Food Security

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Background

The concept of food security and food insecurity is quite complex, it can be understood at different levels; the (inter)national, household, and individual level. The most commonly used definition of food insecurity is when "people do not have adequate physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods that meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life" [1]. Put another way, food insecurity is when there are not readily available nutritious, safe foods that can be obtained in socially acceptable ways and are culturally appropriate or personally acceptable.

Figure 12.1 depicts the four components required for food security: access, availability, utilization, and stability that can be applied at (inter)national, household, or individual level. *Availability* refers to a reliable supply of sufficient quality and quantity food, i.e., in a shop or food market. This depends on shops and food markets existing, imports, food stocks, food aid, and domestic production. *Access* refers to the ability of people to both financially and physically obtain food. This depends on physical, social, and economic factors, market infrastructure, purchasing power, income, and transport. *Utilization* refers to adequate dietary intake of food that the body can metabolize. This depends on food safety, food hygiene, food quality, proper food preparation, and nutritional knowledge. *Stability* refers to long-lasting,

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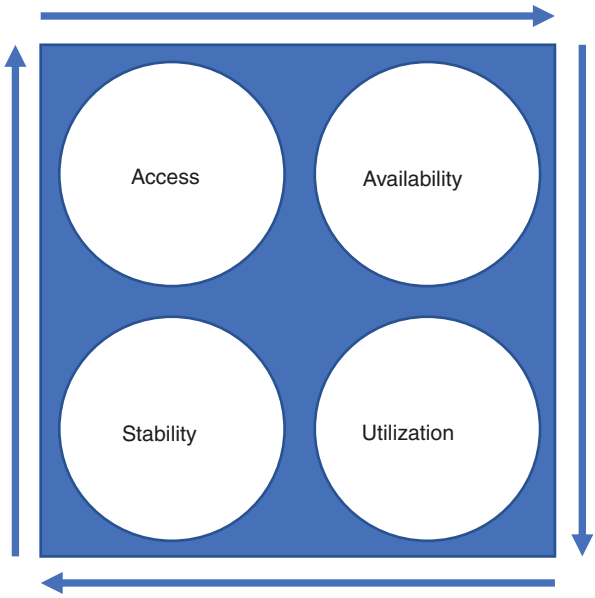

Fig. 12.1 Four components of the concept of food security; access, availability, utilization, and stability

permanent access to food, i.e., all components are maintained over time. Food insecurity can be experienced episodically (i.e., a few weeks of the year) or chronically (i.e., every month) as well as experienced differently by different people within a household (i.e., a mother may experience it differently to a child in the same household) [2]. Experiences range from worrying about the ability to obtain food, to experiencing hunger when food security is very low. Coping strategies and interventions can amend the severity of the experience of food insecurity.

Experiences of Food Insecurity

In refugee settings, reasons for food insecurity can be multiple. People may have lost all their belongings and income due to displacements and be entirely dependent on any external assistance provided. In this case, it is important to properly estimate and respond to the needs, as per the population's culture, demography (gender, age groups) medical history, etc. Even if the population is partially relying on external assistance, it is important to ensure that all nutritional needs are covered to prevent deficiencies and malnutrition, and that assistance properly responds to the special needs of the most vulnerable (infants and young children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, elderly, people with disease or disabilities, etc.).

During the last [12 months/ 30 days], was there a time when, because of lack of money or other resources:

1. You [or others in your household] were worried you would not have enough food to eat?
2. You [or others in your household] were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food?
3. You [or others in your household] ate only a few kinds of foods?
4. You [or others in your household] had to skip a meal?
5. You [or others in your household] ate less than you thought you should?
6. Your household ran out of food?
7. You [or others in your household] were hungry but did not eat?
8. You [or others in your household] went without eating for a whole day?

Fig. 12.2 The Food Insecurity Experience Scale eight question module developed for global use, from Food and Agriculture Organisation [3]

Assessing Food Insecurity

Measuring food insecurity at the household and individual level requires capturing the four components of food insecurity [4]. Dietary recalls can be used alongside questions such as "Do you eat less food than you would like due to a lack of money?". However, several technical tools measuring the existence, occurrence, and severity of food insecurity exist. The Food Insecurity Experiences Scale (FIES) was developed and validated for global use [3]. Asking eight questions about food-related behaviors and experiences, the tool identifies the severity of food insecurity experienced by a household or individual. Questions relate either to the last 12 months or 30 days. Figure 12.2 shows the eight questions from the FIES. Responses from questions are analyzed together to measure the severity of food insecurity. Small-scale use (i.e., not national level) uses the raw score between 0 and 8. Lower scores correspond to less severe food insecurity.

