

SAVING
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Responding to the development emergency caused by COVID-19

WFP's medium-term
programme framework



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Executive summary

Addressing the “development emergency” low and middle-income countries are facing due to the scale and scope of the global COVID-19 pandemic requires a comprehensive and integrated response which upholds humanitarian and human rights standards. The World Food Programme (WFP) is uniquely positioned to support governments, local organizations and other partners to quickly adapt, design and deliver their own interventions. Thanks to its presence and capacity in over 80 countries, WFP can also rapidly scale-up and directly deliver complementary programmes where required.

A crisis that will affect new populations

The impact of COVID-19 will disproportionately affect low and middle-income countries and could lead to a food security and nutrition crisis of historic proportions. More than 800 million people around the world were food insecure before this crisis. An additional 200 million are expected to lose access to basic food and nutrition in the months ahead.¹

Health care systems in these countries are likely to be overwhelmed, while the combination of a sharp global recession and dependence on volatile import, export and credit markets threatens trade, generates unemployment and loss of income, and constrains the ability of countries to respond to rapidly increasing needs. Food insecurity and malnutrition are projected to deepen among poor and marginalized populations – with estimates indicating the number of people suffering from acute hunger could double – and expand among groups that were previously able to meet their own needs. People at particular risk include those living in densely populated urban areas and camps, those who rely on markets for access to food, people employed in the informal sector, and school-aged children and their families. Structural and socio-economic inequalities based on gender, age, disability, income and other factors will be exacerbated, and compound the risk of hunger.

In the face of these challenges, WFP will support governments through three programme pillars that are central to effective, efficient, and equitable responses

and where WFP has demonstrated value as a partner to governments, UN Agencies and International Financial Institutions. These are:

1. NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

As the pandemic threatens to deepen existing vulnerabilities and create new ones, WFP will help governments to design, adapt and implement social assistance interventions that respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and to strengthen existing shock-responsive social protection systems. Drawing on decades of experience in safety-net programming in crisis contexts, and on extensive technical expertise in analysis, assessment, programme design, in-kind and cash delivery systems and accountability to affected populations, WFP can help governments to:

- increase understanding of needs and changing vulnerabilities arising from the crisis;
- adapt existing safety nets to increase the value or coverage of in-kind or cash-based social assistance;
- establish new schemes to reach populations that are not covered by current safety nets;
- maintain programmes that protect populations from other shocks, like extreme climate events, that will compound COVID.

2. BASIC SERVICE DELIVERY

WFP can support governments in continuing to ensure essential nutrition and school-based services to protect children and women, build human capital and enable recovery.

School-based programmes – Due to COVID-related school closures, 370 million school children are currently missing out on school meals. In countries across the globe, school feeding programmes provide a crucial and widespread safety net that supports children and their families. Recognizing their importance, many countries are adapting programmes to continue supporting children during school closures. As some countries will soon turn their attention towards school reopening, meals and health programmes can provide incentives for families to send their children back to school. Without them, many – especially girls – won't resume their

¹ FSIN, 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises>

education, resulting in a lost generation that will never recover from this crisis.

Based on its global experience and partnerships, WFP is uniquely positioned to:

- support school reopening: WFP, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF have developed a framework to support national preparations to safely reopen schools. WFP and UNICEF have also launched a global health and nutrition campaign to support return to school. Working with partners, WFP can help governments put in place robust school feeding and health programmes, ensure appropriate physical distancing and prevention efforts, and promote proper water, sanitation and hygiene services for school children and staff;
- advise governments on alternative ways to deliver school feeding programmes while schools are closed, and support linkages with social safety nets.

Nutrition – It is essential that nutritionally vulnerable populations do not get left behind or deprioritized during the COVID-19 response. Many countries will have to dramatically shift the way at-risk groups, especially women, infants and young children, receive preventive and life-saving support as movement restrictions and service prioritization affect access to clinics and nutrition services.

