



Food Insecurity as a Driver of Child Protection Issues

Child Protection and Food Security actors are working together to develop better analysis explaining how food insecurity can be a driver of protection issues particularly for children

The Child Protection AoR, the Global Food Security Cluster, recognize the many benefits of close collaboration in furthering shared outcomes for children promoting the centrality of protection and an integrated approach for the food security and child protection responses. Food insecurity is a significant driver of protection issues, in particular for children; therefore, food security early warning, early action analysis can be an important tool for protection actors in identifying protection risk in food insecure communities. Child protection coordination teams are working with their food security counterparts to develop better data collection methodologies that can provide strong, actionable analysis allowing both response and mitigation measures to be put into place. Such analysis has never been more important as the COVID-19 pandemic threatens not only the health but the livelihoods, food security and nutrition of millions of people around the world. Identification of those worst impacted by the global pandemic will allow coordination teams to support the targeting of interventions at the most vulnerable households and those with the greatest needs.

Food Insecurity as a Driver of Child Protection Issues¹

When crises strike, agricultural livelihoods can be destroyed, productive assets can be lost, and safe food or water may no longer be available. In many contexts, especially where social protection systems are weak or non-existent, this translates into a rise in child protection issues. Families may resort to negative coping strategies, pulling children from school and putting them into work. Education may also be inaccessible due to unsafe conditions, restricted access, impeded mobility, and the destruction of infrastructure. Harvest failure and loss of livelihoods due to movement restrictions or lock-down measures increases the chances that children will be needed to support household income and production including participation in hazardous work². Children separated from their families may need to work to survive and children can be forced into more harmful

situations, such as joining armed groups or armed forces. There can also be an increase in other negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and sending children to live with relatives where they are forced to become domestic servants. In addition, loss of livelihoods can also create additional stresses on caregivers to provide food for the family, resulting in increase of intimate partner violence and violence against children ('VAC') in the household³. Scarcity of food may force families to reprioritize essential resources, for instance limited food over menstrual hygiene materials for girls. Marginalized children such as children living in the street or children with disabilities can be excluded from food distribution in some settings, which may drive them to resort to negative coping mechanisms including transactional sex or hazardous work to survive.

Case Study: The Impact of the 2014 -17 Kenyan drought on Protection Issues for Girls⁴

In September 2017 in Kenya 2.6 million people were facing "severe food insecurity" due to lengthy drought conditions. Plan Kenya assessed the impact of the drought on the child protection situation, focusing on two of the hardest hit ASAL counties: Marsabit and Kilifi. Findings were shocking. The dominant trend was for pre-existing child protection problems (such as child labour, child marriage and transactional sex) to become more acute and widespread, but also previously unreported issues including incest and the sale of children arose. The drought resulted in a dramatic increase in survival sex, sexual exploitation and abuse with the study revealing a direct correlation between food insecurity and increased incidents of sexual violence inflicted on women and girls. The analysis also concluded that many of the issues seen in 2017 were the same as those that arose during the 2011 drought, but that the areas and communities affected were different. This underscores the need for strong data collection and analysis in food insecure contexts to best identify and target those most vulnerable and affected.

¹ Adapted from FAO Guidance Note: Child Labour in Agriculture in Protracted Crises, Fragile and Humanitarian Contexts, FAO, 2017

² Hazardous work harms the health and safety of children, See the [ILO Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 \(No. 182\)](#)

³ Linkages between poverty, food insecurity and VAC are examined in the [VAC study](#) covering four countries (Zimbabwe, Peru, Italy and Vietnam).

⁴ Assessment Report: The impact of the drought on the protection of children in Marsabit and Kilifi counties, Plan Kenya, 2018

Why Collaboration is Critically Important

Close collaboration between food security and child protection actors will be critical in providing strong, actionable analysis allowing both response and mitigation measures to be put into place. This is because:

- ➔ The food security sector through its Integrated Food Security Phase Classification System (IPC) and regular monitoring can forecast at risk communities where food security issues are expected to escalate.
- ➔ Food security assessments and monitoring tools can be adapted to significantly increase the data available for protection analysis in food insecure contexts. This, together with CP actor's contextual knowledge, can help prevent, mitigate, and respond to child protection issues.
- ➔ Integrated risk-based analysis between the sectors provides a better understanding and knowledge base on the impact of food insecurity on children's well-being strengthening integrated programming approaches based on collective outcomes.



The [minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action](#) (CPMS) clearly articulates actions that can be taken by both child protection and food security actors to support the integration of child protection and food security interventions including for example joint prioritisation criteria for targeting children and households at risk. However, it is important to realise that often the most vulnerable children fall outside the classic 'household' model such as children living alone, on the street or in child-headed households. Food insecurity is intrinsically linked with livelihoods and as such needs-analysis should include livelihood factors. As can be seen from the current COVID-19 pandemic, it's catastrophic effect on livelihoods across the globe is threatening the food security and nutrition of millions of people around the world⁵ and resulting in increased protection risks for children, including VAC. The [INSPIRE framework](#) with its multisectoral approach, also emphasizes the need to support income and economic strengthening interventions, such as cash-transfer to address those risks and food insecurity, and contribute to children's rights to survival, development and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

Case Study: Using existing food security and nutrition surveys to understand protection issues in Mali



The Enquete Nationale sur la Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle (ENSAN) is a food security and nutrition assessment conducted in Mali twice a year since 2012. In preparation of the September 2018 round, the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping team (VAM) with support from Child Protection partners, adjusted the existing questionnaire to better capture child protection concerns and assess their linkages with household level food security indicators. The indicators included the presence of orphans in the household, child marriage, child labour, consumption patterns and food security and the involvement of children in negative coping mechanisms. Key findings included identifying a higher presence of orphans/separated children in Northern and Central Mali compared to other regions and that sending household

members to work in exchange for food was much more prevalent in rural household compared to urban households (88% vs. 12%). Such analysis provides valuable insight to the overall protection picture and is extremely valuable for targeting child protection responses at the most vulnerable households and addressing the root causes of child protection issues.

Food Security and Child Protection Reference Group on Collaboration

The Food Security Cluster and the Child Protection AoR have already brought lead agencies and members together through the creation of a reference group composed by GFSC, CP AoR, WFP, UNICEF, Plan International, SCI and War Child. The group will work on a number of key projects, focussing on both (i) Knowledge management: documenting and consolidating good practices in risk mitigation, integration, and strengthening child protection response in food assistance programmes and in conducting joint assessment, analysis and situation monitoring (needs identification); (ii) Tools and materials (user friendly and practical) to inform the development of protection responses to child protection

All children affected by humanitarian crises live in food secure environments that mitigate and respond to child protection risks

and food insecurity, in areas where these are interlinked (mainstreaming and integration). Currently the RG is focussing on the following countries: CAR, SSD, DRC and Somalia. On the **29 of July** Child Protection and Food Security actors will come together in a special global event to continue work on strengthening and enhancing collaboration. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on experiences and recognise best practices; identify key gaps in collaboration; and for the development and launch of a **Global Action Plan to enhance Child Protection and Food Security integration across coordination**.

For more information on this event or on our work on child protection linkages with food insecurity please contact Boris Aristin (baristingonzalez@unicef.org)

⁵ <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-food-security-and-nutrition>