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Cambodia COVID-19 Lockdown

Food Security and Nutrition Brief

6 May 2021

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- World Food Programme (WFP)
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Situation overview

As of 6 May 2021

On 1 April 2021, the Phnom Penh Municipality implemented an overnight curfew (8:00pm-5:00am) and lockdown measures in some villages and sangkats in Khan Sen Sok, Khan Po Sen Chey and Khan Mean Chey to contain the spread of Covid-19. Beginning on 15 April 2021, as Covid-19 positive cases continued to rise, the Government instituted a lockdown for the whole of Phnom Penh and Ta Khmau town of Kandal province for 14 days. These lockdowns were lifted on 6 May 2021; however, Phnom Penh City Hall will continue the three-color zoning system (red, orange, yellow, see next page) and restrictions will remain in certain high-risk areas. A number of lockdowns and red zones have been established in other parts of the country as Covid-19 cases increase (see Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Figure 1. Red zone location and market closures in Phnom Penh

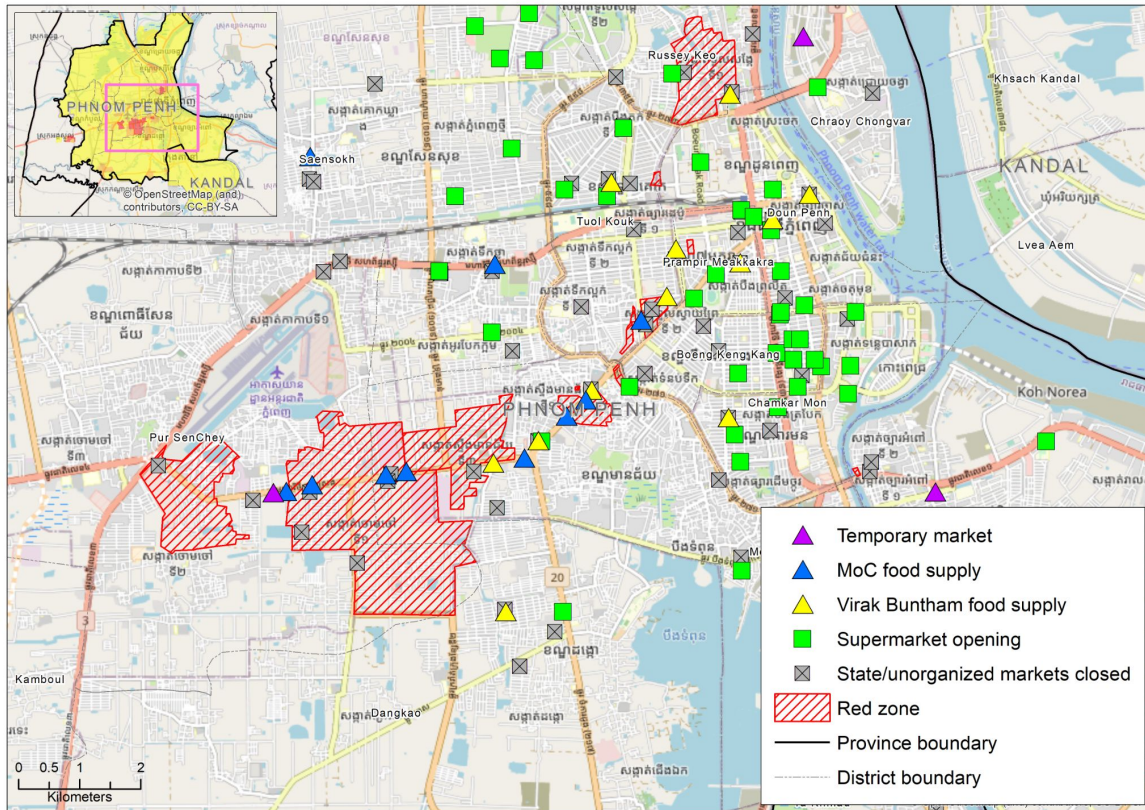
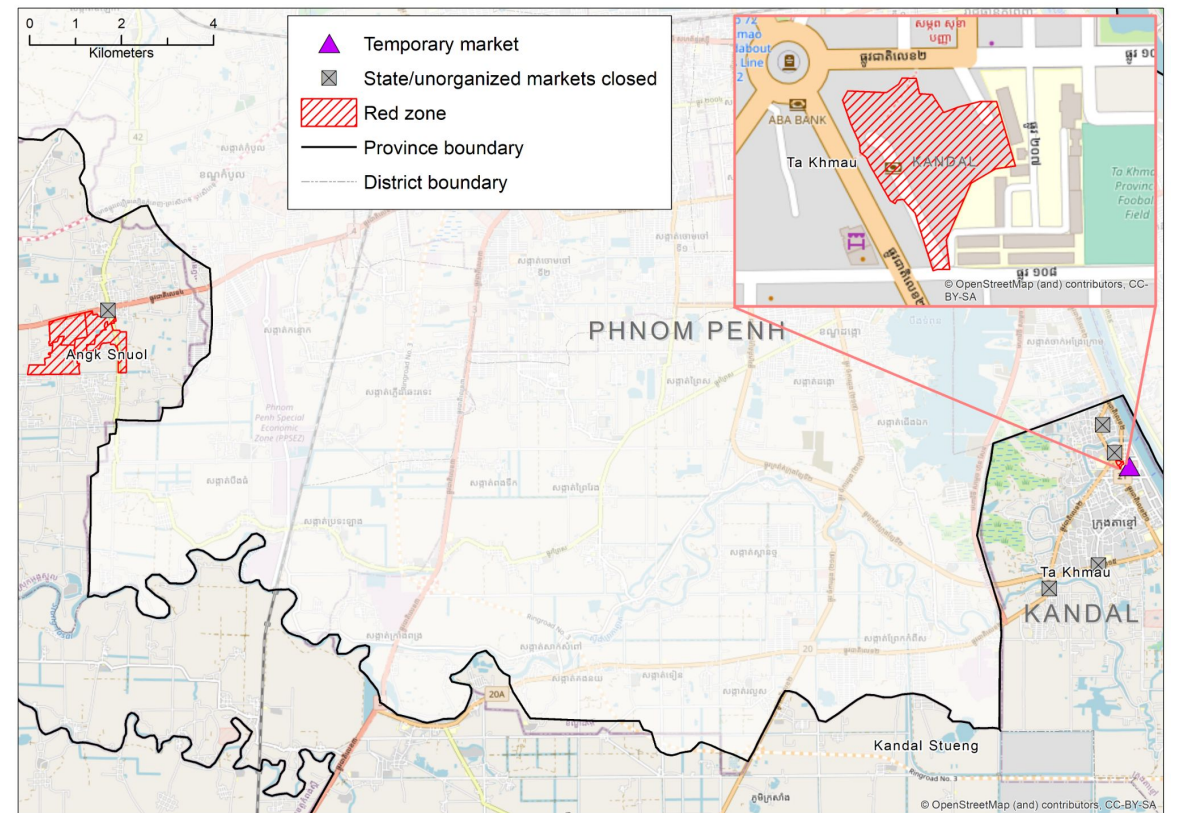


Figure 2. Red zone location and market closures in Kandal



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Data sources: Phnom Penh Municipality, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Information, WFP/MAFF market monitoring system