What Can you Do with the Information?

This data can provide rationale for setting up a local project addressing food insecurity and help inform its procedures and practices. Collecting this data with researchers could help inform local policy or advocacy work.

Who Should Ask?

For local community projects a senior volunteer or project coordinator is best suited, or a trained researcher.

Where Should you Ask?

It is important that questions relating to food insecurity are asked on an individual basis, and not in big groups. This acknowledges the sensitivity of the topic and limits feelings of embarrassment, stigma, and shame. Ideally, the person asked will handle the food for the household. Commonly, this will be a woman, especially in households with children.

Case Studies

This section of the chapter provides four case studies each addressing food insecurity. The first two case studies are national, humanitarian interventions addressing food insecurity. The following two case studies are examples of best practice of local, community responses to addressing food insecurity in Gateshead, UK.

Case Study One—Food Assistance in Refugee Settings

South Sudanese refugee crisis, Northern Uganda camps.

Description

Ongoing civil war in South Sudan has led to one of the largest influxes of the South Sudanese population to neighboring countries in 2016. More than a million people fled the conflict and were displaced in Northern Uganda, in different settings and camps. Considered one of the largest refugee crises, the high number of people fleeing South Sudan forced local authorities to install and expand existing refugee sites.

A few days and weeks after the first arrivals, the situation in the camps was scarce. During the initial assessments, the population was asking for the most basic provision of food and water. Many men stayed behind and were involved in the conflict, resulting in a large proportion of the population being women and children (more than 80% at the beginning of the crisis). Local authorities and humanitarian organizations urgently responded to the need by providing food and water assistance to the population.

Food Assistance and Gardening

At the onset of the emergency and because of pressing needs to respond, food rations were distributed in newly established camps. Each ration was composed of wheat and maize, lentils, peas, and vegetable oil. For households with children between the ages of 6 and 24 months, specialized nutritious foods were also provided (called blanket supplementary food under the form of high-energy

biscuits—usually for newly displaced situations). Food rations were also distributed in schools set up in the camps for school-aged children. In addition, cash transfers were also provided once markets were operational again to allow households to choose food that was culturally appropriate and be more independent.

Due to a large number of people and incessant arrivals in already overcrowded camps, the food assistance approach was quickly overwhelmed and deemed insufficient. More advocacy towards setting up cash assistance instead of food distribution started, to avoid negative coping mechanisms in camps such as selling items or prioritizing some households' members because of food shortage.

After many months and realizing, that the situation was prolonging with no prospects for many to return to South Sudan, some households received pieces of land from local authorities to cultivate their own garden. Although this represented only a small portion of the refugee population, it allowed some families to plant some vegetables to increase household food security. In some cases, this additional food helped families supplementing their food rations. However, some of the challenges encountered were access to water (particularly underground water) and ensuring that lands were fertile. This pushed many families to move from one camp to the other, even trying to leave the camps (which was difficult for administrative purpose), hoping to find better living conditions for them and their children.

Way Forward

The situation in the South Sudanese refugee camps of Northern Uganda remains dire because of the large population in the camps and a decrease in financial assistance over the years. However, community support plays a vital role. Plots of land allocated to households, although sometimes too small and not allocated to all, provide some relief to families in addition to the food and cash assistance.

Case Study Two—Food Assistance for Internally Displaced and Refugee Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW) and Children 6–24 Months

Syria Crisis, Northeast Syria Camps, 2020.

