

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES



COVID 19 and conflict sensitivity

Rapid Operational Conflict Risk and Prevention Tool



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Purpose

COVID 19, and the different actions by governments and other authorities to try to control it, are triggering tensions and undermining relationships in many of the contexts where WFP works - or run the risk thereof. At the same time our programming is adapting to the changing context, including suspension of some programmes, changing modalities (mainly from in-kind to cash, but also mixed) and target groups, including a major pivot from rural to urban populations.

There are risks that all these changes can result in our interventions being inadvertently caught up in, and contribute to, tensions or conflict. Similarly, it also offers new opportunities to support social cohesion, mitigation and reduction in tensions, as an important contribution to peace.

Analysing the possible risks and opportunities in a systematic manner enables us to make important enhancements and adjustments to our operations facilitating efforts to be conflict sensitive. This is important both in contexts where tensions are already manifesting in view of COVID, but likewise as a preventative measure making the impact of our adjustments more effective and reducing potential future risks. This document first outlines important risks emerging from COVID 19 and national responses to it, and secondly provides a simple tool which includes a list of key questions to support operational staff in analysing how WFP programming can get caught up in conflict. This is complemented by a table whereby the risks are accompanied by possible mitigation measures to support programme adjustments.

Should a country operation request further support in applying the tool, they may be supported with a virtual Diagnostic Clinic that will help them clarify the work needed for their operation to be conflict sensitive. This will be designed by the Regional Bureau and the WFP Peace & Conflict Advisor, where present, with the support of the Peace & Conflict Team at HQ and will draw on all relevant expertise to support a specially tailored 'clinic.'

This tool should be used in association with WFP's Medium Term Programme Framework (MTPF) related guidance, when planning for adjustments or scale up of existing programming or start of new ones. It is relevant for all MTPF support areas and pillars.

Conflict risks emerging from national responses to contain COVID19

01 Risk of politicization of coronavirus response



Differential responses of warring groups and efforts to discredit the capacity / intention of rival groups to respond to COVID 19 can feed polarization (Libya). Fragile coalitions can become stressed as rival groups push responsibility for the response to specific political parties (South Sudan) while tensions are emerging between national and local authorities over response to COVID 19 (Tigray in Ethiopia). Containment and curfew policies are exacerbating tensions around elections (Guinea, Ethiopia, Burundi) and are viewed as a deliberate tactics to hold on to power and to prevent political protests

Where WFP is supporting national social protection systems in a COVID 19 response, concerns over already existing targeting inclusion / exclusion errors may become amplified and more politicized. It may also influence government-led geographical selection / targeting.

02 Civic unrest against containment policies and differential response



Protests against quarantine measures and consequent deteriorating economic conditions have erupted widely across the globe, especially in communities living in crowded conditions, relying on the informal sector and hand to mouth means of living. While poor people struggle to access services, making ends meet and get arrested and harshly punished if not respecting containment rules (Libya, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, India, El Salvador, Colombia etc.), economic and political elites or security forces can get privileged access to PPE, test kits and health support, and are able to flout control measures and get away with it. In Libya there has also been a liquidity crisis, resulting in people unable to withdraw their salaries from banks and unable to buy food, leading to protests. Overall there is a loss of faith in institutions, that can be exploited by, or cause a resurgence in, armed actors.

This creates a much more hostile and unpredictable operating environment for WFP, especially where WFP is perceived as responding insufficiently to food insecurity created by containment measures and quarantine processes. Increased antagonism between different sectors of society can affect community attitudes towards staff / partners.

03 Risk of Security Sector responses involving excessive use of force and creating a backlash



It can be hard to persuade populations with little trust in government to follow public health directives and comply with coronavirus measures, as was the case with Ebola in Liberia for example. In many situations containment is being enforced by the military, who are using violent means to impose strict measures, resulting in public protests, violence, increased tensions between state and citizens, and casualties (Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria). With the army focused on containment measures, gang warfare has escalated resulting in increasing homicides and the passing of legislation to allow the use of lethal force to control both gangs and the pandemic (El Salvador). NSAGs may exploit this to expand control / presence. Using military language to address COVID 19 (“warfare”) legitimises a military-driven law and order enforcement approach rather than framing the response in social security, individual responsibilities and solidarity terms.

