

Food Security Dimensions - Access

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Introduction:

This document is a collaborative work developed by the Programme Quality Working Group of the Global Food Security Cluster in September 2021. The document provides a brief overview of the food security dimensions (availability, access, utilization and stability), and provides practical examples from country offices, with links for further study and resources.

Food Security is influenced by many factors, at the geographic, household and individual domains. Each of these spheres also intersect and interact in a variety of ways. The 1996 World Food Summit stated, "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." The four dimensions of food security, availability, access, utilization and stability, are critical to understanding food security and provide insight into likely food security outcomes.

Purpose of the document

The Global Food Security Cluster (gFSC) has developed support documents for each food security dimension to ensure common definitions and enhance consideration for partner use. The definition briefs will support field teams with a shared understanding of food security dimensions, related indicators and best practices for analysis and program design. Each document provides an overview of a specific dimension, including:

- Definition
- Supporting in Emergencies
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Linkage to the IPC analytical framework
- Case studies and examples from field teams

Definition

Food Access - Access by individuals *or households* to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources) (FAO 2006).¹

Supporting Food Access in Emergencies²:

Food access (of households in specific population groups) is the ability of households to regularly acquire adequate amounts of appropriate food for a nutritious diet. Means of access may include:

- own production – of crops, livestock or farmed fish;
- hunting, fishing or gathering wild foods;
- purchases at markets, shops, etc.; 16
- barter exchange – exchange of items for food;
- gifts from friends, relatives, community,
- transfers from government or aid agencies (relief or safety net programmes).

Three sub-categories of food access:

Physical Access:

- Ability for a household or individual to directly access a location with food resources – including safe movement to the location (See annex for case study)
- **Examples:** Poor road infrastructure causes an area to be cut off from main markets during rainy season; insecurity prevents pastoralists from traveling to traditional grazing areas; COVID-19 movement restrictions prevent labour migration

¹ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/faoitally/documents/pdf/pdf_Food_Security_Concept_Note.pdf *Households (italics)*
inserted by author

² <https://fscluster.org/food-security-emergencies>

Financial Access:

- Ability for a household or individual to afford food items – including food prices, income generating activities, terms of trade, and purchasing power – without forgoing the purchase of other essential food and non-food items and services, such as health care. (See annex for case study)
- **Examples:** Macro-economic crisis causes hyperinflation reducing household purchasing power; livestock disease reduces the terms of trade for pastoralists; poor harvest increases prices of staple cereals

Social Access:

- Ability for a group of people, household or individual to access food in an area without being stigmatized or risking harm due to ethnicity, social stigma, gender or other forms of discrimination. (See annex for case study)
- **Examples:** Specific ethnic groups are targeted or risk harm by traveling to markets outside of their direct area; population groups are stigmatized due to association with COVID-19 or other diseases; females are not allowed to legally own assets or engage in livestock trade

Data and Analysis of Food Access:

Food security dimensions tend to interact in a systematic manner, i.e. food must be available, then households must have access to it and must utilize it appropriately, and the whole system must be stable – with feedback loops between each dimension. **An adequate supply of food at the national or international level does not in itself guarantee household level food security. Households must be able to access food, including physical, financial and social access.** Concerns about insufficient food access have resulted in a greater policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives. Food Access analysis (See Figure 1) considers physical access (e.g. own production, distance to markets), financial access (e.g. purchasing power, access to credit) and social access (e.g. ability to secure food through social networks, based on extended family, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation) (IPC Manual Version 3).³

Example Statement on Household Food Access:

