



**UNEG**  
United Nations Evaluation Group

# Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security

## Main Report

February 2021

This study was prepared by Patrick Breard, consultant, under the guidance of the Management Group consisting of representatives from FAO, IFAD, UNIDO and WFP. This project was funded with UK aid from the UK government, and managed by UNEG.

The analysis and recommendations of this study do not necessarily reflect the views of the Management Group agencies, UNEG or DfID.

**See also:** Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security - Annexes

Other publications in this series:

- [Joint Evaluability Assessment of the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All \(SDG-GAP\)](#) (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP, WHO and World Bank, July 2020).
- [Rapid Evidence Assessment - What Works to Protect Children on the Move](#) (IOM, ILO, UNHCR and UNICEF, July 2020)



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## Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic is an acute health and human crisis affecting the food security of millions of people around the world. Food insecurity was already on the rise prior to COVID-19 due to factors such as conflict, economic crises, extreme weather and climate change-related events. The pandemic has dramatically worsened this trend and led to an additional 130 million people chronically undernourished in 2020. The contribution of the United Nations (UN) system to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular to SDG2 “Zero Hunger”, has become more important than ever. As such, this timely study will be useful for those who share the sense of urgency to address the food security issues.

The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) advocates for the use of evaluations in policy-making and operational work, and facilitates partnerships and collaboration in the UN system and beyond. Influencing policy-making and operational work through evaluations is a central objective of UNEG’s Strategy 2020 – 2024.

System wide evaluations ensure that evaluations within the UN system produce knowledge and evidence that can be used to inform relevant, effective, sustainable UN support to Member States to achieve the SDGs.

I welcome the work of FAO, IFAD, UNIDO and WFP in producing an evidence summary on COVID-19 and food security, which emerged in response to the need to identify evidence on what works to support food security in times of crises. The work was funded by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland through UNEG.

I would like to thank, in particular, the lead author Patrick Breard, as well as members of the Management Group: Carlos Tarazona (FAO), Fabrizio Felloni (IFAD), Johannes Dobinger (UNIDO) and Deborah McWhinney (WFP) for setting up and managing the study.



Masahiro Igarashi  
UNEG Chair  
Rome, February 2021

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We are grateful for comments received from colleagues of UN evaluation offices: Marta Bruno and Nanae Yabuki (FAO), Johanna Pennarz, Nanthikesan Suppiramaniam and Simona Somma (IFAD), Javier Guarnizo (UNIDO), Michael Carbon and Federica Zelada (WFP) and Mathew Varghese (UN) throughout the study, as well as from the suggestions and comments received from Anne-Claire Luzot (WFP), Guy Thijs and Patricia Vidal (ILO), Christophe Franzetti, Claire Lyster, and Katharine Barwise (IOM) on an earlier draft of the report. We would also like to recognize the contributions from partners outside the UN such as Global Affairs Canada and the International Development Research Centre, as well as project managers and policy advisers from the contributing agencies who provided ideas and suggestions to make this study more relevant to their work.

Last but not least, we are thankful to UNEG for the support and for selecting this proposal for funding of this important system wide evaluative initiative.

Carlos Tarazona, Fabrizio Felloni, Johannes Dobinger and Deborah McWhinney  
The Management Group

## Acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
mPDM	mobile Post-Distribution Monitoring
mVAM	mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

## Executive Summary

Alongside conflict, economic crises and climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a factor contributing to increasing global food insecurity and, in 2020, led to an additional 130 million people being chronically undernourished. What can findings, good practices and lessons learned from past evaluations of interventions to protect food security in times of crisis, tell us?

By summarizing and making this knowledge more easily accessible, this study aims to contribute to a greater effectiveness of the United Nations (UN) system response to COVID-19 in the area of food security. The study draws from 65 evaluation reports by 15 multilateral and bilateral organizations that assessed responses to: conflict and insecurity crises (36%); economic shocks (6%); natural disasters (6%); extreme weather (28%); crop pest and animal disease (2%); and systemic crisis responses (11%).

The UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 has three pillars that have potential effects on food security: social protection and basic services; economic response and recovery; and social cohesion and community resilience. The summary drew upon this Framework to develop three overarching research questions:

- a. What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting social protection and basic services to preserve food security during crises?
- b. What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises?
- c. What interventions have better supported social cohesion and helped vulnerable population groups become more resilient to food insecurity?

### Key Findings: Interventions aimed at ensuring social protection and basic services

- **Cash transfers** are an effective modality to support social protection and preserve food security during crises, but are bound to a range of enabling factors, such as functioning markets, available technical capacity, regulated banking services and suitable infrastructure.
- **School meal programmes** are effective to support social protection and preserve food security during crises. Some Governments have indicated a willingness to institutionalize and sustain school meal programmes.
- **Food distribution** contributes to preserving food security in response to different types of crises and can sometimes support local production.
- **Distribution of agricultural inputs** (seeds, fertilizer, tools) offers an effective channel to restore agricultural outputs and livelihoods, but with limited long-term welfare effects largely due to timing issues and/or lack of appropriate scale.
- **Key factors influencing the effectiveness of social protection and basic services interventions:** the level of collaboration with national and local partners and stakeholders; the level of preparedness of UN agencies and national partners; the comprehensiveness of needs assessments; the security situation; the targeting of

beneficiaries; the extent of adaptive management, agility and learning to adjust to evolving contexts; as well as the protection and safety of staff and beneficiaries.

## **Key Findings: Interventions aimed at supporting economic response and recovery**

- *Value chain development* can support economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises; increases in productivity of crops and livestock; facilitating access to new markets; and, in some, instances reach and support poor and very poor households.
- The role of *early warning systems* in supporting economic response and recovery returned mixed assessments. While there is significant evidence of early warning information available prior to several crises, these systems have not necessarily triggered early action.
- *Policy advice* is useful when it leads to improved legislative and regulatory frameworks, and is more effective when provided in partnerships with other international organizations (including donors) and/or anchored in dialogues on the development of national strategies and policies.
- *Rural employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes* are effective in providing poor workers with a source of income while contributing to the rehabilitation - or creation - of public and community infrastructures and restoration of agricultural production.
- *Key factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions supporting economic response and recovery* include: fragility of the state; governance arrangements for policy change/programme implementation; breadth of partnerships especially with the private sector, financial institutions, academia and research institutes; availability of infrastructures and access to credit, resources and knowledge.

## **Key Finding: Interventions aimed at supporting social cohesion and vulnerable groups**

- Evaluations of interventions that supported social cohesion and helped vulnerable population groups become more resilient to food insecurity highlighted the importance of social dialogue, localization, and adopting comprehensive targeting approaches that consider other local vulnerable communities alongside populations directly affected by crises.
- Local leadership in supporting social cohesion, and the enabling role of equitable policies and legislation were also important.
- Evaluative evidence also highlighted the added-value of civil society groups in the planning, design and implementation of the interventions.

## Conclusions

### 1. **Interventions that support social protection were more effective when designed as a bundle of complementary modalities tailored to the local context and specific needs of target beneficiaries, and involving adequate partnerships.**

- i. Designing social protection interventions requires disaggregated needs assessments and a systemic approach that cuts across sectors and implies large partnerships. Agencies and partners are variously prepared and equipped to conduct such integrated scoping and targeting exercises.
- ii. Good practices (e.g. normative tools, guidance materials, systems, procedures, as well as knowledge and know-how) are sometimes, but not systematically, considered and taken up by other partners.
- iii. Cash transfers were often reported as effective to supporting social protection and basic services. However, certain conditions are required to implement this modality and there is limited evidence about integration into existing safety nets and sustainability.
- iv. In-kind food assistance was effective in preserving food security during crises including when social distancing was required. However, it requires a major logistical efforts and sustainability is not always ensured.
- v. School feeding programmes were effective, although national partners were not always willing or able to institutionalize them.
- vi. Inputs distribution was found to be effective in supporting food security and nutrition, when delivered in a timely manner. It is more effective when complemented with capacity development and financial services, although there is limited evidence on its multiplier effects.

### 2. **Programmes supporting *economic response and recovery* of food insecure populations in times of crises were more effective when designed and implemented taking into account the realities of the context (e.g. economic, financial, infrastructural, political, environmental, social), and when they included clear scaling-up strategies with involvement of partners, private sector and political actors.**

- i. Economic recovery programmes benefit from being grounded in needs assessments and/or economic and financial feasibility analysis. This implies looking at the productive, institutional, socio-economic, and agro-ecological systems in an integrated way, as well as conducting disaggregated diagnosis for different types of target beneficiaries. These are complex tasks that eventually face incomplete normative instruments.
- ii. Targeting using new technological remote data collection tools was often found to be effective in situations where staff movement was restricted or required social distancing. However, these approaches must mitigate the risk to exclude some vulnerable target groups. They also need to be tailored when food security assessments and data needs span different sectors, which can benefit from preparedness and synergies between agencies.



- iii. Support provided to food supply chain development/preservation was found to be particularly effective in promoting economic recovery. Greater attention to aspects such as involvement of the private sector, marketing, rural finance, behavioural change and infrastructure would enhance their effectiveness. For value chain projects, the importance of assessing market potentials and establishing linkages with rural finance schemes was frequently highlighted. Supply chain development sometimes requires managing trade-offs between the scale and scope of the interventions, which may call for phased approaches.
- iv. Policy-oriented interventions have contributed to the improvement of legislative and regulatory frameworks, but were often constrained by the lack of partnerships, limited follow-up at country level and insufficient attention to policymaking processes. Interventions in fragile States must set realistic expectations. Policy interventions are sometimes confronted by a lack of data for assessing the welfare impacts of a crisis and hence for targeting specific interventions, calling for stronger data preparedness, quality and availability.
- v. Programmes that support rural employment and entrepreneurship have been effective for certain groups of poor and vulnerable populations such as young people, but require a long-term multisectoral commitment and effort to produce lasting change. Scaling-up strategies are often missing from the programme design.

**3. Interventions addressing food insecurity can better support social cohesion by broadening their scope to include not only core target beneficiaries but also the most vulnerable.**

- i. When specific tools to foster social cohesion, such as social dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms, were explicitly included as a component of the intervention, the latter contributed to more robust and resilient communities.
- ii. Interventions with limited scope and focus on small target groups, such as demonstration/pilot projects that grant some benefits to only one community, can instill tensions with other vulnerable groups if not handled well.
- iii. Comprehensive and differentiated targeting approaches and participation of civil society organizations in the design and implementation of interventions were found to be contributing factors towards greater social cohesion.

# 1. Introduction

1. According to the fourth annual *Global Report on Food Crises* (GRFC 2020),<sup>1</sup> in 2019 135 million people across 55 countries were in crisis or worse (Integrated Phase Classification / Cadre Harmonisé [IPC/CH] Phase 3 or above). A further 183 million people in 47 countries were classified in stressed (IPC/CH Phase 2) conditions, at risk of slipping into crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) if confronted by an additional shock or stressor. According to the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* (SOFI), in 2019 nearly 690 million people were chronically food insecure.<sup>2</sup>

2. The COVID-19 outbreak has worsened this context by placing an additional burden on agri-food systems and exacerbating acute food insecurity in countries with food crisis, and by driving up acute food insecurity levels in other countries. Preliminary projections suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may further add up to 132 million people to the total number of chronically undernourished in the world in 2020, depending on the economic growth scenario.<sup>3</sup>

3. The economic consequences of the pandemic are impacting all sizes and types of countries.<sup>4</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated total working-hour losses in the second quarter of 2020 (relative to the fourth quarter of 2019) were 495 million full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. Lower-middle-income countries have been the hardest hit, having experienced an estimated decline in working hours of 23.3 percent (240 million FTE jobs) in the second quarter of the year.<sup>5</sup>

4. Many countries are suffering indirect consequences from value chain disruptions and lower international demands for goods due to the recession.<sup>6</sup> The global food chains got hit right at the centre by the pandemic, disrupting all phases of the supply chain, from production to distribution.<sup>7</sup> The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)<sup>8</sup> assessed that the stressed food value chains, with bottlenecks in farm labour, processing, transport and logistics are disproportionately affecting farm actors and seasonal workers, the intensive-labour harvest (i.e. fruits and vegetable vs cereals), and shortage in inputs. Thus, short-term disruption of food systems and the consequent economic crisis have long-term impacts on livelihoods especially of vulnerable people.<sup>9</sup>

5. Against this backdrop, many development and humanitarian agencies and the United Nations (UN) itself are promoting and formulating comprehensive responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Some of these responses were made at the outset of the crisis and could benefit from considering the good practices and lessons identified by previous evaluations on what works best to protect food security from health, socio-economic and environmental shocks such as those caused by COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> Food Security Information Network & Global Network Against Food Crises. 2020. *Global Report on Food Crises*. Available at: [https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC\\_2020\\_ONLINE\\_200420.pdf](https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC_2020_ONLINE_200420.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9692en/>.