In camp settings, the military might decide to exert pressure over the management of the camp, undermining existing aid delivery structures, limiting access for WFP, and possibly increasing rent seeking behavior. Increased civil unrest can make distributions more risky, since overall there may be more triggers for protest, and teams must increase field presence in order to reduce numbers of people at each distribution. Containment measures such as checkpoints create opportunities for graft, including along WFP’s supply chain.

04 Vigilante responses are sometimes violent and can restrict humanitarian access



The diversion of defense forces to COVID 19 response could result in increasing of vigilante groups. In some situations medical evacuations of non-COVID cases have been attacked out of fear that the individual may be a COVID carrier (Colombia). Where there is a low trust in government capacity to respond local vigilante groups have emerged to enforce the isolation of villages.

In some circumstances this may inhibit WFP’s humanitarian access / transit (Kyrgyzstan, Colombia).

05 Pandemic may affect peace processes and local conflict resolution mechanisms



Attention is being diverted from peace processes to COVID 19 responses, and some armed actors are using this as an opportunity to escalate military operations to change facts on the ground, with increased impunity (Libya, Myanmar). In terms of peace negotiations, the disarmament process in the Philippines has been interrupted; and Mozambique, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Somalia are refusing to acknowledge the UN secretary Generals ceasefire call. Conversely a ceasefire has been achieved in more than 12 countries, including arrangement in Yemen, Afghanistan and Syria. Local conflict resolution mechanisms involving face-to-face meetings will be severely disrupted by the prohibition of gatherings (Sierra Leone).

Increasing offensives create a more risky and volatile operating environment for WFP, and create new population movements with needs for support, shifting power dynamics and marginalization, which can affect programming now and once lockdowns are lifted.

06

Damage to community trust, solidarity and relationships



The invisible nature of the spread of the virus fuels suspicion and can undermine mutual trust, solidarity and community relationships. Social distancing and prolonged isolation can have an impact on mental health, especially for people/communities already affected by trauma. In the looming economic recession, people may increasingly compete with one another for dwindling resources, undermining cooperative behavior and relationships.

For WFP programming previous achievements in building bridges across groups and building social cohesion may be undermined. This can have significant effects for (the re-introduction of) WFP's development programming.

07

Scapegoating, discrimination and stigmatization



Scapegoating of specific groups along ethnic, religious and other lines are exacerbating existing tensions (Muslims in India, Gorkha in Darjeeling for resembling ethnic Chinese). Irregular/seasonal migrants caught at closed border crossings, or not permitted access to rural villages (e.g. India) are being blamed as vectors of the virus. In some locations with early COVID cases among UN personnel, there has been a significant anti UN / foreigner backlash (South Sudan, Mali). Since the most marginalised communities live in crowded conditions, with a lack of access to water/hygiene and other control measures being put in place, the pandemic is expected to spread widely, which will likely result in scapegoating and stigmatization.

WFP's target groups may increasingly align with stigmatized / scapegoated groups, and WFP may be perceived as biased. Frontline staff / CPs wearing protective gear could appear increasingly distant and reinforce a message of different values for different lives (protection of aid workers but not of aid recipients).

08

Rumours and access to information



Misinformation, fake news and myths around how the COVID 19 propagates are already widely spread. In some places withholding access to information is a deliberate tactic to keep control (Cox's bazaar and certain areas in South Sudan are denied access to mobile phone networks). Denying access to information not only prevents people from receiving important health messaging but also obstructs understanding of the global pandemic, and leaves space for misunderstanding and the spread of local rumours.

In communities that have little access to trustful information, rumours can be powerful drivers of fear, panic and violent action, including against aid providers. Misinformation can also pertain to WFP operations, targeting, and COVID management practices.

