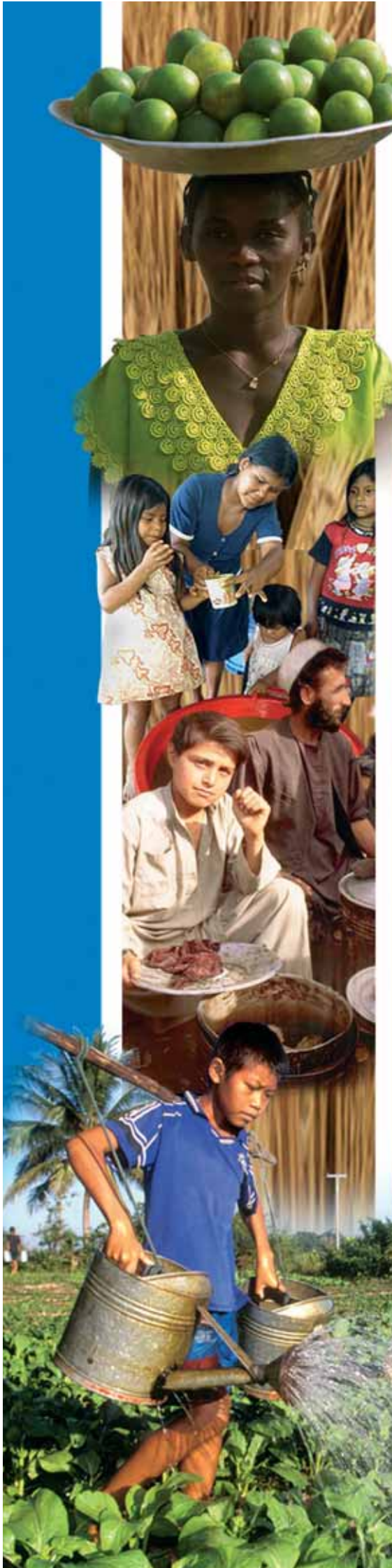


# Protecting and promoting good nutrition in crisis and recovery




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*Resource guide*

**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**  
Rome, 2005





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## Foreword

Every year, floods, droughts, earthquakes, outbreaks of plant and animal pests and diseases and other natural disasters adversely affect the lives of millions of people in the developing world. In many countries, armed conflicts, natural disasters and other forms of crisis have caused widespread destruction and have forced families to abandon their homes, farms and villages. Access to adequate food becomes difficult, and this hardship contributes to high rates of malnutrition. The provision of food, water, shelter, protection and medical care is essential if refugees and internally displaced persons are to survive until such time as they can return to their homes or establish new ones.

Temporary food distribution and supplementary feeding for vulnerable groups are common humanitarian interventions that are necessary to help people to cope under emergency conditions. However, at the same time, assistance is also often needed to help restore local food production and to reduce the dependency on food aid. Creating the conditions in which households can meet their own basic needs and sustain their nutritional well-being is a fundamental aspect of the recovery process. Through its Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division, FAO plays a vital role in the aftermath of natural disasters and conflicts in saving and enhancing rural livelihoods.

The Food and Nutrition Division has prepared this book as a complement to the *Technical Handbook Series on FAO's Emergency Activities*. It offers guidance to programme planners and technicians in the fields of nutrition, food security, agriculture and community and social development in adopting a longer-term perspective to addressing problems of household food insecurity and malnutrition during periods of crisis and recovery. It provides a framework for an implementation strategy that focuses not only on saving lives in the short term, but also on strengthening livelihoods to ensure that households are less vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity in the future.

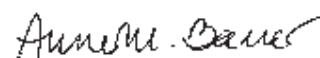
Actions and interventions for saving lives and livelihoods need to be designed in a way that helps households to realize their right to food and ensure the nutritional well-being of their members, not only in the short term, but also in the medium to long terms. Making improved nutritional well-being a distinct goal within the context of a broad-based livelihoods approach when dealing with crisis has two advantages. First, it focuses on people and emphasizes the need to strengthen local capacity to protect and promote nutritional well-being. Second, a focus on improved nutritional well-being provides a number of entry points for different sectoral interventions in health, agriculture and community development. Such multisectoral interventions are key to supporting communities' efforts to overcome long-term threats to their livelihoods and nutritional well-being.

The resource material in this book has been drawn from a range of publications, reports and documents related to experiences of crises around the world. As sub-Saharan Africa has had a large share of crises during recent decades, many examples are taken from this region. Nevertheless, the general information, principles and approaches promoted in this book are of universal application.