<sup>3</sup> Global Network Against Food Crises. 2020. *Food Crises and COVID-19: Emerging evidence and implications. An analysis of acute food insecurity and agri-food systems during COVID-19 pandemic*. Technical note.

<sup>4</sup> IMF. (2020) <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/06/an-early-view-of-the-economic-impact-of-the-pandemic-in-5-charts/>

<sup>5</sup> ILO. 2020. *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*. Sixth edition. 23 September 2020. Geneva.

<sup>6</sup> UNIDO <https://www.unido.org/stories/coronavirus-economic-impact-10-july-2020>

<sup>7</sup> FAO <http://www.fao.org/datalab/website/covid19>

<sup>8</sup> OECD <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/food-supply-chains-and-covid-19-impacts-and-policy-lessons-71b57aca/>

<sup>9</sup> Global Network Against Food Crisis

[http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fightfoodcrises/doc/GlobalNetwork\\_75UNGA\\_SideEvent\\_Presentation.pdf](http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/fileadmin/user_upload/fightfoodcrises/doc/GlobalNetwork_75UNGA_SideEvent_Presentation.pdf)

## 2. Rationale and approach

6. The evaluation offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and World Food Programme (WFP) joined efforts to explore how evidence from food security-related evaluations can better support UN agencies and partners to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. With funding for system-wide evaluation work from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, managed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), these agencies have commissioned the present study which seeks to summarize publicly available evaluative evidence to inform ongoing and future interventions and identify knowledge gaps that forthcoming evaluations of COVID-19 response programmes may address.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1 Objectives and scope of the study

7. This study aims to contribute to the effectiveness of the response to the pandemic's effects on the food security of vulnerable populations by summarizing evaluative knowledge that can inform the design of future and current interventions on areas relevant for the UN-wide response to COVID-19. The study summarizes evidence from evaluations, documenting lessons on what worked and what did not in protecting the food security of affected populations. There is a special emphasis on crises with similar outcomes to the current pandemic (e.g. lockdown measures or travel restrictions disrupting the supply chain) and interventions designed to help these populations become more resilient to food insecurity so they can better cope when a crisis re-occurs.

8. The evidence comes from evaluations of interventions, programmes or strategies implemented between 2008-2020 (see section 2.4). The study was informed by interviews with key informants (Annex 1) and non-evaluative sources (Annex 2), especially to define the conceptual framework for the exercise.

### 2.2 Conceptual framework and analytical approach

9. UN agencies have formulated an overarching framework to foster a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19* (April 2020)<sup>11</sup> articulates five pillars of intervention to deliver socio-economic support under the current emergency conditions:

- Pillar 1. Health First: Protecting Health Services and Systems during the Crisis;
- Pillar 2. Protecting People: Social Protection and Basic Services;
- Pillar 3. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and Informal Sector Workers;
- Pillar 4. Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration;
- Pillar 5. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience.

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<sup>10</sup> This initiative follows a recent note on *Lessons Learned from Evaluations on Food Security* that FAO, IFAD and WFP contributed to through the Global COVID-19 Evaluation Coalition: [http://www.oecd.org/development/covid-19-global-evaluation-coalition/documents/Lessons from Evaluation Food Security Final Edited.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/development/covid-19-global-evaluation-coalition/documents/Lessons%20from%20Evaluation%20Food%20Security%20Final%20Edited.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>

10. A mapping of selected UN agencies' strategic priorities in response to COVID-19 highlighted that **three pillars** were more systematically covered with food security interventions, namely: social protection and basic services; economic response and recovery; and social cohesion and community resilience.

11. **Social protection and basic services:** ILO defines social protection as the set of public measures a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress caused by the absence or substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age or death of the breadwinner), the provision of health care and the provision of benefits for families with children.<sup>12</sup> Under this pillar, the study gathered lessons and evidence of what works in cash transfers; in-kind food; input distribution; and school meals programmes.

12. **Economic response and recovery:** Is the bridge between a rapid response (social protection) and long-term development. According to the OECD,<sup>13</sup> recovery will take a long time to bring the economy back to pre-pandemic levels, and the crisis will leave long-lasting scars - a fall in living standards, high unemployment and weak investment. Job losses in the most affected sectors, such as tourism, hospitality and entertainment, will particularly hit low-skilled, young and informal workers. Under this pillar, the study gathered lessons and evidence of what works in food supply chain development/preservation; food security monitoring and early warning; food policy advice; rural employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes.

13. **Social cohesion and community resilience:** Community-based programmes aim at reaching various elements of the community, namely women, the elderly, youth, differently abled people, and the community at large. They are designed around the needs and resources existing within a community involving community stakeholders addressing sustainable and equitable outcomes.

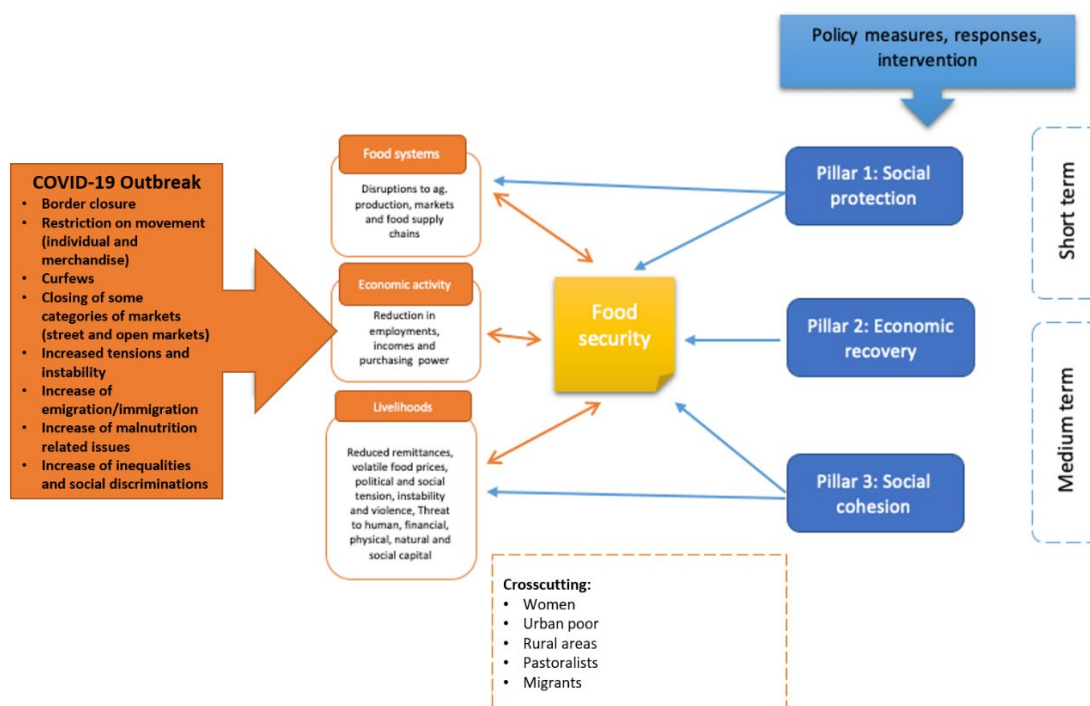
14. Building on these three pillars, a simplified conceptual framework was developed to guide and focus the study (Figure 1).

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<sup>12</sup> ILO. 2004. Social Protection Matters. Geneva.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/global-economy-faces-a-tightrope-walk-to-recovery.htm>;  
<https://www.oecd.org/insights/46156144.pdf>

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the Study**



Source: Adapted from Global Network Against Food Crises. 2020. Food Crises and COVID-19: An analysis of acute food insecurity and agri-food systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rome.

15. Within this framework, the study considered the impact of COVID-19 on food security of vulnerable populations, especially:

- i. **Urban poor:** Short-term disruptions due to COVID-19 have pushed those in the informal economy out of work especially in urban areas, thereby exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. The effects of essential and urgent restrictive measures have triggered increased hunger as urban poor rely entirely on markets for their food.
- ii. **Rural dwellers:** The economic crisis has forced workers to return to rural areas even without prospects for employment and impacted the flow of remittances. Moreover, agriculture-based livelihoods were also faced with the indirect effects of COVID-19 particularly experiencing challenges in terms of access to inputs and labour, as well as disruption of agricultural markets.
- iii. **Pastoralists:** Pastoral communities have been affected by the disruption of traditional migration to access grazing areas of nomadic herders/transhumance (e.g. Sahel and West Africa), limited access to markets to sell livestock products and decreasing purchasing power.
- iv. **Migrants and displaced persons:** Migrant workers, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) appear to be disproportionately affected, particularly due to pre-existing vulnerabilities (such as labour market conditions) which have been exacerbated by COVID-19 related measures, movement restrictions, limited market access and labour opportunities, and rising food prices coupled with low purchasing power.

16. Furthermore, the study has taken into account a gender dimension as COVID-19 is found to have more severely affected **women** who make up the majority of healthcare workers and unpaid caregivers. Moreover, women's food security is severely hampered by containment measures (no market access, fetching water, firewood, reduced informal jobs, selling in the market, street vendors) and the adoption of coping strategies at household level, such as reduction in the quantity and/or quality of food

in a household, as these are frequently adopted by women in favour of men and children. Women also represent a large share in the informal economies of most developing countries, and most informal jobs have vanished due to containment measures.

17. The study also considered interlinkages between food insecurity and the different **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Multiple SDGs relate to food security and the food system:<sup>14</sup> **the main one is SDG 2, which focuses on ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition while promoting sustainable agriculture**. Other SDGs (such as SDG 1, SDG 6, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 15, SDG 14, SDG 5, SDG 16 and SDG 17) have strong linkages and trade-offs with SDG 2. For instance, SDG 1 focuses on poverty reduction, where agriculture and food have a key role to play.<sup>15</sup> Sustainable production also plays a central role in achieving SDG 6 on water, SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, SDG 13 on climate change adaptation and mitigation, SDG 15 on land use and ecosystems, and SDG 14 on marine resource and oceans. Moreover, SDG 5 focuses on reducing gender inequalities by reducing food insecurity and improving nutrition of girls, women and children; SDG 16 promotes peace and stability, which is key for food insecurity and nutrition in crisis contexts; and SDG 17 has a global prioritization on nutrition within cooperation<sup>16</sup> of all actors including UN agencies, private sector and governments.

## 2.3 Study questions

18. The questions were formulated in collaboration with the Management Team and key informants (Annex 1) as follows:

### **Pillar 1: Social protection and basic services**

#### **What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting social protection and basic services to preserve food security during crises?**

- i. What are the good practices and lessons learned in expanding community-based social protection services or national contributory social protection mechanisms, especially for urban poor, migrants, pastoralists, rural dwellers and women? What contributed to make such interventions more relevant and effective?
- ii. What are the good practices and lessons learned in strengthening UN collaboration on such interventions (including through integrated analysis and multi-packaged approach, and with agencies that do not have a country presence)? What contributed to make such interventions more coherent and efficient?