09

Increased criminality, illicit trafficking, theft and diversion of coronavirus response



Decreased availability of food and health supply could lead to diversions (in East Libya government medical equipment bought in by the govt was taken by doctors for use in their private hospitals) or to illicit trade in medical supplies.

Food and cash in short supply could lead to a raise in criminality, looting of WFP's warehouses, or put recipients at risk of theft following distributions.

10

Gender Based Violence



With more stress over resources and heightened tension at household level, women and girls are being exposed to greater intimate partner violence (in China reports to police tripled during the outbreak). In IDP camps, worsened socio-economic conditions might expose women to greater sexual exploitation. Isolation undermines women/girls' ability to look for support in traditional community networks. In parallel, resources for SRH and GBV services might be diverted to the COVID 19 response and further weaken service availability.

Increasing violence in the household and community can affect decisions of women and girls to participate in assessments and distributions. Where WFP targets female household members the transfer may become a source of contention.



Overall COVID 19 is likely to exacerbate existing drivers of conflict / tension, and simultaneously undermine social and economic resilience / coping mechanisms.

Changes in resource flows and exploitation of domestic discontent and international distraction is creating new dynamics among existing conflict actors.

Rapid Operational Conflict Risk Tool

Each context is different, and some analysis is needed to identify possible risks and develop mitigation measures. In a fast changing context, this analysis can quickly become out of date, and staff have limited time available for reflection.

Outlined below are questions to prompt a quick identification of risks and opportunities to support programme design or course correction. What constitutes a 'good enough' analysis here depends on the situation – where risks to communities are low, an internal discussion of the questions / desk based review may suffice, but where risks are high a more thorough investigation and primary data collection through focus groups and key stakeholders interviews might be necessary.



THE SIXTEEN QUESTIONS HELP TO BUILD AN AGREED UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGING CONTEXT AND HELP TO IDENTIFY THE RISKS TO WFP'S OPERATION.



CHANGING CONTEXT

01

What were the issues or divisions creating tensions/conflict in this area prior to COVID 19? (Who was in conflict with whom and about what?) Have there been any recent developments in these tensions since COVID 19 (e.g. around raising food prices and availability/access to food)?

02

Are there any conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in place in the area of intervention (early warning systems, conflict mitigation committees etc.)? Has the functioning of / access to these mechanisms been affected by COVID 19 response measures?

03

What are the areas and groups that have been most affected by COVID 19? Are they related to any specific ethnic / religious / political or other group (also exclude other groups)? Are any groups being scapegoated for spreading COVID 19?

04

What are the trusted sources of information here? What kind of misinformation, fake news and myths are circulating? What level of access to information do people have?

 05

Are the government / state security forces leading the response seen as legitimate, competent and responsive to the needs/rights of marginalized groups? Are containment measures felt to be proportionate / acceptable? Have any specific groups (rival parties, opponent in a conflict etc) been excessively/unfairly targeted?

 06

How have local non state armed groups (NSGAs) responded to the COVID-19 outbreak and response? Are they using movement restrictions and potential decrease in security force to gain control over areas or to their own benefit?

 07

How are relationships changing at a local level: Have scapegoating, misinformation, social distancing and other measures (including any form of assistance) damaged trust and social cohesion?

 08

What are potential triggers for violence in relation to the COVID 19 response? What capacities / opportunities to support tolerance and peace are emerging?



RISKS TO WFP'S OPERATION

 09

Do choices over where and who to target, or the sequencing of distributions, coincide with key divisions in the conflict and run the risk of reinforcing existing grievances?

 10

Could programming choices be instrumentalized to promote / reinforce their own patronage networks or increase competition between groups in conflict?

? 11

Could programming choices that provide different benefits to different groups reinforce tensions or contribute to the power of one group over another in any way?

? 12

Could delivery modalities (including working with gov't) undermine or strengthen relationships and trust at a local level?

? 13

Has access become an issue due to COVID 19 containment measures and response? Are there increased risks for aid diversion?