As experiences in this area are continually evolving, this is a working document for use in different working environments, countries and regions. We would like to encourage users to make comments and suggestions for future editions. It is hoped that the document will stimulate government organizations, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to pilot some of the proposed strategies and approaches, and to provide feedback in the form of case study material and lessons learned. Academic institutions may use the materials for training nutritionists and other technical staff wishing to acquire basic skills in programme planning and implementation in emergency situations.



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## Acronyms

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
ARI	acute respiratory infection
BMI	body mass index
CBGMP	community-based growth monitoring and promotion
CBO	community-based organization
CBTC	community-based therapeutic care
CGP	community growth promoter
CHW	community health worker
CSB	corn soya blend
DSM	dried skim milk
EWS	early warning system
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning System Network
FFW	food for work
FIVIMS	Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems
FSAU	Food Security Assessment Unit (Somalia)
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture
HEA	household economy approach
HFA	height for age
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDD	iodine deficiency disease
IDP	internally displaced person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ITK	indigenous technical knowledge
KAPP	knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and practices
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
MUAC	middle-upper-arm circumference
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
PLA	participatory learning and action
PLWHA	people living with HIV/AIDS
RRA	rapid rural appraisal
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SFP	supplementary feeding programme
SRCS	Somali Red Crescent Society
STD	sexually transmitted disease
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TB	tuberculosis
TBA	trained birth attendant
TFP	therapeutic feeding programme
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
URI	upper respiratory infection
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCT	voluntary counselling and testing
WFH	weight-for-height
WFA	weight-for-age
WFP	World Food Programme of the United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization



# Introduction

Emergencies and crisis situations encompass a range of different circumstances with various characteristics and differing impacts on household livelihoods and individuals' well-being.

1. Natural disasters, including drought, floods or hurricanes, may develop into emergencies when the capacity to cope fails among particular population groups or at the national level.
2. During conflict, deliberate attacks on civilian populations, their livelihoods and their coping strategies can be an explicit war objective. The impacts of insecurity and the destruction of social, civil and productive infrastructure that result from internal conflict and war interact and are often compounded by natural disasters and chronic disease, leading to complex protracted emergencies.
3. Economic crises brought on by internal mismanagement, terms of trade shocks or volatility in capital flows are a recurrent phenomenon. Responses to economic emergencies, such as fiscal austerity measures that reduce public services or remove food subsidies, often have a heavier impact on the poor than on richer population groups.
4. The increasing prevalence and impact of HIV/AIDS mean that this epidemic is another factor in emergency situations, or an emergency in its own right. Households' resources and coping capacity become depleted by chronic illness or the loss of a key producer. Communities may become overburdened by the need to support HIV/AIDS-affected households. They then become vulnerable to further shocks, and acute crises are likely to re-emerge.
5. Many crisis situations are acutely visible. However, there are also areas where populations live in situations of chronic, physical, political, economic and environmental instability, and where attempts to increase development have failed. These areas are now recognized as being "chronically vulnerable".

Although crisis situations vary widely in terms of type and cause, they also share some common characteristics. For example, food production is often no longer possible, income is reduced, food distribution and marketing networks collapse, and people's homes and belongings are looted, destroyed or burned. Essential services to provide health care and sanitation, education, and law and order break down. Families can be separated; men may be forced to fight while women and children, the elderly and the disabled are often left behind or forced to flee to safe neighbouring countries or areas. The poor are more seriously affected; their coping capacity is more limited than that of better-off households, as they are unlikely to have sufficient assets or savings to see them through bad times. The disruption of normal life can result in rising poverty and vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition.

The increase in number and scale of crises and emergencies over the last decade, as well as the long-lasting nature of most complex emergencies, has renewed the debate regarding how to respond to such situations. In the past, emergency response was viewed as a linear sequence of events, starting with early warning and emergency relief and continuing with rehabilitation and development. Interventions were largely restricted to the humanitarian imperative of saving lives. It is now widely accepted that the concepts of relief, rehabilitation and development are closely interrelated and that synergies and linkages among relief, rehabilitation and development activities should be explored when responding to emergencies.

In complex protracted emergencies whose causes are related to both natural disasters and conflict, population groups living in conditions of structural poverty can be exposed to various natural and/or socio-political “shocks”. Areas and households may spiral backwards and forwards between periods of acute crisis and relative stability. The impact of and ability to cope with a shock differs, depending on structural factors and the socio-economic, gender and ethnic characteristics of the population. Population sub-groups within an area may therefore have a range of different needs.