### **Pillar 2: Economic recovery**

#### **What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises?**

- i. What are the good practices and lessons learned in conducting and coordinating needs assessments and diagnosis of agri-food labour markets and business environments for crisis response and recovery?
- ii. What are the good practices and lessons learned in scaling-up employment intensive programming in the agri-food sector, especially during or after a crisis? What groups or categories of people have benefited the most or the least from these interventions and

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<sup>14</sup> SOFI. 2018. <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/2018/en>

<sup>15</sup> OECD. 2016. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264264687-27-en.pdf?expires=1603459524&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=B9F088DEA20413F9D71D3AB16C19668C>

<sup>16</sup> WHO Department of Nutrition for Health and Development. 2018. [https://www.who.int/nutrition/globalnutritionreport/2018\\_Global\\_Nutrition\\_Report.pdf](https://www.who.int/nutrition/globalnutritionreport/2018_Global_Nutrition_Report.pdf)

why? What are the main contributing and/or constraining factors for their effectiveness and sustainability?

### Pillar 3: Social cohesion

#### What interventions have better supported social cohesion and helped vulnerable population groups become more resilient to food insecurity?

- i. What are the good practices and lessons learned in identifying most affected populations and their needs in COVID-like contexts (e.g. lockdown, social distancing)?
- ii. What are the good practices and lessons learned in supporting inclusive social dialogue, advocacy and political engagement? What contributed to make such interventions more relevant and effective?
- iii. What are the good practices and lessons learned in supporting equitable service delivery for urban poor, rural dwellers, pastoralists, migrants and women? What contributed to make such interventions more relevant and effective?

## 2.4 Methodology

19. The dataset used for the study is presented in Annex 2. The selection process followed several steps, starting from a search for secondary resources covering food security in crisis contexts. This initial scan retrieved 252 documents, including 104 evaluation reports and assessments selected by the team and/or sources facilitated by UNEG members and partners. Two rounds of reviews and selections were then conducted by the team to ensure that evaluative evidence was relevant and of adequate quality. Quality criteria for the selection of the evaluative evidence covered: i) relevance of the resources for the study; ii) adoption of evaluation principles, norms and standards; iii) credible methodology; and robustness of iv) findings and v) conclusions. Detailed quality criteria applied for the selection and further information on the approach are presented in Annex 3.

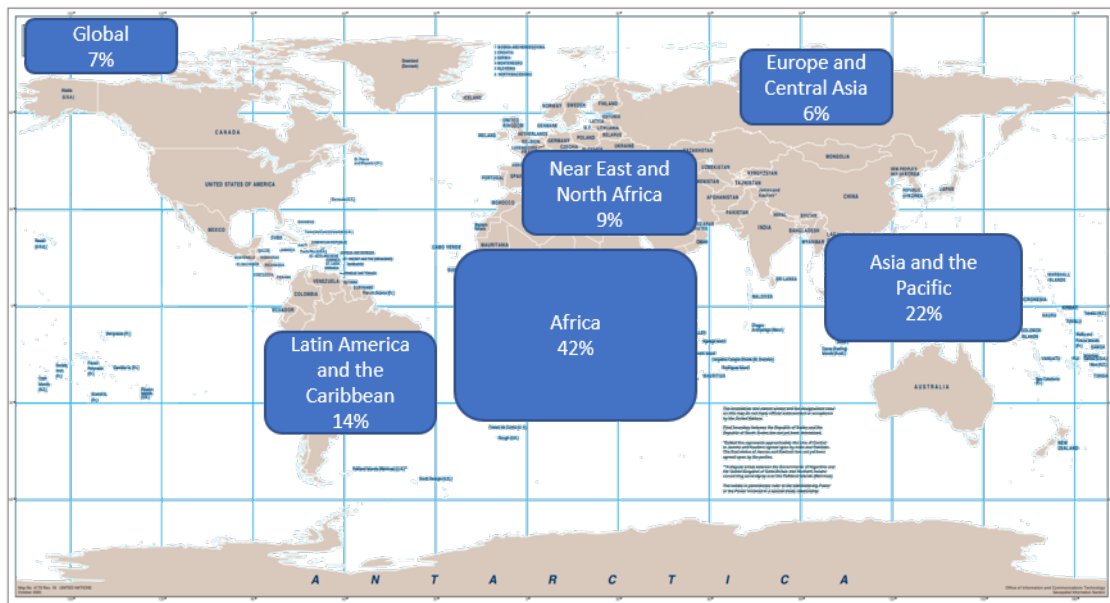
20. Based on the above process and criteria, **65 evaluation reports** were selected to form the core sample of evaluative evidence used. These reports were published between 2016 and 2020, with addition of a few selected earlier evaluations that were found pertinent, and originates from the following sources:

Organization <sup>17</sup>	Reports	Organization	Reports
FAO	6	UNDP	1
Government of Canada	2	UNHCR	4
IFAD	17	UNICEF	7
ILO	4	UNIDO	4
IOM	4	USAID	1
Joint SDG Fund	1	WFP	11
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands	1	World Bank	1
OCHA	1		

21. The geographic focus of the selected reports spans all regions except North America, with a stronger representation of reports covering the Africa region. The countries most frequently referred to in the dataset, either as a standalone location of a programme or as part of a regional response or in global evaluations, are Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

<sup>17</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Organisation (ILO); Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

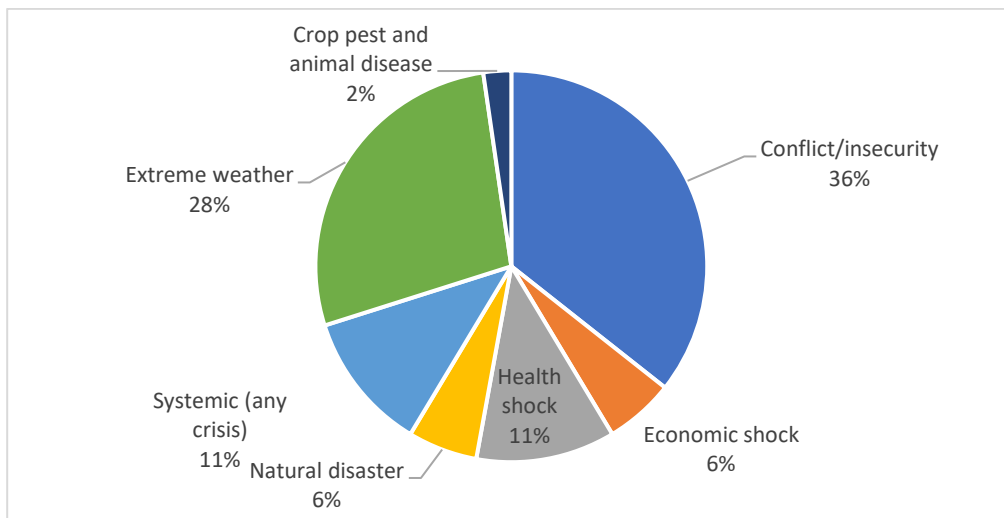
**Figure 2: Geographic coverage of the evaluative evidence**



Source: Evaluation reports (65) in the dataset

22. Conflict/insecurity is the type of crisis most frequently addressed in the dataset (31 reports), followed by extreme weather (24). Some reports, such as global or country evaluations, cover several types of crisis (e.g. conflict/insecurity, extreme weather and health shock in Sierra Leone).

**Figure 3: Evaluative evidence per type of crisis**



Source: Evaluation reports (65) in the dataset

23. Following the establishment of the core dataset, the team extracted qualitative data as per the evaluation questions and detailed evaluation dimensions. Coding of qualitative data relied on MAXQDA<sup>18</sup>. Results were used for confirmatory review and to complement the analysis of constraints and knowledge gaps. Key highlights of the results of the coding per typology are presented in Annex 4.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.maxqda.com>



24. While coding and summarizing the evaluative evidence, the team identified the following knowledge gaps:

- i. The interventions assessed in the dataset of evaluation reports do not always distinguish very specifically their target beneficiaries but sometimes aggregate several categories used for the study (urban poor, rural dwellers, migrants and women). There is sometimes a lack of granular data regarding the effectiveness of the interventions per target group. In addition, across the dataset, pastoralists and, to a lesser extent, urban poor were not frequently targeted and/or singled out in the interventions and/or evaluations.
- ii. Few evaluation reports in the dataset present a comparative assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the different modalities. There would be room for evaluation reports to discuss economic cost together with economic benefit, and to elaborate and spell out under which conditions (of locations, food basket composition, market prices) and at which scale the modalities can be cost-effective.
- iii. The evaluative evidence presented limited findings about the institutionalization and sustainability of the interventions (e.g. cash transfers vs school feeding in extending existing safety nets). There would be room to explore longer-term effects and uptake of the interventions in national policies and budgets. On a related note, limited evidence was found sometimes about the longer-term impact of employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes. Evaluation reports sometimes found capacity and skills development initiatives effective and promising despite not having created jobs during the period of intervention or evaluation, implying that additional research would be beneficial.
- iv. The evaluative evidence lacked more detailed assessments about the effectiveness, good practices and lessons learned of conducting and coordinating integrated needs assessments, joint market analysis, and joint targeting and programming.
- v. Policy support was often reported in the dataset as an activity but more rarely with specific details about the technical or substantive outcomes of the interventions and their impact.
- vi. There was limited evidence in the dataset about the linkages and effectiveness of the transition or synergies between social protection interventions and interventions that supported economic recovery, suggesting room for further research. The extent to which interventions have made vulnerable communities effectively more immune to future shocks was not always clear and could be a line of inquiry in future evaluations.

### 3. Findings from the evaluations about what works to support food security in crisis contexts

25. This section reviewed findings and lessons learned from the evaluation dataset in order to answer questions under the three pillars. The specific source(s) of evaluative evidence are referred to in parenthesis throughout the text.

#### 3.1 Social protection and basic services

26. The structure of this section follows the study questions defined for Pillar 1.

##### What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting social protection and basic services to preserve food security during crises?

###### Cash transfers

27. Most evaluations find cash transfers to be an effective modality to support social protection and preserve food security during crises, but the evaluative evidence reviewed does not convey many cases of uptake and institutionalization in Governments' safety net programmes.

28. Cash transfers<sup>19</sup> are considered a highly relevant modality to support food insecure populations and ensure greater choice and agency for affected people, allowing beneficiaries more freedom to determine their own strategies to meet their needs (see Box 1; UNHCR 40, WFP 55, WFP 59). This autonomy, which is a clear case of empowerment, is higher than it is for in-kind food distributions. Cash transfers can also cut across siloed programming and contribute either to the achievement of a sectoral response or multi-sectoral objectives. When used with existing government services, cash can also contribute towards removing the barriers between development and humanitarian response (UNICEF 46).

29. Cash transfers and other expenditures have also translated into economic contributions either at local (WFP 54) or regional level (WFP 55). Nearly USD 1 billion was injected into local economies in 2017 in response to the Syrian crisis. For example, the USD 238 million injected into the Lebanese economy in 2016 was equivalent to 0.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product that year. Cash transfers can also have economic multiplier effects. In Lebanon, WFP cash-based transfer programming had a multiplier effect of 1.51 on the local economy; specifically, that every USD 1 spent by WFP in the country would generate an additional USD 1.51 of economic activity. A few reports also noted that cash transfers were a cost-effective modality, with key factors being the scale and duration of the interventions, and learning

##### Box 1: World Bank's suggested ranking of Social Safety Net Programmes for Food Crisis Response

- (1) Expand benefits and coverage of existing targeted cash (or near cash) transfer programmes.
- (2) Introduce targeted nutrition interventions for infants and pregnant women to help households use their resources most effectively to nourish their children and improve micronutrient intake.
- (3) Introduce in-kind food programmes, including school feeding and distribution of fortified calorically dense food for children aged 0-2.
- (4) Expand public work programmes where they exist; complement them with cash transfers.
- (5) Introduce fee waivers, lifeline pricing, and other forms of targeted subsidies for poor users and consumers of basic food and energy products.
- (6) Introduce additional measures to prevent children from dropping out of school, such as fee waivers, subsidies for school inputs, or cash transfers.

Source: World Bank 62

<sup>19</sup> Includes conditional and unconditional cash transfers, and multi-purpose cash transfers. Other related modalities such as vouchers or e-vouchers are specified accordingly.

and investments made over the years of crisis bearing fruit in terms of greater efficiencies (UNHCR 38, UNICEF 64, WFP 55).