Description

In the protracted emergency of Syria, almost 10 years of conflict and violence caused loss of access to basic services such as food, clean water, shelter, and health care for millions of people. In the Northeast of Syria, regional conflict caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, mostly women and children, to

flee or be transferred to IDP and Refugee camps in the governorates of Al-Hassakeh, Raqqa, and Dier-Ez-Zor—all of them dependent on aid for basic services. By 2020, the devaluation of the Syrian pound greatly inflated the cost of food in the markets, further limiting access to a quality diet for all households such as fruits, vegetables, and animal sources. After almost a decade of conflict and depleted resources, chronic malnutrition (stunting) began to rise to WHO "high" thresholds, micronutrient deficiencies climbed, where 1 in every 3 pregnant women was anemic, as well as over 40% of all children 6–24 months, and within 1 year (from 2018 to 2019) maternal acute malnutrition increased fivefold. Yet, access to diverse foods was still a challenge.

Food Assistance

In the camps of Northeast Syria, food security actors provided vulnerable households with food baskets containing staple items such as vegetable oil, sugar, rice, pasta, lentils, tomato paste, flour, salt, tea, dried chickpeas, and zaatar (mix of spices, herbs, and sesame seeds). However, this provision only covered partial needs, and families would have to supplement other foods such as fresh fruit or vegetables, meat, or eggs, which was difficult due to lack of livelihoods/income and high prices in the market.

Pregnant women and children 0–2 years were some of the most physically vulnerable to food insecurity in Syria. A food and nutrition intervention in Areesha Camp of Al-Hassakeh governorate prioritized all pregnant and lactating women (who were also mothers of children 0–24 months) with food vouchers for a 6-month duration. Following analysis of the food basket content in Areesha camp, the vouchers were initially restricted to fruits and vegetables to cover gaps in micronutrients. However, following a market assessment, it had been decided that restricting the voucher to specific products with specific amounts (kg) posed logistical constraints such as availability for different vendors or seasonality of the products. Therefore, it was decided to implement a value voucher modality where mothers were able to choose the products they needed with the specific amount they received. Mothers were provided with vouchers of 20 USD per month. Knowing that families did not have access to refrigerators to properly store products, mothers were able to redeem 5 USD vouchers from selected vendor shops on a weekly basis.

Strategically, all pregnant and lactating women receiving vouchers were already accessing maternal and infant nutrition support in a Mother Baby Area (MBA) with daily counseling and education by skilled staff. Nutrition actors focussed on the importance of dietary diversity during pregnancy, in a child's diet after 6 months of age, and the criticality of breastfeeding during food insecure contexts. In addition, nutrition messages related to foods containing Vitamin A, C, and iron, were printed directly on the vouchers, and voucher distribution was only carried out at the MBA during nutrition sessions to ensure mothers were receiving support to both *access and utilization* of food.

Way Forward

Food insecurity continues to be a concern in Syria, and since the COVID-19 pandemic, has only worsened. Humanitarian actors are now recognizing that food assistance through food baskets is necessary for certain food insecure contexts, but in the long term, access to fresh and animal source foods is critical to ensure adequate health and nutrition of the population. Therefore, unrestricted cash and vouchers are now beginning to be a more accepted food security intervention, especially when it is combined with health and nutrition behavior change support. Evidence shows that food security programs have more nutritional impact if access to food is combined with nutrition education. However, more analysis on modalities in humanitarian contexts needs to be conducted. In Syria, food security assistance with cash and vouchers are being scaled up but more information on the outcomes of integration with nutrition programs and health services (such as Antenatal Care/Postnatal Care) are required.

Case Study Three and Four—Food Assistance in a High-Income Country

By the end of 2018, the UK had resettled around 14,000 Syrian refugees [5]. National statistics show that the UK welcomed around 30,000 asylum applications in 2019 [5]. A person arriving in the UK awaiting a decision on an asylum claim does not have the same rights as a British citizen. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work until they have received refugee status which can take up to 6 months. This precarious situation means many asylum seekers and refugees in the UK are more vulnerable to food insecurity.

In the UK, asylum claims can fall under various schemes such as the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) or resettlement schemes for those The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have referred as being in greatest need of assistance [5]**.** After claiming asylum in the UK, if a person has no finances, they can also apply for support from the Home Office via the Dispersal programme. The Dispersal programme is a process where the Home Office moves asylum seekers living in destitution to local authorities across the UK, and Central Government provides local authorities funding to support housing of asylum seekers and refugees. Gateshead Council, in the Northeast of England, has voluntarily participated in the program since it started in 2000 and has housed several thousand asylum seekers [5]. In Gateshead, organizations have been set up in response to help settlement and integration, and improve access to food for asylum seekers and refugees.