Figure 3. Red zone location and market closures in Preah Sihanouk

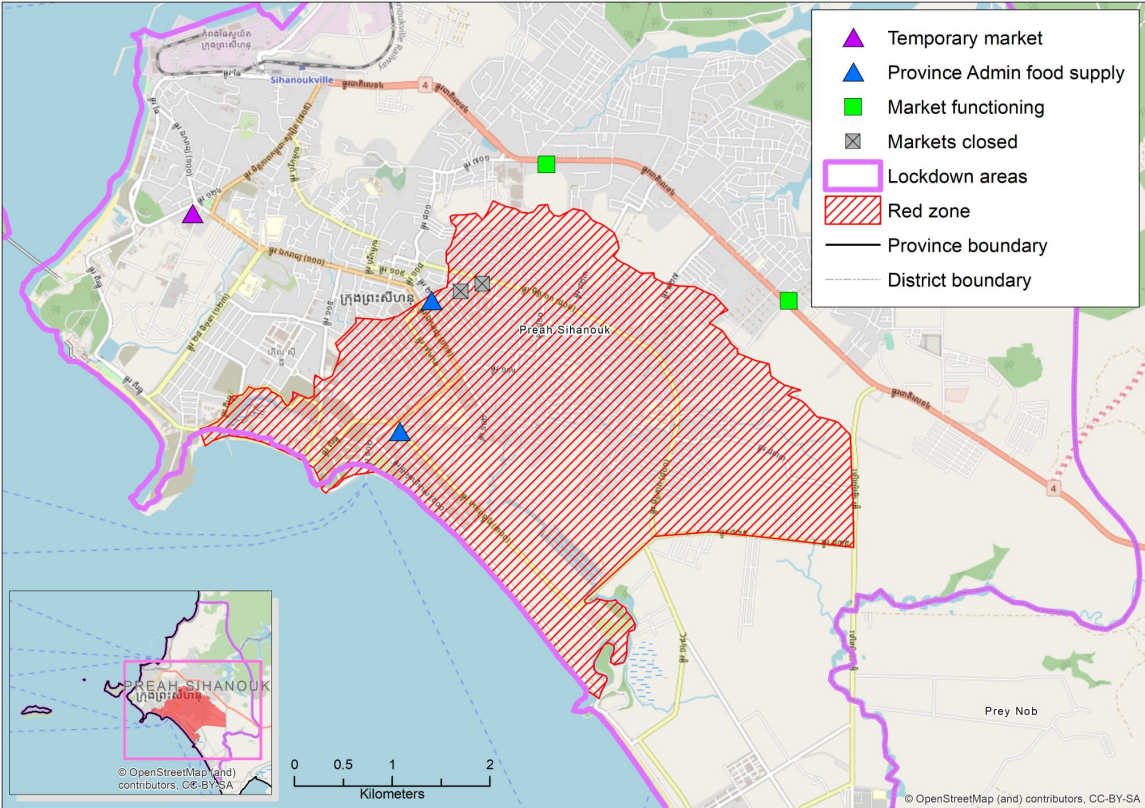
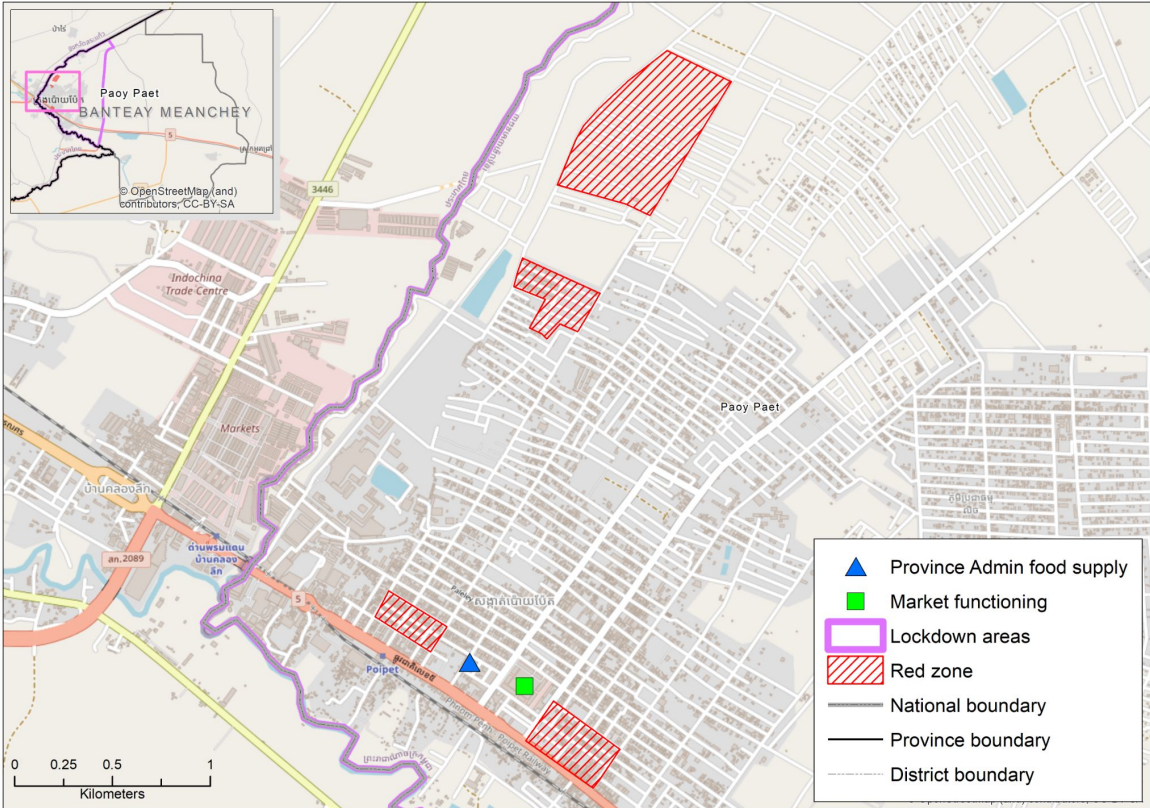