30. *Evaluations point out several enabling conditions to operationalize cash transfers*, such as access to functioning markets, available technical capacity, regulated banking services and suitable infrastructure (WFP 55). Therefore, some trade-offs were noted for this modality. On the one hand, electronic cash transfers allow less regular physical access for aid workers and continued assistance where access conditions deteriorate. On the other, it can only be used when the (phone-) banking infrastructure and markets exist, and still require aid workers to access affected people in order to assess needs, register beneficiaries and monitor the use of cash-based transfers (WFP 65).

### **School feeding**

31. Evaluative evidence shows that school meal programmes are effective to support social protection and preserve food security during crises, and that there is some willingness from Governments to institutionalize and sustain them.

32. *School feeding was found to contribute to several development outcomes*, such as improving school enrolment rates and literacy (WFP 55, WFP 61), and to fostering reconciliation and social cohesion (WFP 53). Several reports indicate that countries have been able to link school meals with procurement from local producers, thus providing schools with fresh and local products but also empowering small-scale farmers and local cooperatives (Box 2; WFP 60). Evaluative evidence indicates that in some countries (e.g., Bangladesh, Cambodia, Central African Republic), school meal programmes are progressively being taken up by governments and institutionalized as a safety net (WFP 53, WFP 60, WFP 61).

33. *School feeding also confront several constraints*. In the Central African Republic for example, school meals were interrupted by the crisis between April and November 2013 and in 2014, as most schools were closed due to the civil conflict (WFP 53). Therefore, emergency school feeding could only be deployed in areas with sufficient security to allow delivery, storage and monitoring. Furthermore, school meals acted as a significant pull factor when delivered, and induced a strong increase in the number of pupils per classroom which, combined with the lack of teachers and equipment, further undermined the quality of education. Another reported limitation comes from the focus of these programmes that cannot cover the most vulnerable period for malnutrition and irreversible loss of human capital, which is between conception and age two (World Bank 62). Furthermore, school feeding programmes have the potential to create distortions in food markets resulting from procurement, transport and food distribution. Large-scale school feeding programmes are likely to also include children from less poor families (and thus have errors of inclusion). Or if they are kept small and limited to very poor areas and regions to avoid leakage, they are unable to cover the poorest children living in less poor areas (and thus have errors of exclusion).

#### **Box 2: Localizing school feeding**

In El Salvador, FAO is providing support to the Ministry of Education to implement components of the National School Feeding Programme. The country has made very good progress on linking school meals with procurement from local producers, thus providing schools with fresh and local products but also empowering local cooperatives.

Source: FAO 4

34. In some contexts, well-designed school feeding programmes can be targeted moderately accurately, though rarely as effectively as the most progressive of cash transfers. In the poorest countries, where school enrolment is low, school feeding may not reach the poorest, but in these settings alternative safety net options are often quite limited, and geographically targeted expansion of school feeding may still provide the only option for rapid scale-up safety nets. As in-kind programmes, school meals can be a practical and politically acceptable vehicle for social assistance in countries without more sophisticated systems, as long as their limitations are recognized, and longer-term options developed. It was also noted

that additional research is needed on how school feeding programmes compare with other social safety net transfer programmes that help promote human capital investment, including targeting efficiency, impact on human capital accumulation and household budgets, and the ability to scale-up quickly through the school network (World Bank 62).

### **Food distribution**

35. Several evaluations stress that food distribution contributes to preserving food security, especially during certain crises and for certain target populations, and can support local production.

36. As noted earlier, despite evidence that cash transfers are a preferred modality of support by many beneficiaries, exogenous factors do not always facilitate implementation and uptake of cash transfers (e.g. poor market conditions, unfamiliarity of beneficiaries with technology, mobile money). Furthermore, some types of crisis make food distribution more appropriate. In Ebola-affected countries, for example, evaluative evidence shows that food was considered a key component of the strategy to contain the disease. Both national and international actors saw food to be most relevant for the containment strategy – the largest component of the food assistance response, where communities/hotspots were quarantined with restricted movement (WFP 52). Several evaluations stress that the success of in-kind transfers is underpinned by an effective supply chain and logistics operation (WFP 57).

37. Several reports point out that *the composition of the food basket benefits from being localized*. In the Central African Republic, for example, beneficiaries and cooperating partners expressed concern about the food basket which was distributed as it was not adapted to local traditions. In particular, the distribution of rice was not responding to local needs and beneficiaries would often sell rice to buy manioc (WFP 54). Conversely in Northeast Nigeria, in late 2016, the cereal in the food basket was changed from rice to sorghum/millet based on cost considerations. The change to sorghum and millet was not a popular decision as it required significantly more grinding, pounding and water for preparation, more cooking time and fuel, and condiments to make the meal palatable. The evaluation found that after the change, beneficiaries claimed to have sold quantities of sorghum so they could purchase alternative food commodities (WFP 57).

38. In terms of nutrition security, the dataset contains limited quantitative data about the nutritional support provided through in-kind distributions and little benchmarking between modalities. However, a few evaluations outlined that *cash transfers or e-vouchers, either as a standalone modality or as a complement of in-kind assistance, enhance food consumption scores compared to the sole distribution of food*. Cash assistance gives beneficiaries the ability to purchase fresh products not supplied through dry rations (WFP 52, WFP 54). Therefore, several factors must be taken into account when choosing the transfer modality, including impact of market recovery, inflation, and beneficiaries' choices and preferences, as well as security and access considerations.

39. *From a cost-efficiency perspective, evaluations are not conclusive*. One report mentions that costs associated with food acquisition, transportation, storage, packaging, distribution and preparation are higher than they are for cash, food stamps or vouchers (World Bank 62). However, another evaluation reported several Omega value calculations, which measure the nutritional value of a standard food basket and the associated costs of getting it to beneficiaries. It found that the cost-effectiveness of the voucher modality compared to in-kind general food distribution was higher in some locations but lower in other, indicating that in-kind distribution was more or less cost-effective than the voucher modality depending on food baskets, market prices (and their volatility), the impact of early recovery, and security and access (WFP 54).

## **Input distribution**

40. The evaluative evidence indicates that the distribution of inputs (seeds, fertilizer, tools) offers an effective channel to restore agricultural outputs and livelihoods, but with limited long-term welfare effects largely due to timing issues and/or lack of appropriate scale.

41. Some of these interventions have been commended for giving access to better quality seeds which, together with other inputs and capacity development (see below), have generated higher yields and increased productivity, and therefore have improved household monetary incomes, assets and food security over the baseline situation (FAO 3, IFAD 11, IFAD 24, World Bank 62). Input distribution has also sometimes offered an opportunity for crop diversification (FAO 3, IFAD 11, IFAD 20). In Lesotho, for example, a key aspect of the livelihood package was the mix of maize and beans to promote inter-cropping and nitrogen fixing. Whilst in Malawi, crop diversification was found to promote nutrition security and balanced diets, and enhance the resilience of vulnerable farmers to future shocks (Box 3). Several evaluations outlined that the effectiveness of input distribution, such as seeds or fertilizers, increased with the provision of complementary support including financial services (such as micro-capital, loans, insurance and money transfer services), technical support for equipment installation and maintenance, agricultural extension, market information and advisory services (FAO 3, IFAD 17, IFAD 19, World Bank 62).

### **Box 3: Localizing inputs distribution**

In Malawi, the evaluation found that the package for the input trade fair was tailored to the different regions in terms of the proportion for maize, legumes, and vegetables seeds by putting a cap on maximum quantity, and this was designed to promote crop diversification, nutrition security and balanced diets, and enhance the resilience of vulnerable farmers to future shocks.

Source: FAO 3

42. *The effectiveness of input distribution has often been constrained by untimely delivery.* Late distribution of seasonal agricultural inputs affected uptake and/or yields in countries and situations as diverse as South Sudan's protracted conflict and insecurity context (OCHA 36, UNHCR 39); the Philippines' post-Typhoon Haiyan (IFAD 12); Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe after the El Niño-induced drought (FAO 3); or Ethiopia and Nicaragua after the food price spike of 2007-08 (World Bank 62). Insufficient and/or late supplies of quality seeds come either from the local seed industry that is not yet adequately advanced or from timely imports that cannot be arranged.

43. Finally, one report (World Bank 62) states that, in front of large-scale crises such as the 2007-08 food price spike, input distribution has limited impact. Input distribution programmes that cover only a small share of the farming community will not generate a significant supply increase. If the aggregate supply response is not large, it is unlikely that domestic food prices will decline as a result of the intervention. *Input distribution interventions require adequate scale if they are to have welfare effects (through domestic food price reduction) beyond the direct recipients of input support.* If the necessary resources for such a scale are not available or if the interventions are not justified based on a cost-benefit analysis, then the only possible justification for subsidized input distribution is crisis-impact mitigation for recipient poor farmers, and the cost effectiveness of such a measure compared to other targeted mechanisms needs to be assessed, as well as the targeting strategy.

## **What are the good practices and lessons learned in expanding community-based social protection services or national contributory social protection mechanisms, especially for urban poor, migrants and rural dwellers?**

44. Evaluations of interventions aiming to expand social protection of vulnerable populations reported various good practices and lessons learned.

### *Urban poor*

45. One key lesson drawn from the support provided to urban poor concerns the importance of designing interventions according to the profile of target beneficiaries. In north-east Nigeria, for example, cash transfers prioritized the elderly and persons with disabilities alongside other vulnerable groups in urban areas. However, this assistance did not prove specifically adapted to their needs as mobile money, operated via mobile phone, did not take into low beneficiary access to and familiarity with mobile phone technology, low literacy levels, or lack of a safe place to keep SIM cards. The evaluation found that beneficiaries receiving mobile money generally stated a preference to receive e-vouchers and in-kind assistance instead of mobile money (WFP 57).

### *Migrants*

46. Many good practices found in interventions supporting migrants come from the management of in-kind food assistance and the operationalization of the food supply chain. This includes using food supply agreements that involve purchasing specific food volumes at an agreed price with commodities drawn directly from suppliers' factories or warehouses; using long-term agreements with suppliers to keep costs low; designing retail strategies and creating collective buying clubs to enable at-scale purchasing with consequent decreases in shelf price; packaging inside the country, close to beneficiaries; diversifying the market for ground transport through a tariff system; investing in food quality assurance systems at source; improving internal management through a supply chain working group; and installing a supply chain dashboard providing real-time oversight (WFP 55).

47. Several *innovations* in the management of large-scale cash transfers were also highlighted, such as (WFP 55, UNHCR38):

- i. An iris scan technology used in camps to verify beneficiaries' identities;
- ii. Multi-agency platform and common e-cards in Lebanon;
- iii. Blockchain technology in Jordan;
- iv. Technology to generate near-real-time transaction data to monitor purchasing and retail patterns; and
- v. Cash Working Groups set-up at national and local levels.

48. In Lebanon and Jordan, *cash-based assistance was found to exacerbate pre-existing social tensions* between refugees and host communities (WFP 55), illustrating that it is critical to foresee and prevent any possible social tension arising between the targeted households and those in the host communities not benefitting from such socio-economic support (UNICEF 64). Cash transfers were also reported as an impediment to refugees seeking formal employment and a barrier to those beneficiaries seeking self-reliance. As put forward in an evaluation report, some recipients of cash assistance were unwilling to actively seek employment or inclusion into national social welfare systems "*for fear that their UNHCR salary*" will be discontinued, which calls for the development of exit strategies for cash assistance that promote self-reliance (UNHCR 63). Cash transfers also sometimes missed the opportunity to further enable financial or economic inclusion of recipients. In Turkey, for example, UNHCR cash transfers to livelihood training beneficiaries were not designed to build their profile with the financial institution, which could have promoted their access to other financial products in the future (UNHCR 63).