Case Study Three—Bensham Community Food Co-Operative (BCFC) Food Assistance in Gateshead, UK

Bensham CFC is a community-led venture set up for the benefit of the local community and run on a not-for-profit basis. It primarily serves Bensham's refugee community, although welcomes all. Bensham CFC has a non-paying membership scheme. Membership does not require "proof-of-need," i.e., people do not have to provide reasons for accessing the food cooperative, reducing any potential stigma or embarrassment.

Bensham CFC runs a weekly service. It intends to supplement a household's food supply to provide balanced meals, rather than be the main source of food for a household. Bensham CFC rely predominantly on public donations of nonperishable food items that can be stored for a long time without the need for refrigeration. However, BCFC places emphasis on providing fresh produce. To obtain fresh produce, BCFC is linked with larger supermarket chains and local allotments who pass on their surplus fresh produce. Food Co-Operatives often have to supplement donations, buying food with their own funds. Bensham CFC does this through a subscription with a charity called FareShare. A FareShare subscription ensures delivery of weekly or bi-weekly variety of fresh produce. For BCFC, providing foods that are culturally appropriate is important, so they ask for specific donations of rice, lentils, chickpeas, and other pulses and types of oils and herbs and spices to meet the needs of their members. Figure 12.3 provides an example of some of the food BCFC offers.

Way Forward

Providing access to food on a weekly basis with a focus on fresh produce helps people get a step closer to eating enough healthy, quality foods that form a balanced meal. Bensham CFC recognises that refugees and asylum seekers experiencing food insecurity are experiencing multiple aspects of poverty. Therefore, they have evolved to meet needs beyond food, for example, providing free clothes, toys and furniture. Community spaces such as BCFC offer more than nutritional benefits. As Irna says "this place helps my family, more than food, they are so lovely, and this place is like home." They provide a space where people can share experiences with others in similar situations. Volunteering opportunities help increase self-esteem, confidence, and sense of purpose. This model provides an opportunity for people to be a part of the solution by volunteering themselves and donating back when they are able to do so. The community nature of a food cooperative means anyone is welcome. As volunteer Lena put it, "it is a place full of kindness and peace and with people who have a big heart." Table 12.1 in the appendix of this chapter provides questions to prompt those contemplating opening a food-co-operative. Further guidance on food co-operatives can be found at the Sustain website that provides toolkit to help set-up a food co-operative, and locate others in the UK [6].

Fig. 12.3 Food on offer at Bensham Food Co-Operative. (**a**) Fresh vegetables on offer onions, potatoes, carrots, leeks, green, yellow and red peppers (**b**) Tinned fruit, vegetables, and beans, coconut milk, oats, pasta, flour, and sugar

Case Study Four—The Comfrey Project Food Assistance and Gardening in Gateshead, UK

The Comfrey project was founded in 2001 and received charitable status in 2002. Starting as a pilot project offering one session a week on an allotment, the project has expanded. In 2016, the project had three sites with 21,000 sq. feet of land under cultivation. Set in the same local authority as BCFC, this project provides a different approach to addressing food insecurity, primarily through its community gardening space.

Food Assistance and Gardening

The Comfrey Project works with refugees and those seeking asylum. Their community gardening space is on land previously used by Gateshead local authority but was left neglected. Refugees volunteer at The Comfrey Project to maintain the garden and keep local, seasonal produce growing all year round. Volunteers also maintain the beehives producing local honey and cook food grown in the garden to provide hot lunches for everyone taking part in an activity that morning. This cooking aspect is beneficial because it provides an opportunity to practice cooking and eating different locally grown fruits and vegetables. This helps diversify diets and introduce more affordable options; affordability or availability of ingredients native to home can be an

issue for refugees. It also has environmental and health benefits too as people are eating seasonal foods, which can mean less need for chemical substances.