Figure 4. Red zone location in Poy Paet, Banteay Meanchey



Description of the three-color zoning system:

- **Red:** High risk area. Individuals must remain in their residence except for “essential travel”.
- **Orange:** Medium risk area. Those in orange zones can travel for “necessary work”.
- **Yellow:** Low risk area. Travel in this zone is permitted, most businesses can now reopen.

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Food availability and access

As of 6 May 2021

On 23 April 2021, all state markets and unorganized markets in Phnom Penh were closed and transportation of food commodities from other locations into the city faced some challenges.* This created a shortage of some food supplies (especially meat and vegetables) which led to price increases for some commodities (see Table 1). Like Phnom Penh, markets in lockdown/red zones in Kandal (i.e., all markets in Ta Khmau district and one market in Angk Snuol district) and Preah Sihanouk (two markets) were closed temporarily.

Market monitoring data compiled from before (7 April) and after (23 April) the lockdowns reveal that some retail food prices (e.g., fish, pork, eggs and various fresh vegetables) in Phnom Penh and Ta Khmau markets had increased significantly. Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar increases occurred in other foods as well (e.g., seasonal fruits).

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) is providing six (6) food items at fixed prices to ensure supply and stabilize prices during the lockdown (see Table 2).

Table 2. Fixed Food Prices from MOC

No.	Food Commodity	Quantity/volume	Unit	Price (Riel)
1	Mee Chiet noodle	24 packages/box	One box	16,000
2	Vital drinking water (1.5 liter/bottle)	12 bottle/box	One box	14,000
3	Fish sauce (450ml/bottle)	6 bottles/package	One package	6,500
4	Soy sauce (450ml/bottle)	6 bottles/package	One package	6,500
5	Canned fish	6 cans/package	One package	17,000
6	Rice	25 kgs/bag	One bag	55,000