WFP can leverage existing partnerships and support governments to:

- deliver essential medicines, non-pharmaceutical supplies and specialized nutritious foods;
- shift service delivery from health facilities to the communities;
- scale-up interventions for individuals whose nutritional status has been affected by the pandemic;
- use data collection and analysis to assess access to food and nutrition, identify the most vulnerable populations, and target key interventions for the delivery of preventive services;
- advocate for the strengthening of services for those at risk of being left behind in the response.

3. FOOD SYSTEMS

The COVID-19 pandemic is placing significant stress on all components of food systems (production, trade and distribution, and consumption), threatening the food security and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people. Sustaining, protecting and improving food systems during the crisis is vital to reduce economic and food insecurity risks to communities, especially the most vulnerable, and enable a quicker and more inclusive recovery.

WFP can build on its partnerships to support governments and work with actors along the food value chain – from farmers to traders, processors, distributors, and retailers – to:

- sustain and strengthen market functions by leveraging WFP's supply chain expertise to help ensure food availability, also through the procurement and provision of timely market information;
- increase smallholder farmers' productivity and reduce post-harvest loss by supporting producers' access to seeds, fertilizers, assets, services and markets;
- protect the livelihoods of smallholder value chain actors through programmes that create income and job opportunities;
- ensure the food and nutrition needs of vulnerable populations are met by linking to social protection and nutrition systems and through interventions such as home-grown school feeding.

Across these three areas – social protection systems, basic service delivery and food systems – WFP will support national responses to save lives and protect livelihoods while strengthening systems to reinforce government leadership and accountability.

With a focus on the countries, groups and people most at risk of being left behind, WFP's actions will help achieve the objectives of the integrated support package offered by the United Nations Development System to protect the needs and rights of people living under the duress of the pandemic.

1. Introduction

Countries across the globe are facing a “development emergency.” There is urgent need to support their responses to the immediate and longer-term impact of COVID-19. To do this, emergency, development and prevention programming must be integrated to deliver joint outcomes. This includes sustaining and scaling up food and nutrition assistance components for critical lifesaving and livelihood protection activities.

The socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic require a comprehensive, coherent and collaborative response – delivered quickly and at scale. Governments are primarily responsible for protecting populations and ensuring the essential needs of all persons are equitably met. Given its enabling and delivery capabilities and roles within both the UN Development System (UNDS) and the international humanitarian architecture, WFP is uniquely positioned to support governments and partners to quickly adapt, design and deliver their own interventions. WFP’s presence in over 80 countries, at national and sub-national levels, further enables rapid scale-up and direct delivery of complementary programmes where required.

WFP’s contribution to the global response will be further defined, operationalized and risk-managed based on country needs in collaboration with WFP regional bureaus, country offices and partners. WFP’s approach is fully aligned with the UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19,² within which the UNDS is shifting into an emergency mode of working. It maintains alignment of WFP country-level planning with any adjustments in Global Humanitarian Response Plans, National Development Plans and UNDAF/UNSDCFs. WFP will work in partnership the humanitarian system partners, UNDS, international financial institutions (IFIs), civil society organizations and the private sector to help governments sustain, scale and complement national responses to save lives, protect people and build back better.

As a Programme of the United Nations, WFP will ensure the support it provides protects the human rights, equality and dignity of all persons without discrimination, and that no one is left behind. WFP and its partners will uphold the primary obligation to do no harm and ensure

that assistance is provided in a safe, inclusive, equitable and dignified manner; that affected populations in their diversity can influence what assistance they receive and how it is designed, delivered, monitored and adapted; and that activities support social cohesion and trust, and do not exacerbate or promote conflict, or cause environmental harm.

WFP’s medium-term response

In defining the programmatic framework to address the medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP has identified three pillars of intervention that are central to effective, efficient and equitable responses and where WFP has demonstrated value as a partner to governments and others. These are: support for national social protection systems; basic service delivery – in particular school-based programmes and nutrition; and food systems. This framework builds on the system-wide L3 emergency activation and covers the period from May 2020 to the end of the year and beyond.