? 14

Are there new areas of access that have opened up as a result of ceasefires / containment measures and where vulnerabilities of communities is a concern?

? 15

Do WFP staff model appropriate behavior? How is WFP perceived/accepted and is there any anti WFP sentiment?

? 16

How could communications with communities inadvertently contribute to stigmatization or blame?



Country Diagnostic Clinics: defining operational adjustments and mitigation measures (Support to operationalise the tool)

PROCESS LINE KEY STEPS



Application of tool

CO, with support from RB (as needed), applies 16 questions to the country context



Request for support

CO triggers request for additional support to RB



Diagnostic Clinic(s)

RB and HQ design clinic based on CO requirements and drawing on relevant thematic expertise



Operational management session

CD presents results to RD backed by HQ technical units and agree on/ sign off programme adjustments

As the Country Office responds to the above set of questions it will help to identify new conflict sensitivity risks emerging from programming and how to mitigate these, while also raising red flags that may require further information gathering in order to develop mitigation measures.

Upon request, the Regional Bureau team supported by the Peace and Conflict Team in the HQ can assist country offices in developing their mitigation measures and articulating the operational adjustments needed to ensure the response is conflict sensitive. Furthermore, this effort will ensure that WFP operations do not inadvertently get caught up in tensions or conflict but rather strengthen social cohesion and peace, where possible.

This would be conducted through the delivery of a carefully tailored virtual 'Diagnostic Clinic' that would pull together a range of relevant thematic experts in support of the country office.

Support provided, including through the Diagnostic Clinic, could include updating conflict analysis as well as identifying opportunities to support peace, and establishing mechanisms to monitor conflict risks. Support is also available for capacity building in conflict sensitivity.

The support provided would be tailored to the unique needs of each requesting Country Office and its operating context. It may therefore range from a one-off 'Diagnostic Clinic' session to a process of continuous support across several weeks. As appropriate, and funding allowing, support could be extended beyond the offering of WFP's internal expertise and resources to also draw on our network of Peace and Conflict partners.

Following the 'Diagnostic Clinics' an operational management session between the Country Director, Regional Director and relevant HQ technical units would be arranged to present country-specific results and agree on/ sign off programme adjustments.



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Sample of mitigation, response and adaptation measures for conflict risks in light of COVID 19

