Canadian Foodgrains Bank
A Christian Response to Hunger

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4. Extremely Vulnerable

FEWS calls these people 'at risk.' They are selling productive assets (farm tools, oxen, land, seed etc.), which will seriously affect their ability to feed themselves in the future.

Extremely vulnerable groups have abandoned their usual production activities and are looking for non-traditional employment, which prevents them from continuing their normal lifestyle. Whole families may be migrating to other areas.

At this point, people are in need of programs that support their income, assets and basic nutrition. Straight food relief and seed packs are two examples.

5. Famine

Groups experiencing famine have used up their resources. They basically have no means of producing food or income. They face starvation, disease and death.

Appropriate responses to famine include the provision of food, shelter and medicine. Programs are aimed at providing for basic human needs.

Hopefully, by recognizing food insecurity in earlier stages and acting appropriately, communities can avoid severe forms of vulnerability. These categories can also be a guide for programs that are trying to help communities move from a more vulnerable to a less vulnerable state.

Indicators for Food Security Assessment

Many different indicators may be used to find out what people are doing with their assets and their way of producing food or income. The following are some examples that have been used in the past:

Activity	Indicator	Source
Change of food source	# Households using reserves	Agricultural workers
Search for other employment	Unusual movement of adult males, wage changes	Chiefs, administrators, extension workers
Increase in prices	Crop/livestock prices at local market	Market surveys
Sale of productive assets	Unusual amounts of personal productive goods at market	Local market observation, household survey
Migration	Number of whole families moving out of area	Household surveys, government records, NGOs
Decreased food intake	# Meals/day, types of food eaten	Household surveys, 24-hour recall

Source: Maxwell & Frankenberger 1995

The appropriateness of the indicator, and the usefulness of the source depend on the local economy and culture. Indicators should be chosen by people who understand the local situation (see tips 105 for more on choosing indicators).

The FEWS categories do not explain all situations. However they are a useful guide for organizations and communities that are interested in learning more about food security in their area.

Resources

Maxwell S & Frankenberger T (1995) Household Food Security: Concepts, Indicators, Measurements, A Technical Review. UNICEF

FEWS website: www.fews.net

For more information on the project cycle, or other issues related to planning, monitoring, and evaluation, contact the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (cfgb@foodgrainsbank.ca).

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