Within each pillar, WFP can provide support in three overlapping areas: data and analytics, policy and programme advice, and operational support. Core cross-cutting priorities including protection, gender, livelihood support, environmental standards and digital transformation will be integrated across all forms of support.

WFP is resolute to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contribute to the global commitment to end poverty, hunger and inequality. WFP’s Vision of Zero Hunger through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is being adjusted and expanded to cater for COVID-19 related needs. Keeping the SDGs as guiding reference, reprogramming efforts have already started in close collaboration with host governments, country programmes, donors and partners to ensure the promise of the 2030 Agenda to ‘leave no one behind’ is delivered and lasting impact is achieved in the spirit of WFP’s ‘Changing Lives’ mandate.

² <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19>

2. Projected impact and populations of concern

While the impacts of the socio-economic crisis generated by COVID-19 are being felt globally, low- and middle-income countries will be disproportionately affected. Under-developed and under-resourced systems are less able to contain and treat the immediate health effects of the pandemic, as well as the longer-term socio-economic ones. The projected global economic contraction,³ integrated nature of economic activity and dependence on volatile global import, export and credit markets signal negative consequences for trade and employment. Limited fiscal space and high debt will restrict many countries' ability to respond to increasing needs.

The large-scale economic disruption caused by the pandemic is reducing household income significantly, limiting the ability to meet essential needs and weakening both households' and countries' potential to recover post-crisis. Many families are likely to experience food price spikes and volatile or reduced food availability or accessibility. Food price spikes can be devastating for low-income households, especially those that depend on markets for basic access to food. As the percentage of household income spent on food increases, diets become less nutritious and less money is spent on key basic

services such as health and education.

Pre-existing inequalities, including those pertaining to gender, disability, health, civil status and income will be exacerbated. Poverty and vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition are likely to both deepen among already poor and marginalized populations and expand among groups previously able to meet their food and nutrition needs. The effects of the pandemic are projected to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, with the number of people suffering acute food insecurity likely to almost double from 135 million to 270 million.⁴

Populations at risk

While anyone can contract COVID-19, personal, situational, socio-cultural and structural factors create different levels and types of risk. The risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic include: risk of infection; risk of severe complication; and risk of socio-economic and other indirect impacts, such as gender-based violence.⁵ Individuals may fall into one or more of these categories, which interact with pre-existing risk factors including gender, age, disability and poverty.



³ IMF, 2020 <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEUpdateJune2020>

⁴ FSIN, 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises>

⁵ UN, 2020: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_april_2020.pdf

Groups at higher risk of infection include health system workers and home caregivers, workers in essential, daily-wage and informal/irregular sectors unable to self-isolate, and people living in densely-populated environments. Once infected, older people and those with underlying medical conditions – including malnutrition and pre-existing disease – are at higher risk of developing severe illness or complications.

Based on the combination of these factors, it is possible to identify groups that are particularly at risk of not being able to meet their essential needs, including food and nutrition, and whose circumstances and needs should be prioritized and supported in national responses to the COVID-19 crisis. These are:

- urban populations and those living in densely populated environments,⁶ including camps hosting internally displaced people and refugees;
- individuals and households living below or close to the poverty line, who depend on wage labour, micro-enterprise or engagement with the informal economy for access to food, the majority of whom are women;
- irregular migrants and marginalized groups with limited access to social services, such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities;
- people with underlying medical conditions and poor nutritional status, including acute malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, HIV/ AIDs, tuberculosis and respiratory illnesses;
- girls and women;
- school-aged children currently not in school or at risk of drop-out;⁷
- single-parent and female-headed households;
- older persons;
- unpaid caregivers, who are disproportionately women and girls.

With an emphasis on inclusion and equity – and, as feasible, gender-transformation – WFP will identify and support partners in determining the particular needs,

preferences, opportunities and circumstances of affected persons, in their diversity. The collected data and consequent analyses will inform decision making.⁹



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