## Rural dwellers

49. Several good practices were found that improved the effectiveness and sustainability of input distribution in rural areas, such as: grouping farmers and fishers into grass-roots organizations, unions and federations; reintroducing improved seeds through a local multiplication and distribution network; setting-up community-based listening clubs and farmer field schools based on the models developed by FAO (IFAD 11); and localizing inputs distribution (FAO 3). On the other hand, some evaluations found that inadequate road infrastructure and unreliable transport systems could hinder the impact of input distribution by limiting or preventing sales of the produce (Box 4; World Bank 62).

### What contributed to making such interventions more relevant and effective?

50. Some factors that contributed to making social protection interventions more relevant and effective include:

- i. **Integration of food assistance into local social safety nets:** Building an element of sustainability *ex ante* has been found to contribute to the uptake and institutionalization of these interventions. For example, some evaluations positively assessed the alignment of WFP's emergency social safety net in Turkey with the Government's social safety net system, or the support provided with food commodities to the national *Tkiyet Um Ali (TUA)* social safety net in Jordan (WFP 53, WFP 55). Furthermore, working actively with the Government, advocating for the institutionalization of safety nets, organizing field visits and workshops, and strengthening national capacities were found to facilitate the integration of safety nets such as school feeding programmes into national planning (WFP 53, WFP 59, WFP 60).
- ii. **Collaboration with national and local partners and stakeholders:** Participation in national government coordination mechanisms, building links with ministries, including through formalized Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), and developing capacities of national partners to realize national risk management policies/strategies were found to contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of the interventions (WFP 52, WFP 59, WFP 60). Similarly, the involvement of local governments, municipalities and communities (both men and women), local groups, extension workers and subnational institutions in decisions related to the design and targeting criteria of the interventions has enhanced their relevance and effectiveness (FAO 3, FAO 4, UNHCR 38, WFP 52, WFP 55). The efficiency and sustainability of school meal programmes, for example, were improved by installing local partnerships and enhancing the school feeding infrastructure (WFP 60).

### Box 4. Bundling recovery and reconstruction

During the civil war, agricultural activities had been disrupted throughout Sierra Leone, and hence, after the conflict, agricultural production was very low and mainly based on labour-intensive subsistence agriculture. [...] In its first phase, [the project] focused on rehabilitation of farmland and infrastructure, and included the provision of seeds and tools. This approach of post-conflict recovery and reconstruction played right into the immediate needs of poor smallholders in the two districts that had been hardest hit by the civil war. [...] The project's impact on incomes and assets of the beneficiaries was positive, as measured through the impact assessment study. This was largely a result of successfully increasing production and productivity, up to two rice harvests in a year, on the back of improved seeds, fertilizer use and farmer training on best agricultural practices. Roads were the high point of the project; their benefits went beyond connecting farms to markets to make physical accessibility of health care and education far better. Institutional capacities of Government structures and grassroots organizations were augmented, and human capital was honed through training on a number of skillsets.

Source: IFAD 24

- iii. **National preparedness and capacities for emergency response:** Several evaluations reported *preparedness and response gaps in national institutions*, including lengthy assessment and government approval processes; late government recognition of the emergency; absence of emergency departments in critical line ministries; intervening political dynamics; slow funding decisions and processes; competing humanitarian priorities; and lack of financial resources (FAO 3, WFP 57, WFP 59 World Bank 62). Therefore, the preparedness of UN agencies and national partners was found to be a key factor contributing to the effectiveness of these interventions. For example, a swift cash transfer scale-up can be facilitated through pre-agreements with finance providers; skills development in systems for cash operations; development of preparedness plans by functional units; and agreements signed in advance with cooperating partners with expertise in cash-based transfers (WFP 65).
- iv. **Targeting and assessments:** A range of tools are available to support designing relevant responses. WFP’s Transfer Modality & Transfer Mechanism Selection Guidance, for example, helps compare in-kind assistance, cash transfers, vouchers and their combinations using four criteria: context, feasibility, cost-efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.<sup>20</sup> Technologies, such as mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) and mobile Post-Distribution Monitoring (mPDM), can help with health and security risks. These instruments facilitate the collection and sharing of market and food security information from areas with limited humanitarian access and were reported effective in different crisis contexts. WFP’s remote data collection methods, for example, were used to good effect where restrictions on staff movements and the risk of exposing enumerators and beneficiaries to the Ebola virus disease made regular face-to-face monitoring practically impossible (WFP 55).
- v. **Adaptive management, agility and learning:** Adjusting modalities to local conditions and needs as they evolve enabled more effective responses. For example, when the delivery of cash using mobile phones confronted significant challenges in north-east Nigeria (due to low beneficiary access to and familiarity with mobile phone technology, inability to perform programmatic reconciliation, and liquidity problems), the intervention was complemented with approaches such as e-vouchers and in-kind distributions that proved effective to reach both targeted populations and new areas (WFP 55, WFP 57). Another example comes from

**Box 4: Integrating social protection interventions into safety nets**

A key development instrument in Ethiopia that can be adapted during times of crisis is the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The PSNP is a social safety net that provides food or cash to chronically food insecure households. The PSNP has a contingency mechanism that enables it to add additional people to the beneficiary list or to extend the number of months over which participants receive assistance, from six to nine months. Its contingency budget can also be used to support humanitarian food assistance. These contingency mechanisms were used in 2015 (USD 16 million) to add three distribution rounds. In 2016 and 2017, donors increased their contributions to the PSNP to support its expansion as part of the drought response. The World Bank, for example, provided an additional USD 100 million and USD 108.1 million, respectively, primarily from the International Development Association’s Crisis Response Window. The interviewees who commented on this PSNP expansion lauded its contribution to buffering some of the effects of the droughts. However, they also highlighted the fact that the PSNP itself can only be expanded in *woredas [districts]* in which it is already active.

Source: WFP 59

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



interventions in the Ebola-affected countries where nutrition protocols were adapted to ensure activities could be carried out with minimum contact and risk when taking anthropometric measurements (WFP 52). Adaptive management also includes the ability to regularly revise budgets and the cost of interventions (WFP 52, WFP 55). Periods of insecurity in South Sudan led to shifts in financial resources in order to provide critical life-saving activities, but at the expense of livelihood interventions, which often had to be deprioritized. While life-saving sectors have been argued as key, often they contribute little towards the self-reliance of refugees and tend to undo gains realized as they foster dependency on humanitarian assistance (UNHCR 63).

- vi. **Protection and safety:** Response to the Ebola disease brought the development of new policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), guidelines, and notes to reflect the situation (e.g. how to conduct safe post distribution monitoring; correct usage of personal protective equipment [PPE]); instructions on staff or beneficiary illness during distribution; and guidelines on nutritional support to Ebola patients. Traditional ways of distribution were revised to include measures to mitigate crowds and shorten waiting times before and during distribution; rotation of staff to reduce exposure to the risk of infection; ensuring the presence of stand-by health workers on site; and provision of protective, hygiene, sanitation and medical materials. A series of staff health and well-being measures were defined and systematically applied to all those going to Ebola-affected countries. These included a thorough psychosocial screening prior to entry, regular health checks and an Ebola exit check. Security clearance from United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) depended upon the results of the exit medical checks (WFP 57).
- vii. **Results and monitoring framework:** When designing interventions, formulating a detailed theory of change and identifying outcome-level indicators to measure the impact of the modality were found to support strategic objectives. Examples include introducing indicators that monitor the contribution of food assistance to containing the spread of a disease or to realizing health objectives (WFP 52); or emphasizing literacy objectives to enhance the effectiveness and educational outcomes of school feeding programmes (WFP 60). On a related note, drafting monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies at country and regional levels provides a framework for standardized tools and supports the mobilization of resources for M&E, which increases the quality and timeliness of data collected (WFP 52).

**What are the good practices and lessons learned in strengthening UN collaboration on such interventions (including through integrated analysis and multi-packaged approach, and with agencies that do not have a country presence)?**

51. Several good practices on UN collaboration can be highlighted:

- i. **Binding the comparative advantages of several agencies in response to a type of crisis contributes to improving the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions.** Many programmes were designed to leverage the comparative advantages of participating agencies (e.g. Box 3). In addition, a range of institutional instruments were found to contribute to joint decision-making and response. *Activation of the IPC L3 was found effective to impact the agencies' ability to take early actions and activate internal support systems* (FAO 3, UNHCR 38). Joint agreements, such as the joint World Health Organization (WHO)/WFP agreement for operation support in response to the Ebola crisis, were found to pave the way for future emergency response and inter-agency support on pandemics and health crises, while ensuring that each agency's comparative advantage and capacities were maximized (WFP 52). Similarly, the institutional

partnership between FAO, WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the tools created (e.g. the Global Early Warning and Response System for Major Animal Diseases, including Zoonosis, [GLEWS]) and specialized backstopping services were reported as being an institutional good practice (FAO 1). Another example of productive collaboration is provided by the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA)<sup>21</sup> tools, which were found effective to help countries analyse and develop options for improving their social protection systems (WFP 58).

- ii. **A few evaluations stressed the added value of joint assessments and integrated analysis, noting this has contributed to the quality and coverage of the interventions** (UNICEF 46, WFP 55). However, these joint assessments and integrated analyses would deserve to be systematized, and involve additional partners and stakeholders (FAO 2, ILO 29, UNICEF 46), as well as to have their quality improved sometimes (WFP 59).
- iii. **Some reports found that resource mobilization and access to funding had created unproductive competition sometimes between agencies.** For example, tensions were reported sometimes between UNHCR and WFP following donor selection of WFP as its main partner for cash-based delivery. The resulting sense of “competition for resources” impeded the spirit of partnership for a period of several months (WFP 55, WFP 58). Similarly, for the overall drought response in Ethiopia, gaps between food, nutrition, health and water responses persisted, and uncoordinated minimum standards and cash-for-work rates had a negative impact on agencies’ capacity to operate effectively. Efforts to address these gaps were not successful due to misaligned funding priorities among donors, competition between humanitarian organizations and a lack of follow-up to global missions (WFP 59).

### What contributed to making such interventions more coherent and efficient?

52. The following factors were identified as contributing to make UN interventions more coherent and efficient:

- i. **Preparedness:** It is recognized that coordination of social protection interventions in global crises is complex due to the specialized mandate of participating agencies, each covering one piece of the agenda, from UNICEF’s focus on children’s nutrition to the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF’s) focus on fiscal costs of safety net programmes (World Bank 62). A proactive approach to inter-agency emergency preparedness, including agreed protocols for early warning triggers, contributes to the effectiveness of the response (FAO 3, WFP 57, UNHCR 38). Conversely, factors limiting the effectiveness of interventions include *insufficiently prepared international institutions* (FAO 3, UNHCR 38, WFP 59). The application of standard administrative procedures as business as usual can significantly delay delivery

#### Box 5: Seed protection campaign

Food assistance for assets [*in the Central African Republic*] provided support to more than 700 000 beneficiaries from 2012 to 2016, or around 20 percent of the total number. It was first applied in the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, where the assets were mainly in the form of early agricultural recovery through seed protection cooperation with FAO. The activity responded to communities, which reported not having enough seed to plant for the next agricultural season (March and May). Through the seed protection cooperation, WFP provided food rations to vulnerable households while FAO provided seeds and tools to protect their productive assets during the lean season. The seed protection cooperation was expanded [...], where WFP provided seed protection rations to 50 000 vulnerable households in 6 high-priority prefectures out of 17 where FAO distributed seeds and tools, and with seed protection rations, this corresponded to around half of the full general food distribution ration

<sup>21</sup> <https://ispatools.org>

of project interventions. Responsible factors also include administrative procedures that require signing a MOU between partner institutions, which can take several months, or standard procedures for payment that do not align well with the processing of cash transfers (ILO 27).

- ii. **Strong leadership and efficient coordination of interventions were crucial in defining the overall response architecture.** The L3 activation accelerated and mobilised a scaled capacity of leadership, staffing and funding. This increased opportunities for synergy among UN agencies resulting in greater programme effectiveness at the strategic and operational levels (WFP 52).
- iii. **Plenary discussions between UN partners were reported more effective to ensure effective coordination than multiple bilateral consultations.** In the response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the evaluation found that better inter-agency communication could have resulted in greater synergies and multiplying opportunities, for example, conducting joint/tripartite discussions between WFP, WHO and UNICEF rather than engaging in parallel/bilateral discussions. Improved communication within the UN system at country level could have resulted in a quicker and more effective response to the crisis (WFP 52).

