



World Food Programme

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LIVES

Scaling down operations

Key RAM considerations when prioritizing assistance

In 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) anticipates an unprecedented gap between the global need for food assistance and the available funding to meet that need. While shortfalls have been persistent even as WFP significantly scaled up in recent years, 2023 marks a crucial turning point as funding levels are projected to decrease while needs continue to grow. When identified needs cannot be met, the process of prioritization aims to ensure that assistance is safeguarded for the most vulnerable people within the targeted population. As WFP country offices (CO) are forced to prioritize assistance, the role of WFP's Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) is vital in upholding WFP's integrity as a champion for food security and nutrition, and to enable needs-based assistance in line with humanitarian principles. This document outlines essential factors for RAM functions¹ at the CO level, enabling prioritization strategies that reinforce WFP's mandate while safeguarding assistance for those furthest behind.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that prioritizing assistance within food-insecure populations comes with negative consequences. The prioritization process involves intricate analysis and operational trade-offs aimed at mitigating risks and minimizing negative impacts on food security, nutrition, and access to essential resources. RAM's role lies in generating evidence to facilitate informed decision-making that minimizes harm. Furthermore, RAM works to monitor, document, and communicate any anticipated and actual negative impacts, recognizing that they will arise regardless of the thoroughness of prioritization decisions.



Secondly, active involvement from internal and external stakeholders is critical for successful prioritization design and implementation. Internally, RAM must maintain systematic and regular communication with other functions to ensure optimal utilization of limited human and financial resources. Insight into key programmatic considerations, such as operational planning, communications strategies, or staffing arrangements, provide necessary details that allow RAM to deliver timely and actionable guidance to WFP Programme and Management teams. External consultations with affected populations, partners, humanitarian and development organizations, and relevant authorities are also necessary to ensure efficient resource allocation. Importantly, RAM should advocate for the inclusion of affected communities' perspectives in decision-making processes, avoid duplications, prioritize marginalized areas and populations, and ensure that contracted partners have the necessary capacity to fulfill their obligations.

RECOMMENDATIONS WHEN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING PRIORITIZATION APPROACHES

Identify and collate key existing evidence to inform impartial prioritization decisions: Gather relevant data from WFP and partner assessments (both quantitative and qualitative) alongside thematic analyses. Where feasible, address knowledge gaps by conducting primary data collection.

Be mindful of the limitations of using IPC/CH for prioritization: While IPC/CH results are valuable for food security classification at the geographic level, relying solely on area-based classification may lead to significant inclusion or exclusion errors.

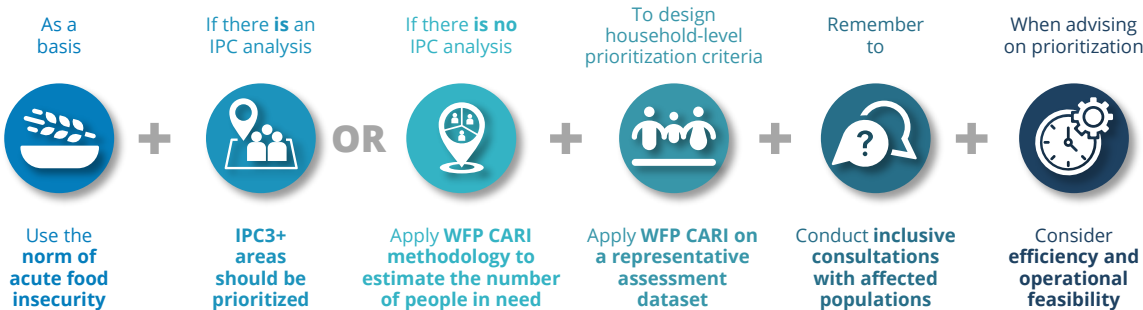


This can be attributed to several factors including:

- Prevalence of IPC4+ populations in areas classified as IPC3 or lower, and conversely the presence of food secure populations in IPC4+ areas,
- The non-transferability of area and population-level classifications to household-level, i.e. the inability to determine the IPC phase of individual households,
- Impact of ongoing assistance not being reflected in the analysis, possibly overestimating food security, and
- The consensus-based nature of the IPC analysis

Combine data and methodologies to arrive at fit-for-purpose prioritization recommendations: To provide prioritization recommendations that minimize errors, maintain operational feasibility, and remain inclusive to those served, WFP must know where acute food insecurity is occurring and within these areas, which households are acutely food insecure. Having access to data at this level of detail allows WFP to design efficient prioritization that reaches specific households in need of assistance.