Table 1. Food Prices in Phnom Penh and Ta Khmau*

Food Commodity	Unit	Average Retail Prices (as of 7 April)	Average Retail Prices (as of 23 April)	% Change	
1.1. Mixed Rice	Riels/Kg	2,040	2,040	▶	0.0%
2.1. Snakehead fish (Live)	Riels/Kg	7,750	10,000	▲	29.0%
2.2. Trey Pra (Live)	Riels/Kg	7,583	8,500	▲	12.1%
3.1. Pork with fat	Riels/Kg	24,625	27,667	▲	12.4%
4.1. Duck egg	Riels/10 eggs	5,088	6,000	▲	17.9%
5.1. Vegetable Oil	Riels/ 5 litre	25,000	26,000	▶	4.0%
6.1. Iodized salt	Riels/Kg	1,225	1,350	▲	10.2%
8.1. Morning glory	Riels/Kg	3,146	4,667	▲	48.3%
8.2. Carrot	Riels/Kg	3,875	3,250	▼	-16.1%
8.5. Chinese spinach	Riels/Kg	5,125	5,000	▶	-2.4%
8.7. Chinese flowering cabbage	Riels/Kg	3,292	4,125	▲	25.3%
8.14. Wax gourd	Riels/Kg	1,825	3,250	▲	78.1%
8.15. Long eggplants	Riels/Kg	2,617	3,500	▲	33.8%
8.17. Tomatoes	Riels/Kg	4,875	4,750	▶	-2.6%
8.18. Spong gourd	Riels/Kg	2,000	3,000	▲	50.0%
8.23. Cauliflower	Riels/Kg	10,000	8,500	▼	-15.0%
8.24. Chinese Kale	Riels/Kg	4,750	6,500	▲	36.8%

* The price data presented are averages for Phnom Penh and Ta Khmau (prices were combined from MOC and WFP market monitoring system sources).

* Prior to this order, only some markets in red zones and areas with high incidence of Covid-19 positive cases were temporarily shutdown.

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Household food security and nutrition

As of 6 May 2021

Recent assessments provide an indication of how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected food security and nutrition at the household and individual level. The United Nations Covid-19 Social Impact assessment, a nationally representative sample survey, was conducted six times between August 2020 and March 2021.

Key findings include:

- At times, 1 in 5 households had low dietary diversity (consumed < 4 food groups/day) and nearly 1 in 4 did not regularly consume Vitamin A- and iron-rich foods. The situation deteriorated through the end of 2020 before rebounding somewhat in early 2021.
- IDPoor households, small households (< 4 members) and households with members having disabilities were more likely to have poor food security and nutrition outcomes during the assessment period.
- The diets of women (see Figure 5) and children living in IDPoor households, rural households, large households (6+ members), and lower educated households are of most concern.
- The proportion of households resorting to food- and livelihood-based coping strategies (see Figure 6) peaked in October 2021; however, the level of negative coping had not returned to baseline levels as of March 2021, suggesting that households were continuing to struggle to obtain enough food.
- Household- and individual-level food security and nutrition outcomes were observed to track measures of market access, such that reduced access (e.g. following October 2020 floods or November 2020 community transmission) resulted in poorer outcomes.

Following the implementation of lockdown measures, several agencies of the Humanitarian Response Forum (HRF) conducted a rapid, mobile-phone based survey of vulnerable households in red and orange zones between 26 April - 1 May. The survey found that households' main concern was lack of food: 77% of respondents reported having insufficient food over the past 7 days (among households in red zones, this figure was 83%). Additionally, 43% of respondents reported having received some kind of food assistance since the lockdown began. However, an overwhelming majority of households listed food assistance (94%) and cash assistance (70%) as critical over the coming weeks.