## 3.2 Economic response and recovery

53. The structure of this section follows the study questions defined for Pillar 2.

### **What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises?**

#### *Value chain development*

54. The evaluative evidence indicates that value chain development can reduce food insecurity and promote a recovery after an acute crisis, even though longer-term resilience programmes are better equipped to strengthen livelihoods (FAO 2). Support to value chain development has contributed to increasing the productivity of crops and livestock and to bring access to new markets (IFAD 20, IFAD 21, UNIDO 50, MOFA Netherlands 35, ILO 29). *Some evidence indicates also that poor and very poor households and groups can be reached with a value chain approach* (IFAD 19)

#### *Early warning systems*

55. Contrasted assessments were found regarding the effectiveness of the Food Security Information and Early Warning System (FSIEWS) to support economic response and recovery. On the one hand, several reports positively assessed the availability of early warning information prior to a crisis. This includes, for example, the availability of agro-meteorological and early warning information prior to the El Niño-induced drought in Southern Africa (FAO 3); early warning information on the severity of the different droughts in Ethiopia (WFP 59); early warning of the food security crisis in north-east Nigeria (WFP 57); or early warning information prior to the internally displaced persons crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNHCR 38).

56. However, there is significant evidence that Food Security Monitoring and Early Warning interventions have confronted a lack of early action despite early warning (FAO 3, UNHCR 38, WFP 57, WFP 59, World Bank 62). More contextual shortcomings include: early warning information and reports not available in the local language and containing inaccessible scientific jargon; reports not

reaching affected communities (rural communities, pastoralists); and reports missing indicators relevant to some of the affected communities (WFP 59).

### ***Policy advice***

57. Evaluative evidence shows that policy-oriented interventions are contextual and multimodal, spanning across a range of areas reflective of the mandate and comparative advantages of the organizations represented in the dataset. Under the umbrella of food security and inclusive development, policy support spans across the mandates, technical expertise and comparative advantages of partner organizations. *Across this large portfolio, there is recurring evidence of an effective contribution of policy advice to institutional development* (FAO 1, IFAD 12, IFAD 13, ILO 28, WFP 61), for example, in support of the operationalization of a national “Microfinance Act” (Sri Lanka) or in support of gaining full membership in an intergovernmental organisation (Maldives/India Ocean Tuna Commission). Another area where policy engagement was found effective concerns the *improvement of legislative and regulatory frameworks*, with significant evidence from interventions on inclusive rural finance (IFAD 10, IFAD 15, IFAD 20, IFAD 21, IFAD 24).

58. Several approaches used to deliver policy advice return mixed assessments. On the one hand, policy-oriented capacity development, policy analysis and research, policy conferences, forums and working groups were often found effective in conveying policy advice, and contributing to economic response and recovery (IFAD 12, IFAD 13, IFAD 15, IFAD 21, World Bank 62). However, on the other hand, evidence also shows instances where these interventions yielded limited, if any, results when not embedded in partnerships with other international partners (including donors) and/or anchored in dialogues on the development of national strategies and policies (IFAD 16, IFAD 18, IFAD 20). Several evaluation reports also indicate that, despite the aim of supporting policymaking from the bottom up, *project-supported activities have often not provided inputs or a basis for engaging in national or subnational policy issues* (FAO 2, IFAD 12, IFAD 20, IFAD 22).

### ***Employment/entrepreneurship promotion***

59. Many evaluation reports found rural employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes effective in providing poor workers with a source of income while contributing to the rehabilitation - or creation - of public and community infrastructures and restoration of agricultural production, e.g. land clearing, de-silting (ILO 27, IOM 32, UNIDO 48, IFAD 10, ILO 29, ILO 27, MOFA Netherlands 35, World Bank 62). One evaluation also noted that *these programmes were valuable as they were already in place and part of the few existing social safety nets that could be scaled-up in most crisis-affected countries including fragile states* (World Bank 62). These interventions were found effective albeit reaching different scale and size, spanning from the national to the subnational level, and from a few dozens to several hundred beneficiaries or more (over 100 000 reported beneficiaries in IFAD 10 and World Bank 62). Various interventions were positively assessed for providing target communities with new skills (e.g. masonry, carpentry, food processing) and increased employability. In some instances, these interventions were also reported to contribute to social cohesion and improving security in the implementation areas (IFAD 10, ILO 29, UNHCR 40, IOM 32). In some cases, job creation was a means (intermediate outcome) to enhance social cohesion (final outcome). Interventions were also sometimes used as vehicles to develop awareness and appreciation among communities for ‘decent work’, ‘social protection’ and ‘safe work’ (ILO 27, ILO 28). Nevertheless, a few reports also noted limited impact of those programmes on job creation and room for *scaling the interventions in other provinces or at national level* (IFAD 14, IFAD 22, IFAD 23).

## What are the good practices and lessons learned in conducting and coordinating needs assessments and diagnosis of agri-food labour market and business environments for crisis response and recovery?

60. Good practices in conducting needs assessments and diagnosis of agri-food labour market and business environments show the complexity of these tasks. On the one hand, evidence-based assessments (needs/market/value-chains) are reported as more effective when looking at the productive, institutional, socio-economic and agro-ecological systems in an *integrated* way (FAO 3). On the other hand, it is important to conduct *disaggregated* needs assessments and a *detailed diagnosis* of the agri-food labour market and business environments. In that context, an example of good practice is the “*In-depth Gender Sensitive Value Chain Analysis of Horticultural and Livestock Sectors in Sohag and Tahta Districts*”. This analysis was designed to incorporate women’s agricultural opportunities from the outset, and local government institutions and community members participated actively in the planning process. The findings and recommendations of this value chain analysis were used during project implementation (UNIDO 50). Another example of good practice is a disaggregated analysis differentiating between the very poor, poor and better-off rural populations using a multidimensional definition of poverty in line with country and project contexts. The approach used information on target groups such as income-based measures and survey data, asset-based indicators (e.g. land operated or livestock owned), and other relevant characteristics of poor and disadvantaged groups (e.g. subsistence farmers, asset-less, women, indigenous and minority groups, illiterate, HIV/AIDS affected or disabled, and those in remote areas) (IFAD 19).

### Box 6: Vulnerability assessment and mapping

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, despite access challenges, WFP has made considerable effort to shed light on the food security landscape. It collects data on a frequent basis to map food security and nutrition patterns and deficits across the country, applying a wide range of tools including food security assessments (FSAs), crop and food security assessment missions (CFSAMs), rapid food security data and market assessments, cash-based transfer market assessments, plus monthly VAM food price monitoring. The mVAM system, implemented from Amman, collects household food security data by phone, including from hard-to-reach and besieged areas.

Source: WFP 55

61. Good practices were also reported from interventions supporting food security monitoring and early warning systems.

This includes the integration of nutritional indicators in early warning systems (FAO 6); decentralized early warning systems and information centres (ILO 26); gendered early warning systems (IOM 30); early warning systems using satellite technology to understand needs in inaccessible areas (WFP 57) or drones for geomatics assessment (UNICEF 46); and technologies such as mVAM and mPDM to help cope with health and security risks (Box 7).

62. The evaluative evidence also conveyed several lessons from conducting and coordinating needs assessments and diagnosis of agri-food labour market and business environments:

1. Many interventions *lack adequate needs assessments and/or have limited if any economic and financial feasibility analysis* of the value chain, hampering their relevance and effectiveness (IFAD 12, IFAD 15, IFAD 24, UNHCR 40). Needs assessments and diagnosis of agri-food labour market and business environments are sometimes partial leading to, for example, employment skills trainings or cash-for-work programmes that do not respond to the demand of beneficiaries (ILO 27, IOM 31), or entrepreneurship programmes in areas with high poverty levels that may prove not conducive for micro-enterprises to market certain outputs (e.g. dairy commercialization) (IFAD 21).

2. The *challenge of targeting beneficiaries in emergency situations*, as discussed across many evaluation reports. Targeting is often a combination of geographic and community-based, which leads to risks that the intended beneficiaries would not be reached and/or that the non-poor might benefit (World Bank 62). On a similar note, one report highlights instances of adequate geographical targeting but mixed experiences with more focused targeting (WFP 65). Examples of challenges include: the limited involvement of partners in developing targeting criteria; limited time to enable targeting; limited consultation and involvement of affected populations in development of targeting approaches; and continuing efforts to reach as many people as possible as the driver of decisions regarding targeting. External factors, such as funding levels, were also highlighted as a challenge. Positive experiences of community-based targeting systems include those reported in West Africa and in the 2017 Sri Lanka cyclone response. Evidence suggests the benefits of cooperation with organizations with specialist focus areas, for example, WFP cooperation with Handicap International in Sri Lanka helped identify eligible beneficiaries from among the disabled population, and cooperation in Nepal with women's associations in the earthquake response increased women's access to assistance. However, in Pakistan, short-term contracts with partners hindered in-depth targeting of beneficiaries in the later stages of responses. The use of technologies to assess needs and analyse markets is also a challenge, as they risk introducing bias against certain population groups such as older people, persons with disability or those who are illiterate.
  
3. Interventions that deliver policy advice benefit from prior analysis and an understanding of country context. Furthermore, regularly updated information is critical to make sure contributions from UN partners remain pertinent and complementary to those of governments and other national or international organizations. However, several evaluations highlight a *lack of data at the country level for assessing the welfare impacts of a crisis and hence for targeting specific interventions* (FAO 1, World Bank 62)

**What are the good practices and lessons learned in scaling-up employment intensive programming in the agri-food sector, especially during or after a crisis?**

63. Several evaluations indicate that economic recovery interventions are complex to design, implement and scale-up. Examples of employment initiatives replicated across geographic locations (e.g. value chains, cooperatives), showed scaling had been rather limited compared to the size of a country (IFAD 12, IFAD 20, IFAD 21). Furthermore, public work programmes rarely achieve a large-scale and *require significant investment resources* (World Bank 62) and eventually *remain for a sufficient length of time – 10 to 20 years of effective work* (IFAD 11). Rural employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes cannot be successful and sustained on their own but require complementary mechanisms such as: political will; robust governance and strong coordination; follow-up projects; interdisciplinary and multisectoral actions; capacity building components; linkages with employers; and the potential to embed results into policy (FAO 5, ILO 28, WFP 55, WFP 59).

64. Supply chain development is similarly complex due to the broad and diverse range of conditions that need to be in place for value chains to be viable, inclusive and sustainable. Therefore, focusing *on a limited number of intervention modalities or sequencing interventions through several project phases* was sometimes referred to as good practice (IFAD 19, IFAD 24). Furthermore, *several reports pointed out the need for - and frequent lack of - scaling strategies*. Such strategies could present a theory of change for scaling-up results; plan for analytical work and knowledge management; identify partnerships covering strategic, financial and technical collaboration; aim for increased visibility and presence in the development partners' forums and working groups; and pave the way to stronger policy

engagement at the country programme level and beyond the project level (FAO 5, IFAD 20, IFAD 25, MOFA Netherlands 35).

65. A few reports also noted that project-level M&E systems were not always designed to facilitate scaling, lacking relevant *outcome-level indicators* that could provide insights into the effects of interventions on employment generation (e.g. number of persons, additionality, full-time/part-time, permanent/seasonal); multiplier effects (e.g. through transportation, storage, conditioning and processing); indirect results (e.g. changes in perceptions at policy level, changes in behaviour of value chain actors); and food security and nutrition outcomes (IFAD 16, IFAD 19, MOFA 35, World Bank 62).