To generate this information, the following combination of data and methodologies is recommended:



As a foundation, use the norm of acute food insecurity² as the basis for this approach.

Where IPC analysis exists, prioritize IPC3+ areas for food assistance – while there may also be pockets of acute food insecurity in areas of lower classification, it is likely more cost-effective for WFP to prioritize areas with a higher magnitude and severity of food insecurity. Advocating for government and/or humanitarian and development partners to assist populations that WFP is unable to cover is key. To identify the total prioritization caseload (meaning the total number of beneficiaries prioritized following funding cuts) at national and governorate levels, use the IPC3+ population figure in areas classified as IPC3+.

Where IPC analysis does not exist, applying WFP's [Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security](#) (CARI) methodology is recommended. To do so, you will require two resources: representative needs assessments and data on required indicators such as food consumption, economic capacity and livelihood coping strategies. Applying CARI methodology helps inform the number of people in need by area. From this data, you can estimate prioritization caseloads, with priority given to the severely and moderately food insecure.

Once you have your prioritization caseload by area (using either IPC3+ areas or CARI estimations), you will have to identify which households are most food insecure in these areas. To do so, you will have to design household level prioritization criteria by applying CARI on a representative assessment dataset. This approach allows for the prioritization of the most food insecure households in an area classified as IPC3+, and achieves lower errors when implemented compared to, for example, IPC/CH-based blanket inclusion or exclusion.

Conduct inclusive consultations with the affected population and ensure that their feedback is integrated into design and implementation plans, and

Consider efficiency and operational feasibility when advising on the prioritization approach. Different methods may for example utilize the same prioritization criteria but vary in resource requirements and cost-effectiveness.

Assess the food security impact of prioritization and support advocacy efforts: Advocating for the resources necessary to carry out prioritization-focused monitoring activities in addition to regular monitoring and evaluation activities is recommended. It is also important to encourage donors to fund robust monitoring exercises that document the impact of prioritization. After COs have identified those beneficiaries who will continue to get assistance and those who will be discontinued, the following steps should be undertaken:

- A rapid assessment of the food security status of the prioritized groups before and after they have received assistance, ideally following the same households over time⁴; and
- Visits to a sub-set of prioritized beneficiaries to verify that they do in fact meet the prioritization criteria⁵.

These two activities are designed to generate evidence for operational decision-making as well as advocacy. They achieve two main outcomes:

- 1) ensure that assistance is going to the right people; and
- 2) changes in overall food security outcomes due to prioritization are fully captured and communicated in a timely manner.

LOOKING AHEAD

To strengthen existing evidence bases, COs are encouraged to reach out to RAM teams in HQ⁶ for support on how to set up a real-time monitoring/remote system to continuously assess the impact of prioritization in a cost-effective manner. Additionally, COs are encouraged to consult available process monitoring resources, e.g., data from Community Feedback Mechanisms (CFM) and third-party monitoring (TPM) reports to track whether prioritization decisions are implemented as intended.



For questions regarding the recommendations provided in this document, and/or support requests related to ongoing or forthcoming prioritization exercises, do not hesitate to contact your Regional Bureau RAM teams and the Needs Assessments and Targeting unit in HQ via global.assessmentandtargeting@wfp.org.

NOTES

1. RAM is referring to the VAM and M&E functions at country office-level.
2. IPC/CH 3+, moderately & severely food insecure as per WFP's CARI methodology, or equivalent.
3. For details on how to develop and validate eligibility criteria, please refer to the [Targeting and Prioritization Operational Guidance Note](#) (p.29-34). Additional resources are available via the [Targeting & Prioritization page on WFP Go](#) and the [RAM Resource Centre](#). The 2022 Executive Director's circular on Management of Targeting Processes by WFP offices can be accessed [here](#).
4. In addition the baseline (gathered prior to the change in assistance), at least two rounds of follow-up is recommended (e.g. at one and three months after the change coming into effect). For examples of pre-post prioritization monitoring exercises, please refer to the Monitoring section of the [Targeting and Prioritization Operational Guidance Note](#) (p.48).
5. How criteria are applied to generate an updated beneficiary list will vary with the targeting and prioritization methodology (data-driven, community-based, etc.). Sample verification give important insights to how well the method performs in minimizing so-called implementation errors, i.e. the inclusion of households who should not be prioritized – for details see p.52 of the above referenced guidance note.
6. Contact the Hunger Monitoring Team via mvam.wfp@wfp.org

RESEARCH, ASSESSMENT & MONITORING

World Food Programme

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