



What your audience needs to know in an emergency: Life-saving information

Topic-by-topic guide to core humanitarian issues

INTRODUCTION

These guides are for media professionals working to help audiences affected by humanitarian crises. They give a brief overview of common humanitarian issues in emergencies. They will help you:

- Understand what kinds of problems your audiences are likely to be facing in emergencies
- Work alongside relief experts to provide audiences with accurate, relevant and life-saving information

HOW TO USE THESE GUIDES

These guides contain information on core humanitarian topics. They are intended to serve as a starting point to help you identify the kinds of issues to address in your programmes and questions to ask relief experts. To help you identify which topics to prioritise, you should speak with local humanitarian specialists. If possible, speak with your audiences as well to find out what they need to know.

When using the guides remember to:

- Consider the local situation, culture and context to make sure the information is relevant
- Consider the specific needs of different audiences (for example, men, women, the most vulnerable people)
- Check for consistency with other sources of information being provided
- Consult qualified local specialists to check the validity and relevance of humanitarian information
- Use the guides in conjunction with BBC Media Action's Lifeline Production Manual, which contains guidelines on how to do effective programming in crises



FOOD SECURITY



FOOD SECURITY

What is food security?

Food security exists when all people, at all times, can access enough safe and nutritious food to enable them to live a healthy and active life.

Food security experts stress four important areas of focus:

Food access

In an emergency, food may be available but some people may not be able to access it. Food access is about whether individuals and households can regularly get the food they need.

Food availability

This refers to the food that is available for people affected by the emergency. It includes food from local production and imports (including aid).

Food use

This is the way that people use the food they have (that is, what they eat and how they prepare it) and their ability to absorb nutrients.

Stability

This is about the bigger picture over time, that is, whether people consistently have enough healthy food and if this is likely to change (such as through a poor economy or climate or seasonal changes).

Why is it important?

People die without food. How long a person can survive without food depends on a number of factors, such as their percentage of body fat and their general health.

A consistent lack of food and nutrition can result in weakened immune systems, which contribute to sickness, disease and eventually death. In an emergency, a lack of food creates additional uncertainty and anxiety on top of existing suffering.



How can media and communication help?

You can help communities by providing information on how to access available food in the area. You can also help audiences to preserve, protect and ration the food they have. In protracted emergencies, you can provide information on how people can grow or source their own food. Media programmes can advise audiences on how to prepare and cook food in ways that maximise nutrition and avoid disease. Providing people with the facts about food security and survival so they better understand their situation can help them to make the right decisions.

Remember each emergency is different. Ask local aid experts to guide you on what information you should prioritise and the best advice to share with your audience in the context.

Example information for audiences on food contamination

Store your food carefully in containers with a sealed lid. This protects food from animals and insects. If you are in a flood-prone area, raise your food containers off the ground.



See: <http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/What%20is%20Food%20Security.pdf>



What information can I share with audiences?

Your audiences may need answers to the following questions to help them take practical steps to stay safe and healthy. Talk to local humanitarian specialists to get their advice. Remember that there are different groups in the community with different needs. Find out which groups in the community are the most vulnerable (for example, children, pregnant women, elderly people etc.) and what advice to give them.

Food Availability and access

- What food is available in the area now?
- How/where can people get food (for example, operating markets, community schemes, exchange, trade, government, aid agencies)?
- What prices should they pay at local markets?
- How can people protect any existing crops and livestock?
- What can people do if they do not have enough food? For example, how can people make their food last longer? Share ideas about how families/communities can combine their food resources for greater benefit

Food use

- How can people safely store food? (For example, provide information on how to store food safely to prevent rotting)
- What are people using to transport food? Is it safe? What are the safe options available to them?
- Which foods are available that have high nutritional value? How can people prepare/cook food to boost nutritional value?
- How can young children, pregnant women and sick people get the nutrients they need?

What can people do to protect themselves from specific risks/diseases related to nutrition?

Malnutrition and dehydration

How can people clean and purify water before drinking or preparing food? (See [WASH guide](#).) It is important to stay hydrated. Even if they do not have enough food, people should try to drink lots of clean water. This is especially important for vulnerable groups (elderly people, pregnant women, sick people, children etc.). Inform people about the kinds of food available, and how it is best prepared to maximise nutrition.

Diarrhoea

What kinds of (clean) food are available for people to consume when they have diarrhoea? For example, are there any foods with fibre such as millet, banana, peas, lentils? Or are there foods that can help the stomach like yoghurt and porridge? Common advice says to boil or steam foods rather than eating them raw, and to eat small amounts of foods regularly.

Food contamination

Inform people about the importance of washing hands and food preparation areas to avoid getting sick from food contamination. Inform them about what is available for them to wash with (soap, ash, other).

It is important to keep meat separate from other foods (for example, in separate, covered utensils). Find out what utensils people have to do this. It is important to cook all animal products thoroughly. What cooking provisions are available (fuel, firewood)? How can people protect their food from flies and insects? For example, what can they use to cover food? How can they clean dishes and utensils? How can they wash clothes, bedding and surfaces that might have been contaminated by faeces (for example, with hot water and soap, ash, other)?

Food sustainability

How reliable is the current food supply? Are there likely to be any risks to people's current food supply (for example, season changes, more crises)? If yes: What steps can people take to ensure they have enough nutritious food in the coming weeks and months (for example, aid agency programmes, crop or livelihood alternatives, long-term storage, community action plans)?

How can people share food within their families and communities in a safe and sustainable way?

The information in this document is based on the following sources:

Resources

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO): Food Security in a Pandemic fact sheet – with some communication messages for people affected:

http://www.paho.org/disasters/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=533&Itemid=

PAHO/WHO: Fundamentals of Communication during Crises and Emergencies:

http://www.paho.org/disasters/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=539&Itemid=

Generic communication messages:

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library/?!language=english&filterA=threat&filterB=THR-Unsafe-water&filterC=&filterD=&local=global&format=html-cdac>

UNICEF compilation of communication messages on nutrition:

<http://www.unicefec.org/category/index/nutrition>

UNICEF country site pages: http://www.unicef.org/wash/index_43101.html

Free OCHA infographics for potential use on publication material:

<http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/ocha-launches-500-free-humanitarian-symbols>

Further reading

Abdallah, S. and Burnham, G. (2008). Food security and nutrition in emergency. Chapter 9 in: Public Health Guide for Emergencies, 2nd edn. Boston, MA: Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Available from: http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-refugee-and-disaster-response/publications_tools/publications/_CRDR_ICRC_Public_Health_Guide_Book/Chapter_9_Food_and_Nutrition.pdf

Agency for International Development (USAID) (2009). Leadership during a Pandemic: What Your Municipality Can Do (Toolkit). Washington, DC: USAID.

Available from: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt651.pdf

Food Security Cluster: Food Security in Emergencies.

Available from: <http://foodsecuritycluster.net/food-security-emergencies>

UNICEF (2014). Water Sanitation and Hygiene: Emergency WASH.

Available from: http://www.unicef.org/wash/index_emergency.html