of the accommodation variable, which is heavily weighted and gives a good score to rented apartments, regardless of their quality. Or perhaps due to self-selection of families with more resources, who are better able to relocate in search of economic opportunities.

It is important to note that all of the measurement issues noted above (related to food consumption, coping, and expenditure) impact the component indicators, and therefore the final result, of the VASyR.

Box 3: What is the VASyR?

VASyR refers to the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, a multi-sectoral household survey of Syrian refugees in Lebanon conducted jointly by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, with the support of many other organisations in Lebanon. It has been conducted in both 2013 and 2014, is representative at national level, and covers cities such as Beirut and Tripoli as well as the Bekaa Valley and Akkar regions in the North¹⁷.

The VASyR includes a variety of food security data, including asset possession, income sources, expenditure patterns, food consumption and coping strategies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Syria case study has raised a number of assessment-related issues and challenges, in addition to proposing some innovative solutions. Below are combined recommendations from the desk review and the qualitative data collection:

Operational Recommendations:

1. Many actors mentioned interesting developments related to the operational constraints around mobility and sampling. In areas where accurate population data is limited, using population density mapping, aerial maps and other GPS data can serve as a useful start to understanding populations and defining clusters. These sampling approaches should be tested

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2014; Moreno Romero, 2014

for applicability in other contexts – see bibliography resources by Ghattas, Shannon and REACH for more details on methodology.

2. When considering the issues of mobility and insecurity, it may be useful for survey designers to account for this in sampling calculations. It may be useful to build higher than usual non-response rates into calculations to ensure representativeness is maintained. Alternatively, or in addition to this, incentives have proven to be useful in research data collection; providing incentives (and any resulting implications of this) could be explored if refusal rates are high.
3. Establishment of a single multi-sectoral technical body solely responsible for information management and dissemination is recommended. A good example is the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) in Somalia. Purely based on technical considerations, this Unit is the mouthpiece on everything to do with food security, nutrition and vulnerability in Somalia. It has an expansive network of local enumerators who feed into its data system on regular basis. A similar system in Jordan and/or Lebanon, possibly building upon UNHCR's Refugee Assistance Information System, could improve coordination and advocacy efforts.
4. Within this technical body, a focus on data protection must be emphasized. In this context, with frequent assessments and monitoring, along with sharing of data between organisations, rigorous data protection protocols must be developed and implemented.
5. Capacity development for enumerators - (whether individually or through a single body) capacity of the enumerators to collect and feedback on correct information is vital to reliability of any assessment. Whatever approach is taken, enumerators should be properly trained in order to conduct a credible assessment; day-long orientation sessions are usually not sufficient for technical assessments.

Technical Recommendations:

1. It is critical to acknowledge and understand the characteristics that define urban contexts. Unless these characteristics are identified, it will be impossible to understand their implications on food security and economic vulnerability. Acknowledging these characteristics is therefore the first step toward accurate and specific vulnerability analyses.
2. While it is understood that different agencies may have different data collection requirements (e.g. UNHCR groups individuals into cases), the implications of using household level indicators to assess cases should be further studied. Alternatively, finding accurate ways to link or delink cases to align with households could be better explored. It is important to note that household level data is essential for strong food security analysis, but an additional level of community analysis could strengthen understanding of vulnerability. Thus it is recommended that these are not treated as mutually exclusive, but rather complementary analyses serving to improve results.
3. The measurement issues mentioned are numerous, spanning across all types of food security and economic vulnerability indicators. Pre-survey qualitative research could serve to improve quantitative measurement of food consumption, income sources and coping strategies. For example, understanding the importance of consumption outside the home (is an additional module required or not?), or the frequency of sugary/junk foods (should an additional line be

added to diet modules?) should be considered. Similarly, the qualitative data can allow for better understanding of livelihood groupings, which are useful in data analysis.