<p>Responses are politicised or instrumentalised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where a response is channeled through social protection mechanisms which are known to have politically-motivated exclusion errors, this could further aggravate tensions. • Where state is a conflict party there may be limited incentives to protect / support certain communities, including through refusing permission to allow passage of lifesaving assistance on the basis of risk of transmission of coronavirus. • Where central -periphery political rivalries and lack of clarity about local authorities responsibilities make coordination around COVID response challenging • Rent seeking behavior / capture of resources might increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider potential political motives for authorities' recommendations for where assistance should be delivered / prioritized. • Speak with the key actors or their proxies to directly address the problem • In context where mandates and division of roles in managing the COVID 19 response is not clear (at central level and between central and periphery) establish/maintain clear coordination lines and avoid been caught up in political/conflict rivalries. • Articulate numbers of those cut off from assistance and potential impact, immediate and longer term. • Raise concerns within the UNCT/HCT and request the RC to strengthen advocacy to access marginalized populations. • Raise concern internally WFP management (RB and HQ) and solicit corporate engagement on possible mitigation measures (including withdrawal of assistance as leverage for inclusion). • Strengthen assessment of situation of the most vulnerable, including remote assessment and corresponding advocacy plan (internal and external). • Consider the food security status of the population to be served against the conflict sensitivity risks involved – if there are major risks but needs are not life threatening, adjust timelines to allow stronger context analysis and risk mitigation prior to response
<p>Targeting is seen as biased</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting the most vulnerable may mean WFP works with those stigmatized in light of covid 19 (IDPs, refugees, migrants) as such WFP's support may be viewed as biased. • This likely to be accentuated in circumstances where development and emergency response programming has supported different groups (due to vulnerability status) and the development programming is suspended. • Where different groups control different territories, the phasing of food distributions may be interpreted as politically motivated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where development programmes are suspended, and humanitarian programmes have different target groups, communication around suspending programmes needs care to minimize tensions between different target groups • In refugee / IDP context – expand targeting to host community as new vulnerabilities emerge (especially loss of daily wage labour / migrant earnings). • Ensure targeting is transparent, consistent and accepted, and communicated widely to maximise transparency. Where lists are provided by local authorities these require at minimum light touch verification (where feasible) and/or ensure rigorous reconciliation processes via monitoring mechanisms during implementation.
<p>Militarisation of response creates difficult operating environment for WFP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clashes between police / military and protests against control measures create a tense / dangerous environment and undermine social contract. • Military may take over IDP/refugees camp management, affecting perceptions of WFP's impartiality and neutrality. • Security sector involved in quarantine enforcement / distributions may contract COVID 19. • Communities set up own groups to enforce isolation, preventing transit / access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the fundamentals of humanitarian access approaches are in place (Programme, logistical, security arrangements; external engagement with different actors, including the military when necessary) Guidance on the development of an access strategy can be found in WFP (2017) Humanitarian Access Operational Guidance Manual https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000021130/download/ • Integrate light touch conflict analysis into access strategy development / reformulation, especially regarding the opening up of new access. • Identify trusted independent local actors who can support access discussions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in violence with militaries and among communities leads to new displacements and access constraints and increased need for humanitarian assistance. • Increased activities of NSAG and vigilantes groups can impact negotiations for humanitarian access. • Diminished capacity of UN peacekeepers and other security sector actors to provide protection in high-risk environments may adversely affect WFP operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid use of military / warfare language when communicating about COVID 19 response. • Track incident typology to assess changing risk environment • Monitor perceptions of WFP's relationship with government and security sector actors, which could affect attitudes towards WFP and ensure close coordination and dialogue with military actors, through established structures, in order to ensure a principled approach. • Engage with UNCT/HCT coordination structures and Missions, and key interlocutors to advocate for engagement that protects and increases humanitarian space.
Worsening security situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged and significant civil unrest reduces access and disrupts key routes and distributions become more risky. • Civil unrest creates increased insecurity and stress beneficiaries and staff • Lost of incomes/livelihoods, food insecurity, civil unrest lead to increase in the level of criminality, looting of WFP warehouses, threat to WFP assets, and forced offloading of or attacks on trucks/ convoys. • Increased risk of theft from beneficiaries, in particular following enlarged distribution. • Movement restrictions, militarization of the response and more active NSAGs can create difficulty in accessing beneficiaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct conflict analysis with a particular emphasis on developing plausible future scenarios and develop risk mitigation measures. Capture and report in the CO's risk register. • Monitor risk transference to local staff and CPs, establish responsive mechanisms to address insecurity and stigma for staff / partners • Confirm that risk mitigation measures are ready for potential changes driven by COVID 19 and ensure coherent safety and reporting protocols • Work with security on strengthening security aspects of cash safe distribution see guidance on safe cash distribution • Communicate promptly and effectively to the different members of affected populations on delays, shortfalls and suspension of activities to address possible confusion and related stress • Negotiate access with local formal, informal and traditional authorities following COVID 19 humanitarian access guidelines • For more info check: ACLED Disorder Tracker https://acleddata.com/analysis/covid-19-disorder-tracker/
Increased competition over limited resources (livelihoods, food, health), overall social tensions and erosion of trust in public authorities leads to a deterioration of social contract and social cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community space and conflict resolution mechanisms involving face to face meeting will be disrupted and previous achievements in enhanced tolerance, relationship building and social cohesion the risk of being lost. • Competition for dwindling resources undermine trust, cooperative behaviour and community work/spaces. • Increased community tensions create additional operational challenges and make re-entry of other development programmes more difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor rising tensions at community level, especially towards certain groups that are more frequently targeted with discrimination and scapegoating (e.g. IDPs, urban settlers, refugees etc.). • Integration of trust building activities into longer term programming. • Explore opportunities for using existing project-related committees as vehicles for rebuilding trust at the community level, such as to promote collective action on shared needs (recognising the restrictions on gatherings). • Carefully analyse how relationships / tensions has evolved on the ground prior to re-instating currently suspended programming. • Make sure AAP mechanisms are still appropriate, effective and in use – otherwise adjust Check this for tips on feedback practice during COVID • Use APP mechanisms to assess and monitor emerging grievances.
Widespread of misinformation, fake news and rumours create fear and scapegoating of certain groups along ethnic, religious or other lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumors trigger stigmatization of certain communities seen as spreading the virus and increased tensions. • Fear drives inappropriate/ violent responses or fatalistic attitudes, exacerbating divisions • Misinformation could affect also WFP operations, targeting and COVID management practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate a clear and coherent communication strategy to reduce transmission, misinformation, rumours and possible scapegoating of specific groups. Align the strategy to the key messages promoted by WHO, and deliver it in a culturally sensitive way and appropriate language, using simple messages accessible by specific target groups. For examples of communication with communities please check the communication with community strategy and nudging in distribution centres created by RBP • Avoid potentially divisive terms: (eg. Wuhan Virus, "victim", "suspected cases", "infecting" or "spreading to others"). • Only report information based on reliable scientific data and the latest official health advice