Figure 5. Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women

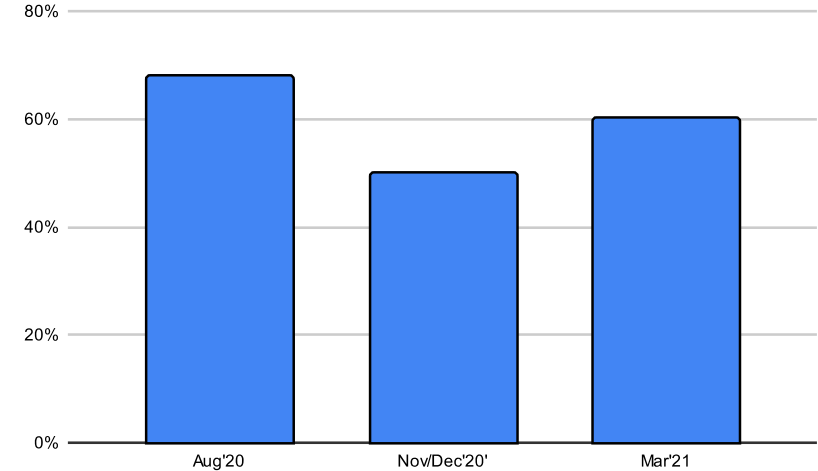
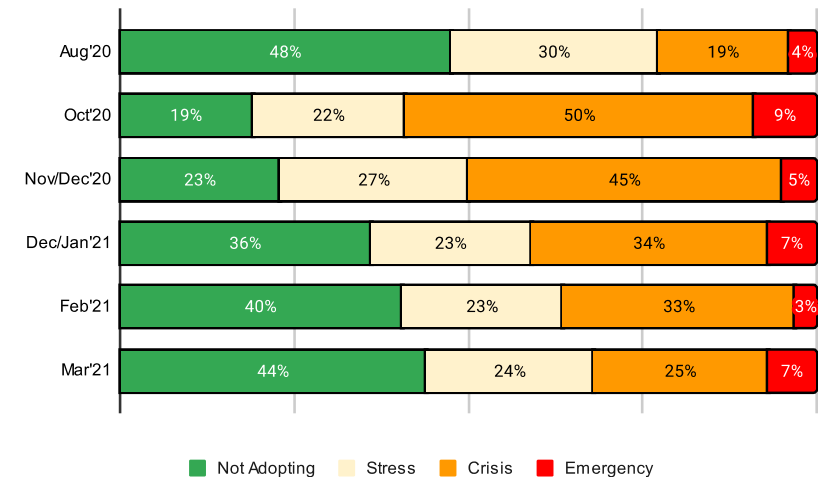


Figure 6. Livelihood Coping Strategies



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Data sources: United Nations Covid-19 Social Impact Assessment; Covid-19 Rapid Assessment: Lockdown situation in Phnom Penh

Markets

- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (MAFF) issued certificates or passes to facilitate traders' transportation of food products into the lockdown areas (Khmer Times, 22 April 2021).
- Ministry of Commerce (MOC) launched online/temporary markets for selling basic food items to people in red zones in Phnom Penh. Virak Buntham company also received a license from MOC to mobilize 64 trucks to commercialize food throughout the lockdown area, including in the red zones in Phnom Penh (Khmer Times, 23 April 2021). Temporary open food markets were established in lockdown areas in Phnom Penh, Kandal and Preah Sihanouk. Provincial administrations in Preah Sihanouk and Banteay Meanchey have set up mobile booths to supply basic food items in red zones.

Emergency food assistance

- Between 10-30 April, 184,406 families in Phnom Penh received assistance from His Majesty King, the Prime Minister, private companies, civil society/NGOs and individuals (Phnom Penh Municipality Facebook). As of 2 May, emergency assistance from the Prime Minister had been provided to 141,600 families with a ration of 25kg of rice, 1 box of instant noodles, 10 cans of canned fish, 6 bottles of soy sauce and 6 bottles of fish sauce (Ministry of Information Facebook). As of 4 May, assistance had been provided to about 6,300 families in Kandal, 9,300 in Preah Sihanouk and 2,000 in Banteay Meanchey.
- On 30 April 2021, Phnom Penh administration received 78 MT of rice from MAFF and Government of Japan and the Armed Forces provided 75 MT of rice, 300 boxes of canned fish, 3000 packages of soy sauce, 3000 packages of fish sauce, 6000 boxes of instant noodles for distribution to people in red zones.
- The National Social Protection Council (NSPC) is currently preparing a proposal for a more nutritionally-sensitive food assistance package to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in lockdown areas, including children and pregnant and lactating women.