### **What groups or categories of people have benefited the most or the least from these interventions and why?**

66. Evaluative evidence shows that interventions supporting economic recovery have benefited vulnerable populations to different extents:

- i. **Rural dwellers:** Several evaluations indicate that *farmers, smallholders and small-scale producers have benefited the most from the support provided to value chain development* (IFAD 19, IFAD 24, MOFA Netherlands 35, UNIDO 50). Pastoralists, rural poor and vulnerable social groups were not reported to have significantly benefited from these intervention (IFAD 22, IFAD 20, IFAD 13, IFAD 21). The targeting of these groups often remains a challenge for projects focused on the development of agricultural value chains. The technical aspects of the projects are generally relevant to the agro-ecological characteristics of the intervention areas, but not always to the socio-economic dynamics of each region. Significant evidence was found of rural employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes targeting the youth. Some interventions were reported having achieved significant results (IFAD 10, UNHCR 40) while other programmes offered a more limited contribution to improving employment prospects in the long run (IFAD 19, IFAD 21, IFAD 23).

- ii. **Women:** There is some, albeit limited, evidence that women have benefited from policy-oriented interventions. The importance and need to strengthen gender approaches in policy support was sometimes recognized (IFAD 10, IFAD 22, World Bank 62). As for the gender perspective in value chain development, the review is inconclusive. Some evaluations found that women have benefited from these interventions (UNIDO 50, IFAD 21, ILO 29, IFAD 10), whilst others show limited results (MOFA Netherlands 35, IFAD 25, IFAD 24). Some evidence was found of *employment and entrepreneurship promotion programmes targeting women through*, for example, specific activities (such as group mobilization and organizational strengthening, microenterprise development, leadership and literacy training, vocational training and employment, finance and technology); supporting “women-prevalent” value chains (e.g. food crops, small ruminants and artisan products); or some functions in the value chains (e.g. agro-processing). Several evaluations positively assessed the effectiveness of the gender component of these interventions (Box 8; IFAD 10, IFAD 19, ILO 29). However, a few reports also pointed out the *limited contribution of the interventions to creating jobs for women* (IFAD 11, IFAD 23). *Equitable employment* also noted some shortcomings, such as when no improvement had been seen on the role of women in decision-making. Management of agricultural outputs, for example, largely remained a male dominated business despite the changes intended by some interventions and indication that where women dominate production and sales, there are better food security effects (MOFA Netherlands 35).
- iii. **Migrants:** Migrants are key actors in production, processing and distribution. However, despite several evaluations returning a positive assessment of the capacity building activities and trainings provided to migrants (most often refugees), the evidence does not show that interventions were effective in enhancing employment for these populations (ILO 28, UNHCR 40, WFP 53). For refugees, national policies and legislations were the main factors constraining the effectiveness and sustainability of the programmes. Furthermore, when the legislation for work permits has been in place, self-employment and/or informal employment have remained the main option for many (ILO 28). Language barriers are also a commonly mentioned obstacle to finding decent employment (ILO 28, UNHCR 40).

**Box 7: Focus on gender-sensitive value chains**

Gender was mainstreamed into the project from the design phase which clearly articulated how it intended to focus specific activities to support women. During implementation, the project clearly disaggregated all project reports and internal M&E by gender. The value chain analysis used by the project to prioritize areas of intervention was also gender sensitive with a specific emphasis on the role of women in various agricultural value chains and a strong emphasis on gender in its data collection methodology. [...] It is assessed the project has effectively supported women by focusing on particular small-scale processing and agricultural activities undertaken predominately by women, especially the support to loofah processing, the training provided for livestock care (predominately a woman’s role in the household) and poultry breeding.

Source: UNIDO 50

**What are the main factors contributing and/or constraining the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions?**

67. The following factors were found to contribute and/or constrain the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions supporting economic recovery:



- i. **State fragility:** *Several reports point out higher challenges for and lower performance of interventions in fragile countries, which face weak policies, institutions and governance. Fragile countries rarely have social safety net systems in place and suffer low economic growth, widespread inequality and poor human development. Interventions in fragile countries faced many challenges, including (IFAD 9, Word Bank 62):*
  - a. A gap between global advice and feasible approaches that can be implemented in fragile states, and ambitious intervention objectives and complex project design.
  - b. Weak policy frameworks and insufficient institutional capacity for service delivery within government at various levels and the private sector.
  - c. Insecurity preventing supervision and implementation support missions to be fielded in concerned project areas.
  - d. Poor project management capacities and disconnect between the country programme and project design in terms of the priority areas of intervention.
  - e. Limited incentives, practical tools and training for staff working in fragile situations.
  - f. Poor quality of data stemming from weak data collection systems, low capacity for analysis and insufficient resources for activities that are not always seen as priorities, especially under conflict and crisis circumstances.
  
- ii. **Partnerships:** *A key factor contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions supporting economic recovery is partnerships (IFAD 10, IFAD 15, IFAD 20). Mobilizing partnerships benefits from the presence of a concrete strategy that: clearly defines objectives and sufficient resources; describes selected approaches for implementation support and supervision; identifies potential partners for such work; presents knowledge development activities; and introduces an outreach and communication plan with activities such as media events, workshops and websites (IFAD 10, IFAD 22). Nonetheless, in a few cases, evaluations questioned the relevance of working with Government staff in designing and implementing value chain interventions, which were typically *market and private sector driven*. The notion of asking public agencies and bureaucrats to develop value chains and provide matching one-off grants was not always perceived to be fully appropriate (IFAD 10, IFAD 12). In a few cases, evaluative evidence shows that interventions were successful in strengthening linkages between supply chain actors (MOFA Netherlands 35, IFAD 19). However, many interventions were found to not have created sufficient horizontal and vertical linkages between all actors to facilitate sustainable development in a fragile context. Interventions have room to *strengthen linkages with private sector actors* by creating incentives for their participation, including risk- and cost-sharing mechanisms; *with financial institutions*, by strengthening their capacity to expand financial services tailored to the situation and needs of small family farms and rural microenterprises; *with academic and research and development institutions* to promote methodological and technical innovation, M&E, and recording and disseminating innovations (IFAD 10, IFAD 12, IFAD 21, IFAD 22, IFAD 24).*
  
- iii. **Policies and regulations:** *Several evaluations point out that a supportive regulatory environment contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of economic recovery interventions. Policies can create an enabling environment for private sector*

*participation and public-private partnerships. The regulatory framework can provide incentives to increase productivity and attract more private sector investment in value chain upgrading.* It can also facilitate the availability of inputs and access to productive resources, including land, infrastructures and services in rural areas, supported by security of tenure, urban-rural terms of trade, and a national discourse on agriculture and family farming (IFAD 15, IFAD 18, IFAD 24, IFAD 25). National policies also contribute to making agriculture an attractive sector of employment which is a key factor contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions. *National policies and legislations were also reported to be a key factor constraining the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions targeting refugees.* National legislations do not always allow integration of foreign workers in the formal labour market. Furthermore, some stakeholders showed little appetite to establish large-scale public works programmes supported by regulatory frameworks that may decrease the willingness of refugees to return to their countries of origin (ILO 28, WFP 53, UNHCR 40). *The decentralized structure of the government was sometimes seen to constrain the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.* For instance, federal systems, devolution processes or decentralization reforms such as those in Kenya, Nigeria or the Philippines, increased the complexity of policy support (IFAD 21, IFAD 10).

- iv. **Country presence:** *Country presence* is another factor that has reportedly contributed to the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions supporting economic recovery. Interventions such as policy support, or **food** security monitoring and early warning, were found to require a strong understanding of the local context, not only the food security and nutrition situation, but also the institutional context, including the capacities and limitations of national agencies responsible for leading an emergency response. Effective policy engagement also requires regular dialogue and interaction with governments and development partners. A formal in-country representation was therefore noted to be important, and policy advice has been found more effective when staff were located within the office of the government (FAO 1, IFAD 10, IFAD 12, IFAD 21, IFAD 24). When there is no established country office for an agency and conditions require a lifesaving response, *arrangements for attachment to UN agencies* (resident coordinators' offices, UNDP, FAO, UNICEF) and/or national counterparts to further enhance partnership can contribute to the effectiveness of interventions (WFP 57).

68. Some other factors found to more specifically contribute and/or constrain effectiveness and sustainability of value chain interventions include:

- i. **Attitudes and behaviours:** Several evaluations stressed that *behavioural change was an important success factor in the effectiveness and sustainability of value chain development.* Trust needs to be built between producers, value chain actors and wholesalers to change attitudes and practices. These processes take time, but projects have also not sufficiently provided attention to mechanisms that foster dialogue, improve communication and collaboration, create synergies and mutual trust, and support behavioural change (MOFA Netherlands 35, GAC 7, IFAD 19, IFAD 24). This includes the project M&E component that would benefit from tracking indirect results, such as changes in perceptions at policy level and in behaviour of value chain actors (MOFA Netherlands 35).

- ii. **Marketing and market access:** Many evaluations noted that *marketing and consumer issues* were overlooked in project design or insufficiently prioritized during implementation. Marketing was found as one of the weak spots in value chain interventions (IFAD 13, IFAD 16, IFAD 19, IFAD 21, IFAD 24, UNHCR 40). This ranged from simply selecting value chains with strong market demand to tailored support enabling producers to **meet** buyer standards for quality and food safety. One good practice to improve the marketability of products has been to establish standards that are less challenging for poorer small producers than international certification standards (Box 9).
- iii. **Infrastructure:** Several reports noted that *localization of value chain actors and road infrastructure* were factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions (MOFA Netherlands 35, IFAD 19, IFAD 23). The appropriateness of the value chain approach was found to largely depend on the local context. Therefore, in areas that are **geographically** remote from main road networks, where primary production involves low yields, hygiene conditions are precarious and nutrition security is weak, it may be premature to adopt a value chain approach. In such contexts, projects to improve basic services (e.g. potable water, feeder roads and sanitation), enhance productivity and strengthen grassroots organizations may be more appropriate to lay the foundation for later supporting access to markets and integration with value chains.
- iv. **Rural finance:** *Many evaluations underscore that establishing synergies between rural finance and value chain projects and identifying mechanisms for sustainable smallholder access to credit remain a priority.* Rural financial services are an important factor in investments in agriculture and in the establishment of value chains, and thus a key contributor to rural employment and rural poverty reduction. Despite rural finance institutions at the grassroots level emerging, access to financial services for the rural poor is still limited, and existing financial products and lending terms are not (yet) suitable for longer-term investments in agriculture. In addition, links with service providers are generally weak (IFAD 18, IFAD 21, IFAD 23, IFAD 24).

#### Box 9: Localized organic certification

The *Amanecer Rural* [project] in El Salvador collaborated with a university to develop a less demanding organic certification scheme for national markets, to enable producers to take advantage of the growing interest in chemical free food among the local population. Similarly, PAPAC in Sao Tome and Principe supported the development of a protected geographical indication certification scheme for export crops. These locally developed schemes may be more suited to the reality of small-scale producers than are many international schemes.

Source: IFAD 19

### 3.3 Social cohesion and community resilience

69. The structure of this section follows the study questions defined for Pillar 3.

**What interventions have better supported social cohesion and helped vulnerable population groups become more resilient to food insecurity?**

70. Significant evidence was found of interventions reported as effective in supporting social cohesion through approaches such as *social dialogue*, contacts between conflicting communities, exchange visits, vocational and skill development (e.g. leadership skills), and *trainings* including on conflict resolution mechanisms (IFAD 21, ILO 29, ILO 28, IOM 32, UNICEF 41, WFP 54, WFP 55).

71. *Support to social cohesion is frequently part of multi-faceted interventions*, including cash transfers (IOM 32, WFP 55), school meal programmes (WFP 54), restoration of education capacities (UNICEF 41), livelihood activities and economic recovery (IFAD 21, ILO 29, UNHCR 40). For example, school feeding in the Central African Republic promoted national reconciliation and social cohesion because the proposed supported schools gathered children from mixed Christian-Muslim populations as a key selection criterion (WFP 54).

72. In some instances, interventions were reported to be moderately effective in supporting social cohesion when, for example there was limited coverage (both geographically and in terms of target population covered) and scaling-up in the countries covered (UNIDO 48). One report also noted that cash transfers had exacerbated pre-existing social tensions between beneficiaries (refugees) and local community members (WFP 55). It has been further advised to foresee and prevent any possible social tension arising between the targeted households and the rest of the host communities who do not benefit from such socio-economic support (Box 10; UNICEF 64).