It is now realized that hunger and malnutrition are not the only outcomes of crises. The lack of well-nourished and healthy individuals is another constraint on efforts to recover livelihoods and well-being. In addition, acute conditions that require relief aid, and situations of relative calm when developmental interventions are possible may follow each other sequentially or exist simultaneously in the same area or population. Although an immediate humanitarian response is often required, it may also be necessary to implement a range of broader food security response strategies that protect human rights and support livelihoods.

### The challenge: Improving nutritional well-being and protecting livelihoods

The current challenge is therefore to respond to the immediate impact of an emergency while, at the same time, ensuring that the livelihoods of affected populations are protected from both the present crisis and future threats. The combined strategy of addressing both immediate and longer-term needs requires a broad approach that views nutritional needs within the perspective of livelihoods. However, improving the economic basis of livelihoods alone (e.g. in terms of assets and other productive means) will not automatically translate into good nutritional and health status. Interventions must aim to strengthen household food security and promote and protect nutritional well-being while reducing dependency on long-term food aid. This calls for appropriate complementary and timely interventions, which need to be implemented flexibly in order to respond to the changing dynamics of a situation.

Identifying solutions and interventions requires a good understanding of how households and individuals attempt to meet their food and other essential needs and how people cope with and recover from stress and shock situations. The impact of emergencies not only on nutritional status, but also on livelihoods generally needs to be better understood, as do the linkages between nutrition and livelihoods. Such understanding will help to identify a series of food aid and other measures that can contribute to creating the conditions for sustained nutritional well-being for affected populations, as well as households' ability to support themselves. Such conditions operate at the individual, household and community levels. They must be underpinned by regional and national political and policy interventions, peace initiatives and the realization of human rights. This will allow people to return to their homes or to resettle/re-establish themselves in areas that are stable and/or protected from conflict, where supportive economic, political and social activities can start again as quickly as possible.

Emphasizing improved nutritional well-being as a distinct goal within the context of a broad-based livelihoods approach has two advantages in times of crisis. First, it focuses on people and emphasizes the strengthening of local capacity to protect nutritional well-being, as well as addressing the immediate effects of malnutrition at the individual level. Second, a focus on improved nutritional well-being allows various entry points for different sectoral interventions in health, agriculture and community development. Such multisectoral interventions are key to supporting communities' efforts to overcome long-term threats to their livelihoods. Thus, a nutrition focus can bring continuity between short- and long-term interventions.

## Purpose and structure of the guide

This guide is designed to further the development of a more strategic focus that strengthens programme planners' capacity to protect and promote good nutrition in crisis situations. Its purpose is to establish a common vision and standpoint from which to assess, analyse and improve nutritional well-being in a variety of emergency contexts. It will be relevant and useful to those planners and technicians in the fields of nutrition, food security, agriculture, and community and social development who are able to “cross over” between relief and development modalities of working and who recognize the need to adopt a multisectoral approach to achieving the common goal of improved nutritional well-being.

The guide is structured as follows.

### **Part I: Issues and concepts for protecting and promoting good nutrition in crisis situations**

Part I outlines the relationships between nutrition and sustainable livelihoods and explains why nutritional well-being can be threatened in emergency situations. It shows how a focus on nutritional well-being can provide the foundation for recovery and long-term development by allowing continuity between relief and rehabilitation interventions and by increasing the opportunities for intersectoral collaboration.

### **Part II: Approaches for protecting and promoting good nutrition in crisis situations**

Part II examines possible approaches to protecting and promoting good nutrition. It discusses the advantages of adopting a capacity building approach, while highlighting the need for caution when using participatory methods in the design and implementation of interventions. This part provides guidance on how to develop a capacity building strategy that includes strengthening intersectoral collaboration and policy engagement.

### **Part III: Household food security and nutrition situation assessment and analysis in crisis situations**

Part III discusses the requirements for assessing and analysing households' food security and nutrition situation. Guidelines for carrying out assessments are provided in a range of more detailed technical briefs in Part VI.

### **Part IV: Planning and targeting household food security and nutrition actions**

Part IV examines issues related to the planning and selection of actions in crisis situations that aim to ensure positive and sustainable nutritional outcomes.

### **Part V: Nutrition actions in crisis situations**

Part V presents different types of interventions in areas that range from promoting improved food production and diversification to improving information systems. It provides examples of how the approach presented in this guide can be translated into actions to protect and promote good nutrition.

### **Part VI: Technical resources and sources for methodologies and practical tools**

This guide is a source and reference for a range of existing technical handbooks that cover such topics as assessing malnutrition, managing general and selective feeding programmes and designing specific interventions. A number of technical briefs in Part VI provide more details on some of the subject areas discussed.