Emergency social assistance

- The Government has established a national committee, composed of senior officials from line ministries, to coordinate the implementation of lockdown measures, chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF). Three sub-committees were established: a beneficiary identification working group chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSAVY); a monitoring and evaluation working group chaired by MEF; and a benefit package working group chaired by the National Social Protection Council (NSPC).
- MoSAVY created a Telegram group to facilitate information exchange with development partners on social assistance and other relevant interventions.
- Under the lead of MoSAVY, a proposal on the cash transfer beneficiary identification and mechanisms to deliver assistance in the lockdown areas has been prepared and discussed with the Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of MEF in addition to proposals by groups led by MEF and NSPC.

The food security and nutrition situation for a growing segment of the population has gradually deteriorated over the last six months. Without support, these vulnerable groups are left with very limited resources to anticipate or mitigate the effects of new shocks, including the recent lockdowns in various locations. Protecting the most vulnerable groups from the unintended consequences of such pandemic mitigation measures, including lockdowns, is required to ensure that their access to nutritious food is maintained and to avoid further deterioration of their nutritional status and depletion of their asset basis.

Recommendations:

1. **Do no harm:** Ensure that the pandemic mitigation measures are implemented in a way that “do no harm” and protect people's access to basic needs, including food.
2. **Grant access to humanitarian partners** to red zones and other lockdown areas to assess needs and distribute emergency food items and other basic necessities, including essential health services.
3. **Keep food systems functioning:** Sustain and facilitate the functioning of local food systems through existing distribution channels. Monitor market functionality and prices. If prices for certain food commodities increase due to supply chain disruptions, transparently regulate these food prices, especially in red zones.
4. **Include all actors along the food supply chain as essential workers**, in close coordination with local authorities, including farmers, food transporters, and vendors. Along with priority groups (frontline workers, elderly, with health conditions), continue vaccinating food vendors, agriculture traders, input suppliers and food delivery personnel.
5. **Enable market functioning by allowing local vendors and the private sector to offer fresh and diverse foods** (with risk mitigation measures in place: ‘open-air’, social distancing, mask wearing, cleaning market areas/stalls, etc.) to assure food supply even in red zones, at least at a minimum level. Conduct frequent COVID-19 testing of vendors and equip sellers with PPE.

Recommendations:

6. **Provide immediate relief to the most vulnerable affected by lockdown measures:** The health and nutritional needs, particularly of pregnant/lactating women, young children, older people, people with chronic non-communicable diseases, and people with disabilities are special; they require regular access to fresh, diverse and nutritious foods to prevent malnutrition. Ensure that food distributions remain a stop-gap measure until access to cash and markets is restored and/or cash assistance begins.
7. **Update the food relief package to incorporate nutritious and fresh foods** (and MoH-approved complementary food products for baskets specifically targeted to children aged 6–24 months). Healthy, balanced diets are key for boosting immunity and preventing non-communicable diseases that are risk factors for higher COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. Prevent or regulate the distribution/sale of infant formula that undermines breastfeeding practices.
8. **Urgently expand cash assistance** to the near poor and accelerate the introduction of the emergency cash transfer programme for newly identified “near poor” currently under consideration by RGC with a strong communication component.
9. **Ensure that cash transfers are accompanied by nutrition messages** to provide information to families on how to use the cash towards the purchase of nutritious foods particularly of pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children.
10. **Prepare for a worsening situation**, with potential new waves, expanding red zones, new cities requiring quarantine measures and prolonged periods of confinement. This should include defining a standard for lockdown areas, notably in relation to market functioning, designing a standard emergency food relief package that is nutritionally adequate, and working to pre-identify population groups that would be required to receive social assistance in case of arising shocks.
11. **Ensure regular communication of information to the public and development partners** to promote cooperation in addressing issues affecting food access. Consider establishing and promoting communication channels to regularly solicit, collect, and disseminate information to create a feedback loop between affected populations and Government authorities. Such a communication strategy can help mobilize and deliver resources most efficiently to vulnerable groups when and where they are needed most.



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