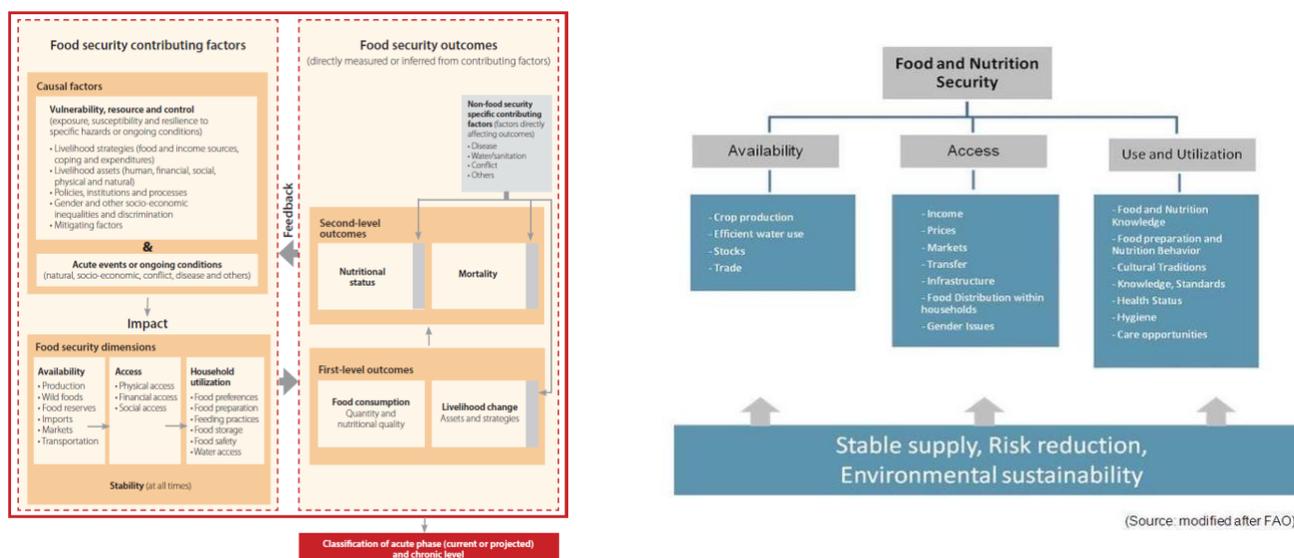
Households' access to food will be limited since their harvests for own consumption will be small so that reliance on food purchases needs to be increased; however, purchases are likely to be low due to the low purchasing power of the households as a result of high prices and few income opportunities.

³ http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf

Table X Description, Factors to Consider and Example Indicators for Food Access Data

Food Security Dimension	Description	Factors to Consider	Associated Indicators (Non-Exhaustive)	COVID-19 Implications
Access (Household)	Actual or potential ability of households to acquire food – physical, financial and social dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical restrictions to resource/food – policy, insecurity, infrastructure, proximity • Financial limitations to the purchase of food – labor market, wages, supply/demand, prices, terms of trade • Social barriers of groups to access resource/food – political alignment, ethnicity, associations, stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and distance required to travel to market, livestock, resource areas • Movement restrictions/barriers • Variation of prices of main commodities • Household's income • Remittances • Depreciation local currency • Terms of Trade cereal-wages or cereal-livestock • Changes in labour wage • Change in interest rates • Price of livelihood inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced income generating opportunities • Disruption of remittance flows • Movement restrictions • Social stigmatization of population groups • Disruption in trade flows

Figure 1 IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analytical Framework and Food Security Dimensions



Guidance and Data Sources - Food Access

Global Food Security Indicator Handbook - <https://fscluster.org/handbook/>

VAM Resource Centre - <https://resources.vam.wfp.org/>

FAO Hand in Hand Webapp - <https://data.apps.fao.org/>

WFP VAM Economic Explorer <https://mars.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

FEWS NET Price and Cross-Border Trade - <https://fews.net/fews-data/337>

REACH Cash and Markets Resource Centre - <https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/theme/cash/>

CALP Operational Guidance and Toolkit for Multipurpose Cash Grants - [CALP Guidance Document](#)

Case Study: Lebanon – Financial Inaccessibility of Basic Food Items

Background

Since late 2019, Lebanon has been struggling with a severe economic crisis that has been exacerbated by further local and global events throughout 2020 and 2021. This crisis has taken place in a country whose economy was already under strain, not least because of the influx of an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees since 2011 into an economy already struggling to provide employment for its own workforce.

The financial inaccessibility of basic food and non-food items has been central to Lebanon's economic crisis since day one. With an estimated population of nearly 7 million on a territory of just 10,000 square kilometers, Lebanon is one of the most densely populated nations in the world. Its high percentage of urbanization (87%), coupled with its mountainous terrain, has led to just 231,000 hectares being cultivated as of 2016 according to UN ESCWA. Levels of own production are correspondingly low, and the country imports roughly 80% of its market commodities from abroad. Given all this, the Lebanese population is highly dependent on markets to access basic goods, and any shock to these markets can have an outsized impact on food security.