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a variety of communication channels (if possible off - and online) • Use distribution points and existing platforms such as AAP and CFMs to convey health messaging and updates on the COVID 19 impact to help reduce misinformation and rumours. • Reach out to trusted community leaders (e.g. religious and traditional authorities) to amplify positive and diverse voices and provide reliable and accurate information at a community level. • Listen to communities, build on trusted relationship, find ways to hear rumours thorough CFM, PDM or through social media, and where appropriate, react through verification and engage target audience to correct misinformation or refer to an appropriate partner to respond. • Explore new partnerships (WHO has partnered with facebook in Yemen). Strengthen connections to local and grassroots organisations to enable two-way communication. • Specific steps should be taken to tackle stigma, including careful use of language, and specific communications strategies. Identify and work through social influencers such as youth. • Link to protection colleagues, and Risk communication / Social Mobilisation / Community Engagement technical groups where these exist. <p>For more information check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO, IFRC, UNICEF COVID 19 stigma guidance - WHO Myth Busters • CDAC Guidance on working with rumours • BBC Media communication in health emergency Internews tracking rumours
Acceptance of WFP and wider international community is reduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases of COVID linked to UN / international community. • Activities that enhance acceptance, such as school feeding in certain contexts, are suspended. • Protective equipment for WFP's/partners' employees may give implicit messages that aid workers lives are more highly valued as they are protected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find 'ethical brokers' (people who have legitimacy and are trusted by beneficiaries) who are accepted in the community can help navigate a lack of trust • Clear communication around the need for front line employees to wear protective gear to protect communities from the further spread of the virus is of paramount importance. Clear messages could also prevent beneficiaries' reaction to 'outsiders' coming to their communities as potential vectors of the virus, and this way dissipate stress / anxiety at point of distribution.
Significant scale up under time pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting of major new groups such as daily labourers in urban areas, seasonal migrants, with little time to understand cleavages increases risks of aggravating tensions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure alignment with humanitarian principles among new partners, in particular financial services providers who may not be used to working with humanitarians. • Work with other agencies with strong local networks, especially those who have peace / conflict expertise, to get rapid understanding of key existing community cleavages. • Explore options for remote assessments , or for lighter touch combined assessments in conjunction with others such as Ministry of Health, IOM, WHO etc.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

An annotated bibliography on conflict, governance and COVID 19

<https://heathermarquette.com/2020/04/09/what-were-reading-on-conflict-governance-covid-19-edition-9-april/>

A list of resources on conflict, peace and COVID19 nexus (see the tab of the same name)

https://www.politicalsettlements.org/covid-19/resources/#content_2-0

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