4. A host of issues have been raised related to the coping strategies index, but a number of initiatives are already underway to address these. As noted above, qualitative research to determine a contextually appropriate list of strategies and weights should provide a solution to this issue. However, it is recommended that actors working on this convene to discuss the results – specifically Mercy Corps, IRC and WFP all mentioned various work underway. The results of these studies, combined, should allow for the design of a Coping Strategies Index appropriate for Syrian refugees, possibly specific to each country context.
5. The issue around establishing urban or governorate specific M.E.B. clearly has no easy solution, as it is not possible to determine a household's actual domicile, and this approach risks creating a pull factor. It is recommended that qualitative research is conducted to determine if the higher income opportunities in urban areas (such as Beirut) actually do offset the higher living expenses. Or if, alternatively, the country-wide M.E.B. approach disadvantages urban refugee households.
6. The Food Expenditure Share does not seem to be a useful indicator in this context, given the importance of shelter and the high non-food expenses. An absolute food expenditure figure rather than a proportion could serve as a more useful, concrete indicator of household vulnerability. Note that this change in approach would require testing and establishing of thresholds.
7. If the assessments were to complete painting a true picture of vulnerability of refugees or any other vulnerability assessment, the role of markets must be properly covered in the analysis. This is particularly relevant in urban areas, as markets are the main source of food for the majority of the vulnerable populations. More often than not, with limited opportunities for own food production, the majority depend on the market, therefore, assessments need to pay more attention to the performance of the markets, the impact of price fluctuations and the movement of goods and services.
8. In addition, host communities must be studied and understood in order to appreciate their role in the situation. The relationship between refugees and host communities may inform the accessibility of markets and employment opportunities, with resulting impact on food security outcomes.
9. In urban settings, with unreliable access to income, humanitarian organisations require a better grasp of the temporal dimensions of economic vulnerability and food security. Access to income opportunities can fluctuate rapidly, further complicating analysis and limiting the time period in which conclusions are valid. Therefore a better understanding of these fluctuations (which are more particular to urban areas) and the implications on analyses could improve humanitarian information and programming.

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Annexes:

Annex I: List of Interviews

Organization	Name:
ACAPS	Pauline Pascal
American University of Beirut	Lamis Jomaa (Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences); Hala Ghattas (Faculty of Health Sciences)
CARE Jordan	Eman Ismail Abu Mohammad
DRC Lebanon	Louisa Seferis
FAO Jordan	Nasredin HagElamin; Andrea Berloffia; Alexandra Davis
IRC Jordan	Barri Shorey; Lisa Dipangrazio
Mercy Corps Lebanon	Samir Raad
Mercy Corps Jordan	Brenna Carmody
Ministry of Social Affairs	Ramzi Fanous
Premiere Urgence	Maria Rehaime; Jean-Bernard Bouvier
REACH Lebanon	Robin Nataf (ACTED); Vincent Annoni (Impact Initiatives)
REACH Jordan	Byron Pakula (ACTED); Zulfiye Kazim; Philip Bato
Save the Children Jordan	Amy Schmidt; Afnan Al Hadidi
Save the Children Lebanon	George Abi Rizk
Save the Children Lebanon / Cash Consortium	Tom White
Solidarites International	Meziane Selmi
UNHCR Jordan	Volker Schimmel; Kate Washington
UNHCR Lebanon	Lynne Miller
WFP Lebanon	Susana Moreno
WFP Jordan	Dorte Jessen; Laksiri Nanayakkara
World Bank	Nandini Krishnan

Annex 2: Qualitative Data Collection Tool - Interview Guide

Presentation/explanation: The 'Adapting to an Urban World Project' aims to strengthen food security analysis in support of humanitarian responses in urban settings. The project is including the Syria crisis as a case study. One component of the Syria case study is a literature review of existing assessments and secondary data analysis. The second component is meeting with key humanitarian actors in Lebanon and Jordan to understand how they have adapted their assessment methodology for urban contexts, what the challenges have been, and lessons learned from the process.

1. General

What experience have you had with urban assessments in Beirut/Amman? What is your perception on how food security is being assessed? Are methodologies appropriate? Are results accurate?

We have gathered a significant amount of publicly available assessment data and reports. If you have other relevant documentation relating to urban assessments, are you able to share these with us?

2. Operational

How have you defined your sampling frame within urban areas? How have you identified clusters for sampling? Do you use specific indicators to differentiate between different urban areas (e.g. population density, housing, facilities, infrastructure...)

How have you selected households within the clusters? What challenges have you encountered and how did you deal with this?

Have you had any difficulties actually finding the households selected and speaking with them? How have you dealt with this?

Any other operational issues specific to the urban context?

3. Conceptual - (specific focus on issues of food consumption, food sources, income, expenditure, assets, housing, other measures of vulnerability..)

Have you added any specific data collection modules to explore urban specific issues? If yes, please explain which modules and why.

Have you removed any data collection modules because you did not find them relevant for urban areas? If so, which ones and how was this decided?

4. Structural

Have you modified how any questions were asked? To whom they were asked?

Have you modified any response options? Added or removed response options?

Have you modified recall periods? If so why and how?

5. Analysis and Results

Have you made any changes in your methods of analysis? How so?

Have you maintained the same thresholds typically used, or adjusted? If so how/why?

Do the any indicator results look different in urban areas? If so how? Why do you think this is?

Do analysis results demonstrate different characteristics of vulnerability within urban contexts? If so, how are they different?