Starting in mid-2019, the financial mechanisms designed to maintain Lebanon's access to foreign currency and trade began to rapidly unravel. Parallel-market exchange rates for the Lebanese pound began to diverge from the country's strict currency peg, making importation more expensive; prices for basic food and non-food items rose sharply; and an effort to raise money via regressive taxes on basic goods and services, including tobacco, petrol, and WhatsApp calls, sparked furious street protests that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri in October 2019.

Disruptions to Household Purchasing Power

The economic situation continued to worsen throughout 2020 and 2021, as the Lebanese pound (LBP) black market exchange rate rose by 878% against the US dollar and banks collapsed due to a lack of funds to pay their depositors. By late 2020, the central bank's extensive subsidy regime for basic food and non-food items had begun to falter, with widespread shortages reported of subsidized items and officials estimating that the subsidy budget would be completely exhausted within two to three months. The price of bread, Lebanon's staple food, rose by 67 percent between June 2020 and April 2021 despite being more tightly controlled than nearly any other commodity price in the country.

Due to the freefalling currency, households saw their savings in Lebanese pounds evaporate and their relative wages decrease until they could no longer cover the cost of basic goods. Furthermore, limits on both LBP and USD withdrawals imposed by the central bank created a situation where even households that could maintain a viable income were unable to reliably access that income to purchase basic goods in cash—another manifestation of financial inaccessibility, as consumers were unable to provide the payment modality being requested by vendors. These developments had dire effects on already vulnerable households, particularly Syrian and Palestinian refugees, as well as on the former Lebanese middle class, which began to slip into poverty.

Multiplier Effect of COVID-19 on the Existing Economic Crisis

Lebanon's economic crisis has taken place concurrently with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has placed further stress on an economy already at the breaking point. The Lebanese authorities imposed strict countrywide COVID-19 containment measures at several points, resulting in widespread business closures, layoffs and furloughs for many permanent employees, and a sharp reduction in opportunities for daily labor, which has long been a central livelihood strategy for refugees in particular. This reduction of access to income-generating activities further eroded vulnerable households' purchasing power. In a June 2020 study by WFP, for which data was collected during the first lockdown, 62% of the Lebanese population reported that their income had decreased compared to one year earlier; 42% of Lebanese, 55% of Palestinian refugees, and 61% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reported having taken on debt to cover basic needs, most often to cover the costs of food or rent.

All of the above dynamics have combined to raise serious concerns about rising food insecurity in Lebanon. By June 2020, according to WFP, fully 50% of Lebanese, as well as 63% of Palestinian refugees and 75% of Syrian refugees, reported having felt worried in the last month about whether they would have enough food to eat. Furthermore, 20% of Lebanese, 23% of Palestinian refugees, and 44% of Syrian refugees reported having eaten only one meal on the day prior to being surveyed. These percentages were not markedly different before and during Ramadan, particularly for Syrian refugees, suggesting that many households had already compromised on food consumption as far as possible and could not make further cuts even in the context of an all-day fast.

Relationship Between Financial Access and Availability in Lebanon

Following the August 2020 blast at the Port of Beirut, humanitarian actors feared that financial accessibility problems in Lebanon could develop into a full food security crisis spanning availability and multiple types of accessibility. The majority of Lebanon's national grain reserves were stored in silos located directly next to the blast site and were destroyed in the explosion, leaving the country with less than a month's supply of grain and uncertain capacity to handle any further imports. In the end, these fears did not fully materialize. Because the ports at Beirut, Tripoli, and Tyre had previously been operating at low capacity due to the economic crisis, it proved easier than expected to redirect food shipments to other undamaged port facilities. Early, rapid food importation and distribution by WFP and local civil society organizations, among others, helped to bridge the gap during the crucial post-blast weeks when supply chains were still being rebuilt.

Though an acute availability crisis may have been averted in this case, financial access to food remains a struggle for the vast majority of Lebanese. Crucially, financial access also remains a struggle for the market actors who seek to import that food, which implies that the risk of availability shortfalls is still present. At the time of writing, the black-market LBP-to-USD exchange rate had peaked at 14,750, a depreciation of 90% from the country's official currency peg of 1,507 LBP/USD. Household savings have been depleted, wages and employment opportunities have shrunk, and basic goods are more expensive than at any point in Lebanese history. Importers have been unable to sustain their previous activities with such limited access to foreign currency and are finding it difficult to keep markets supplied even at current diminished levels of demand. This has led to widespread shortages of basic goods and has raised the prospect that worsening financial accessibility may yet trigger a multidimensional food security crisis in Lebanon.