

Food Security Dimensions – Utilization
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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 analysis framework
- Case studies and examples from field teams

Overview - Food Utilization

Definition Food Utilization -

Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security. (FAO 2006).^[1]

Supporting Food Utilization in Emergencies¹:

Food utilization (by households in specific population groups) refers to the use that households make of the food to which they have access and individuals' ability to absorb and metabolize the nutrients and the conversion efficiency of the body. Food utilization depends on:

- the ways in which food is stored, processed and prepared (including the water and cooking fuel available, and hygiene practices);
- feeding practices, particularly for individuals with special needs such as young children, infants, the elderly, sick people, and pregnant and lactating women;
- the sharing of food within the household and the extent to which this corresponds to individuals' nutritional needs – growth, pregnancy, lactation, the elderly, etc.;
- the health status of each member of the household.

Sub-categories of food utilization²:

Food safety

In the process of storage and transformation or processing, food runs the risk of contamination or degradation. When this happens, there is a potential for human illness which can erode an individual's nutritional status.

¹ <https://fscluster.org/food-security-emergencies>

² IPC Analytical Framework sub-categorizes utilization by Food preferences, food preparation, feeding practices, food storage, food safety, water access.

Gender³ and household nutrition practices

Within any given household, there is often a variation in food consumption and caloric intake among household members. We know that there are often traditional roles, informal rules and norms that guide food allocation and selection within a household. ‘feeding’ and ‘gender dynamics (e.g., decision making, share of workload, women’s time)’ : issues related to gender & nut behaviors go well beyond the intra-HH food distribution.

Post harvest handling

Post harvest management is critical for both food availability and utilization. Management practices that reduce product loss can also reduce microbial risks. ⁴Appropriate dry, clean storage is key to reducing loss. Handling with hygienic practices when intended for a market audience is key.

Complementary interventions

When food consumption is accompanied by effective sanitation practices, water and health services, the likelihood of individuals efficiently processing the food consumed and absorbing the nutrients in it increases. Illness brought on through poor sanitation and water- borne illnesses can negatively impact effective utilization and can even increase the amount of food required to provide the body with sufficient resources to thrive.

Data and Analysis of Food Access:

Food security dimensions tend to interact systematically, i.e. food must be available. Households must have access to it and must utilize it appropriately, and the whole system must be stable – with feedback loops between each dimension. If food is available and households have adequate access to it, the next question is whether households are maximizing the consumption of adequate nutrition and energy, which is usually a factor of food preferences, preparation, storage and access to adequate quantity and quality of water. (IPC Manual Version 3).⁵

Example Statement on Household Food Utilization:

“In addition to limited access to food, inadequate storage capacity, which results in high postharvest losses, and high reliance on staples typically coupled with low dietary diversity, will limit the full utilization of food, and therefore food security.”⁶

Food Utilization and WASH: Cross Cutting Factors

In essence, water and sanitation is essential for food safety, food use and its benefit to human health.⁷ The majority of complex emergencies rely on an integrated response, usually by combining Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) with WASH, health, and nutrition. As a result,

³ To be considered: maternal mental health, which, especially in emergencies and fragile settings, is a key issue for feeding and caregiving and therefore the utilization of food at HH/ child level.

⁴ (Post Harvest Handling : Processing, Storage & Distribution, Iowa State University)
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/Documents/MCMS/GAPSPostharvest.pdf>

⁵ http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf

⁶ IPC Manual Version 3; Page 29 -

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

⁷ This is especially true in emergency contexts: without access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation, and proper hygiene, food is exposed to contamination through the presence of pathogens on hands, in the soil and from flies, and unclean surfaces. This can cause diarrhea, environmental enteropathy and other intestinal diseases (intestinal worms) and eventually lead to undernutrition.

WASH should be strongly considered in FSL responses, especially when a context reaches Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 3 and 4.⁸

Standard WASH and Food Security & Livelihood integrated activities include (Non-Exhaustive):

- Cash transfer payment and voucher, e.g. to pay for water and sanitation services, or for hygiene products;
- Cash for work or Food for Work often apply to WASH projects (e.g activities connected to wells digging, water networks rehabilitation, emergency latrines desludging, etc);
- Cattle trough and infiltration/irrigation pits systematic addition to water points designs;
- Solar systems to improve resilient irrigation systems;
- Building or repairing water catchments and irrigation canals;
- Identification and repairing breached rivers embankments;
- Joint needs and vulnerability assessments;
- Integrated vulnerability tools such as the Water Severity Classification tool, which mirrors to FSL IPC scales;

WASH projects contribute to integrated impacts around women empowerment benefiting to household food security, such as:

- Empowering rural women to start sustainable income-generating activities through water and sanitation products (jars and filters making, soap, bleach, hygien products, etc) and water sales (e.g. Burkina Faso), providing them with the opportunity to build their livelihoods and strengthen their resilience through profitable small businesses.
- Contributing to water governance and water committees through maintaining accurate bookkeeping and accounting, and enhancing water and sanitation marketing (e.g. CAR).
- Improved and secured beneficiaries' (and especially women) access to markets, by implementing gendered latrines, hand washing facilities and water points at market places (e.g. Zimbabwe).