73. Other effective approaches to support rural communities become more resilient to food insecurity include the *caisses de resilience*, which add a saving component to the farmer field schools, and community resilience funds (Box 10; FAO 2).

#### **Box 8: Community resilience funds**

Interventions in Zimbabwe were firmly based on the agreement of the Agriculture National Steering Committee (ANSC). The ANSC strongly discouraged free input distribution, instead encouraging farmers to contribute in cash to ensure their commitment and reduce donor dependency. The evaluation found that FAO adhered to this directive and did not provide free handouts for the FAO 2016/17 response, rather the inputs were provided at a subsidized price (50 percent) and proceeds put into a community resilience fund and reinvested into the community through community projects. The sales of the inputs and resilience fund were managed by the Agricultural Development Associations (ADA), who decided which community projects should be undertaken. The use of resources in the resilience fund was restricted to the development of agriculture-related activities such as the rehabilitation of infrastructure (e.g. warehouses, boreholes and dip tanks) and procurement of additional stock feed.

Source: FAO 3

**What are the good practices and lessons learned in identifying the most affected populations and their needs in COVID-like contexts (e.g. lockdown, social distancing)?**

74. Several evaluation reports recognize the complexity in identifying the most affected populations and their needs in crises that impose social distancing (e.g. Ebola virus disease, Zika virus disease), or in situations where affected populations cannot be easily reached (e.g. conflict, disaster, remote areas). *One effective approach to mitigate these constraints involves using community-based organizations or local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to target hard-to-reach areas* (UNIDO 50, UNICEF 46).

75. Another set of effective mechanisms makes use of different forms of *Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)*. mVAM and mPDM are effective tools for collecting data in an environment where traditional forms of data collection and analysis were not feasible (Box 7; WFP 54, WFP 55, WFP 57). Other ICT applications reported as effective for collecting data include the U-Report, an open-source text-message-based social network that provides SMS mechanisms (UNICEF 41, UNICEF 42, UNICEF 44, UNICEF 45); mHero, a system that links into the government's existing databases of health workers (UNICEF 42); EduTrac, a school monitoring system that uses a mobile-phone-based data collection system, which was used to track school readiness to reopen and other key variables (UNICEF 42); UNICEF Mobile Monitoring System, a smartphone app that enables real-time third-party field monitoring of humanitarian interventions (UNICEF 46). Online social cohesion surveys were also found to be a valuable mechanism for monitoring social tensions between communities (WFP 53, WFP 55). In Turkey, for example, quarterly social cohesion surveys helped to understand and monitor the risk of social tensions between Turkish and refugee populations.

76. Some shortcomings or lessons conveyed in identifying the most affected populations and their needs in COVID-like contexts include (UNICEF 42, UNICEF 46, WFP 52):

- i. The presence of gaps in baseline data on population numbers and, as a consequence, estimates of people in need.
- ii. A lack of transparency in the criteria used for setting targets in relation to people in need.
- iii. Weaknesses in programme monitoring data provided by partners.
- iv. The lack of a clear and consistent targeting strategy to assist in prioritization.
- v. Limitations in the above technologies, including: i) mVAM could not accommodate use of the food consumption scores (FCS); ii) uneven access to, and use of, mobile phones among the population; iii) mobile monitoring and assessments produced lower response rates than face-to-face ones; and iv) reliance on mobile technology, including for feedback mechanisms, risked introducing bias against certain population groups such as older people, persons with disability or illiterates.

**What are the good practices and lessons learned in supporting inclusive social dialogue, advocacy and political engagement? What contributed to making such interventions more relevant and effective?**

77. Evaluative evidence conveyed several good practices that contributed to make interventions supporting social dialogue more relevant and effective. Several evaluations indicate that interventions achieve better results when they adopt a more *comprehensive targeting approach*, including not only the targeting of households but also of pre-existing groups and associations linking them to existing markets (FAO 3, IFAD 20). For example, the involvement of local, trusted groups was found to be a determining factor in reducing civic resistance to Ebola virus disease response activities in West Africa (USAID 51).

78. Better results were also reported from interventions that differentiated and accounted for the needs of the more vulnerable and the needs of households with productive capacity, i.e. “better-off farmers”. Evidence shows that expanding the targeting and differentiating interventions would increase the social cohesion dimension resulting in benefits trickling down to the wider community, thereby ensuring target diversification (FAO 3). This relates somewhat to the finding that *in the interest of social cohesion, programmes targeting refugees are more effective when they also include local vulnerable communities* (Box 11; WFP 53).

79. Cooperatives were sometimes found to contribute to social cohesion by forming both a platform and a strong *web of members*, who in turn help newer members and one another with information, knowledge and links to socio-economic opportunities (ILO 29).

80. Lessons learned highlight the importance of *local leadership* in supporting social cohesion. Negative group dynamics were sometimes reported due to insufficient support from community leadership, including local opinion leaders providing conflicting information to communities on the level of financial and material support, leading to mistrust and low community participation (IFAD 21). In some instances, project duration was also found too short to reach a level of social cohesion. Negative group dynamics and mistrust among newly formed commercial groups were difficult to overcome, and there were issues of weak governance and leadership (IFAD 21). Several reports pointed out the added-value of civil society groups in the planning, design and implementation of the interventions (FAO 6, IFAD 10, IFAD 20, IFAD 25, IOM 30, IOM 31, OCHA 36, UNHCR 40).

**Box 9: Inclusive targeting and support**

UNHCR-funded livelihood interventions targeting both refugees and host community households are valuable in easing tensions. Host community members attribute population pressure and changes in the local economy to the influx of refugees. These perceptions, coupled with the degradation of natural resources, have increased tensions between refugees and host communities. However, livelihood activities implemented by UNHCR and partners — along with humanitarian activities and resources offered to host community participants — have helped reduce tension.

Source: UNHCR 40

**What are the good practices and lessons learned in supporting equitable service delivery for urban poor, rural dwellers, pastoralists, migrants and women? What contributed to making such interventions more relevant and effective?**

81. Targeting is a factor that contributes to equitable service delivery. Other influencing factors are *access to productive resources* (land, water, finance, markets, extension), supported by equitable policies and legislation (FAO 6, IFAD 20, IFAD 21). Some evidence also indicates that poor and very poor households and groups can be reached with a value chain approach and that value distribution is more stable and equitable where: i) efforts were invested in developing dialogue and trust between

stakeholders; ii) producer organizations were empowered to negotiate exchange conditions; iii) competition among buyers was high; iv) the focus was on niche markets; and v) buyers were committed to fair terms of trade. Other factors enabling an equitable distribution of value include: i) selecting commodities that required little land or capital investment, and involved intensive, unskilled labour inputs; ii) stipulation of pro-poor conditions for agribusinesses to obtain support; iii) community-based groundwork and mobilization of producer groups; and iv) previous work in the same area establishing the productive base and local knowledge (IFAD 19).

82. Many evaluations assessed *gender equality and women's empowerment in interventions*. Some have resulted in significant achievements, improving women's access to resources, assets and services (IFAD 21), and also contributing to their economic empowerment and participation in production-related decision-making (IFAD 11, IFAD 23). However, several interventions were reported not to have contributed much to an increase in the share of women in leadership roles (IFAD 15) or lacked data to assess if progress had been made on areas such as equitable balance in workloads and benefits (IFAD 19, IFAD 11, IFAD 21), highlighting limited resources earmarked for addressing gender issues, insufficient project team capacity, and poor monitoring of project results and impact on gender equality and women's empowerment.

## 4. Conclusions

83. This section highlights the main conclusions of the study, in response to the overarching study questions.

### **What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting social protection and basic services to preserve food security during crisis?**

#### **1. Interventions that support social protection were more effective when designed as a bundle of complementary modalities tailored to the local context and specific needs of target beneficiaries and involving adequate partnerships.**

- i. Designing social protection interventions requires disaggregated needs assessments and a systemic approach that cuts across sectors and implies large partnerships. Agencies and partners are variously prepared and equipped to conduct such integrated scoping and targeting exercises.
- ii. Good practices, being in the form of normative tools, guidance materials, systems, procedures, as well as knowledge and know-how, are sometimes but not systematically considered and taken up by other partners.
- iii. Cash transfers were often reported as effective to supporting social protection and basic services. However, certain conditions are required to implement this modality and there is limited evidence about integration into existing safety nets and sustainability.
- iv. In-kind food assistance was found effective to preserve food security during crises including when social distancing was required. However, it requires a major logistical operation, and its sustainability is not always ensured.
- v. School feeding programmes were found effective although national partners were not always willing or able to institutionalize them.
- vi. Inputs distribution was found effective in supporting food security and nutrition, when timely delivered. It is more effective when complemented with capacity development and financial services, although there is limited evidence on its multiplier effects.

### **What interventions were effective (or less effective) in supporting economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises?**

#### **2. Programmes supporting *economic response and recovery*<sup>22</sup> of food insecure populations in times of crises were more effective when designed and implemented taking into account the realities of the context (e.g. economic, financial, infrastructural, political, environmental, social) and when including clear scaling-up strategies with involvement of partners, private sector and political actors.**

- i. Economic recovery programmes benefit from being grounded in needs assessments and/or economic and financial feasibility analysis. This implies looking at the productive, institutional, socio-economic, and agro-ecological systems in an integrated way, as well

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<sup>22</sup> There is not enough evidence to determine the effectiveness of food security monitoring and early warning in triggering early action, nor how social protection programmes can better relate or be better linked to long-term development interventions (such as value chain development).



as conducting disaggregated diagnosis for different types of target beneficiaries. These are complex tasks that eventually face incomplete normative instruments.

- ii. Targeting using new technological remote data collection tools was often found effective in situations where staff movement was restricted or required social distancing. However, these approaches must mitigate the risk to exclude some vulnerable target groups. They also need to be tailored when food security assessments and data needs span different sectors, which can benefit from preparedness and synergies between agencies.
- iii. Support provided to food supply chain development/preservation was found to be particularly effective in promoting economic recovery. Greater attention to aspects such as involvement of the private sector, marketing, rural finance, behavioural change and infrastructure would enhance their effectiveness. For value chain projects, the importance of assessing market potentials and establishing linkages with rural finance schemes was frequently highlighted. Supply chain development sometimes requires managing trade-offs between the scale and scope of the interventions, which may call for phased approaches.
- iv. Policy-oriented interventions have contributed to the improvement of legislative and regulatory frameworks, but were often constrained by the lack of partnerships, limited follow-up at country level and insufficient attention to policymaking processes. Interventions in fragile States must embed realistic expectations. Policy interventions are sometimes confronted by a lack of data at the country level for assessing the welfare impacts of a crisis and hence for targeting specific interventions, calling for stronger data preparedness.
- v. Programmes that support rural employment and entrepreneurship have been effective for certain groups of poor and vulnerable populations such as young people, but require a long-term multisectoral commitment and effort to produce lasting change. Scaling strategies are often missing from the programme design.

### **What interventions have better supported social cohesion and helped vulnerable population groups become more resilient to food insecurity?**

#### **3. Interventions addressing food insecurity can better support social cohesion by broadening their scope to include not only core target beneficiaries but also the most vulnerable.**

- i. When specific tools to foster social cohesion, such as social dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms, were explicitly included as a component of the intervention, the latter contributed to more robust and resilient communities.<sup>23</sup>
- ii. Interventions with limited scope and focus on small target groups, such as demonstration/pilot projects that grant some benefits to only one community, can instil tensions with other vulnerable groups if not handled well.
- iii. Comprehensive and differentiated targeting approaches and participation of civil society organizations in the design and implementation of interventions were found to be contributing factors towards greater social cohesion

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<sup>23</sup> Most of the interventions assessed were not specifically aimed at social cohesion, or at least the extent to which social cohesion was part of their scope was not entirely clear, i.e. some interventions might have had a social cohesion-like component without necessarily naming.

## **Annexes**

Annex 1: List of stakeholders consulted

Annex 2: Bibliography

Annex 3: Dataset

Annex 4: Methodology

Annex 5: Evaluation reports by typology

Annex 6: Definitions

Annex 7: Terms of reference