Warmer seasons result in excess leftover food which can be taken home. Other seasons require a contingency plan to continue running lunchtime cooking activities. This might involve using project funds to purchase surplus food or support from local business. The Comfrey Project is supported by local businesses providing surplus vegetables. This is particularly useful in winter. Investing in a freezer allows the project to have frozen vegetables in the winter months that are just as nutritious. Also, investing in indoor gardening equipment such as electric propagators helps grow more vegetables and fruit earlier compared to if they waited for the spring months in the UK when it is ok to go out into the garden space.

The range of fresh produce provided by the community garden depends on what is grown, which depends on numerous factors including size of gardening space available, season, soil type, budget size, among other things. Having a volunteer or paid member of staff knowledgeable on gardening is useful as they can teach people a variety of growing techniques, discuss the benefits of growing food, and offer advice on garden growing and management.

Way Forward

Food insecurity continues to be an issue for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Local projects, like The Comfrey Project are being recognised as playing a vital role in adddressing food insecurity. Their wider benefits are also recognised. Community gardening is very important in terms of community integration. Growing, cooking, and sharing food provides a vehicle for people to share learn about one another's culture, bringing people together through a common activity. One volunteer at the Comfrey Project said "when you are working with the earth, everywhere you go feels like home" showing how getting involved offers much more than food. Volunteers at the Comfrey Project have experienced how the project's gardening space brings a sense of community, inclusivity, and belonging. They have decided to "give back" by venturing into a "mobile" garden so they can visit different streets in their area and connect with neighbors. For those setting up a community gardening space, Table 12.1 provides thought-provoking questions to inspire its creation.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into the issue of food insecurity for migrating children and their families. Each case study is unique, taking on the shape of its location and people, developing within its means to meet the needs of its community. This

chapter will hopefully have inspired creation or evolvment of local community projects addressing food insecurity.

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Appendix

Table 12.1 Questions to inspire creation and evolution of community food co-operatives and community gardening projects in response to local food insecurity

	Food cooperative	Community gardening
Description	Create a set of principles 1. Write a description of the envisaged project 2. Write a mission statement/ethos/set of values the project acts in accordance with	
Location	• What is an ideal venue? List features to help a search, i.e., kitchen, non-faith based • What spaces are available in the local community, when? • What facilities does the space offer? • Is there storage space in the facility, or will the project need to "move in and out" every session? • What are the running costs of the project?	• What spaces of land are available in the area? • Who owns or has previously used it? • Is the space accessible to project members? • What facilities does the space offer in addition to gardening space? • What is the cost of the land (and facilities)? • What tools are required to grow food? • What are the running costs of the gardening project?
What is provided	• How will food be sourced; what contacts does the project have to collect and donate food? • Is there a collection point for people to drop food donations? • When can supermarket donations be collected? • Will fresh produce be collected? • Does the venue have storage space? • Are there food hygiene, health, and safety guidelines that need action? • Are there regulations regarding the handling of food donated from shops? • Is there a system to track food coming in and out and expiry dates? • Has the venue got the capacity to provide refreshments or hot food?	• What produce will be able to be grown in the gardening space from season to season? • What gardening roles are offered at the project? • What other activities will be provided? • What talents/skills do those using the services have? Could they facilitate an activity or volunteer? • Has the venue got the capacity to provide refreshments or hot food?

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

	Food cooperative	Community gardening
Volunteers	• List volunteer roles that are needed • Will there be volunteer job descriptions listing the role and responsibility? • Will there be team meetings? • Will there be volunteer training for each role? • What about volunteer rotas?	• List volunteer roles that are needed • Will there be volunteer job descriptions listing the role and responsibility? • Will there be volunteer training for each role? • What about volunteer rotas? • Will there be team meetings? • What about linking with voluntary organizations to find someone with gardening knowledge, or is there a local volunteer?
Considerations	• Are there policies on abusing the system or inappropriate behavior? • Are there policies on the amount of food provided, i.e., per person, household? • Are there policies for dealing with allergies/dietary requirements? • Are links with other organizations possible, e.g., a council employee who can help asylum seekers with their specific cases? • Are there other ways to expand to meet people's needs?	• Are there policies on how to share excess grown produce in a fair way? • Are there plans in place for seasons when produce is not as fruitful, e.g., winter months? What equipment could help mitigate these obstacles when gardening? • Are there local businesses to collaborate with? If so, in what ways? • Are there ways to expand to meet people's needs?

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