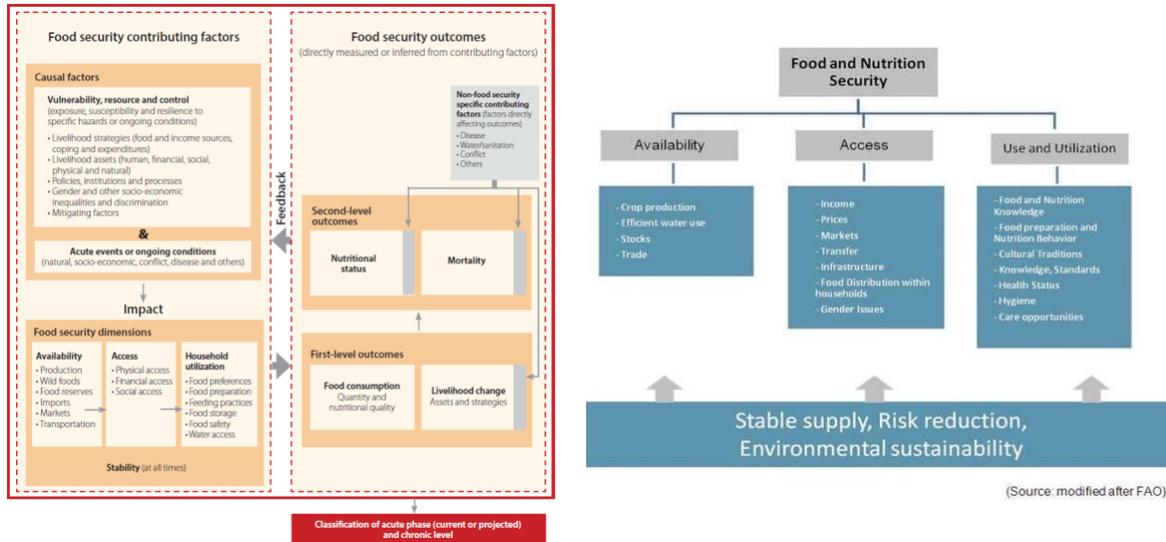
More generally, while women make up a large percent of the agriculture workforce in developing countries and in humanitarian settings, they are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, being the primary collectors of water and spending up to six hours each day on this task. Lack of basic water and sanitation services perpetuates cycles of gender inequality and poverty, reducing household resources and opportunities to access and afford nutritious foods. In some places, a specific household budget dedicated to water and sanitation is affecting the general budget for food, without any assurance about the quality of the water purchased (Sudan, Haiti).

⁸ Integrated WASH and Food Security and Livelihood emergency response projects develop a specific impact on water storage for cattle (in case of drought), improve or facilitate irrigation, benefiting directly to farmers, increase food security, food safety and food production (e.g. fodder) both for human and cattle purpose. The most essential impact is to enable beneficiaries to grow a nutritious food basket, comprising nutritive items such as maize, sorghum, cowpea, etc.

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

FS Dimension	Description	Factors to Consider	Associated Indicators (Non-Exhaustive)	COVID-19 Implications
Utilization	Utilization is commonly understood as the way the individuals absorb the nutrients from food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HH items to safely store and prepare food - Consumption of diverse and sufficient quantities of nutritious food, breastfeeding - Intra-household food distribution dynamics - Access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation facilities and services - Prevalence of diseases which may limit or prevent the ability to absorb nutritional value of food consumed - Optimal maternal, infant, young child and adolescent feeding practices - Gender dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HH ownership to food storage and WASH NFIs - Time and Distance required to travel to clean water sources - Intra-Household food consumption coping strategies - Morbidity rates for acute watery diarrhea, acute respiratory disease and malaria. - Availability and usage of hand soap and sanitation facilities - Individual Diet Diversity Score 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish and maintain healthy food consumption habits during and after the pandemic. While no foods or supplements can prevent Covid19 a nutritious diet rich in whole grains, fresh fruits, vegetable and animal production is key for supporting a strong immune system. - It is important to deliver assistance with nutrition and hygiene education or awareness tools to help families decide what food to purchase and the best utilization of it.

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



Guidance and Data Sources - Food Utilization

- [Global Food Security Indicator Handbook](#)
- [WFP VAM Resource Centre](#)
- [FAO Hand in Hand Webapp](#)
- [WASH Advocates: Global Food Security: The Critical Role of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene \(WASH\), 2013](#)
- [Action Contre la Faim Iraq: CASH & Vouchers on WASH rehabilitations, 2020](#)
- [Intercluster Famine Prevention, Yemen 2020](#)