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## POLICY ISSUES

### Agenda item 5

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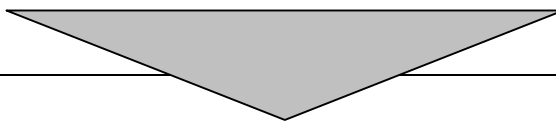
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## URBAN FOOD INSECURITY: STRATEGIES FOR WFP

### Food Assistance to Urban Areas

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# Note to the Executive Board



**This document is submitted for approval by the Executive Board.**

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

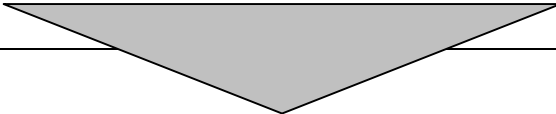
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# Executive Summary



Urbanization is perhaps the most dominant demographic process in recent decades. The urban population in developing countries has increased fivefold over the last 30 years. Currently, over 40 percent of the populations of low- and middle-income countries live in urban areas. More than half the population of Africa and Asia will be urban dwellers by 2020. More than three quarters of Latin Americans already are. Increasing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are accompanying the growth in urban areas.

To address urban food insecurity, WFP and its partners need to consider the factors that affect the food and livelihood security of the poor. These include greater dependency on cash income and less reliance on agriculture and natural resources, low wages from work at insecure jobs, a large number of women working outside the home, legal obstacles including insecure land and housing tenure, inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and health services, and frequently weak social networks that often transcend community boundaries. Moreover, governments may not make safety-net programmes available to the poor living in illegal squatter settlements because they cannot or will not provide services to populations who are residing illegally.

Recognizing that the poor will not lift themselves out of poverty unless they have access to secure employment, targeted food programmes to urban areas will continue to be necessary safety-net interventions, especially during dramatic economic downturns. In these situations, the lessons drawn from ongoing programmes will be critical for programme planners, including the need for diagnosis to understand vulnerability in urban contexts, the challenges of targeting in various urban settings, the importance of complementary programming to address poor service delivery in slums, the nature of choosing and working with partners in highly politicized environments and the need for sound exit strategies to ensure that food-assistance programmes do not have a negative economic effect.

Although WFP considers urban food insecurity to be a growing problem demanding greater attention, the majority of WFP's interventions will continue to be in rural areas.

## Draft Decision



Bearing in mind the review of factors affecting the increasing problem of food insecurity in cities, the Board approved the recommendations contained in this document (WFP/EB.A/2002/5-B).



## INTRODUCTION

1. In the next 25 years, the urban population of the developing world is expected to double. More than half of the total population in Africa and Asia will live in urban areas. Currently, more than 2 billion people in low- and middle-income countries live in cities. As urban populations grow, poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are also increasing.
2. Recognizing this trend, WFP seeks to improve and enlarge its urban-based programmes in development settings and its emergency and recovery operations. It is important to underline that while WFP considers urban food insecurity to be a growing problem demanding greater attention, the majority of WFP's resources will continue to be devoted to rural areas, where most poor, food insecure people in developing countries currently live.
3. All of WFP's future urban programming would need to be carried out within the framework of the Programme's current development, recovery and humanitarian policies and practices, such as Enabling Development (WFP/EB.A/99/4-A), and From Crisis to Recovery (WFP/EB.A/98/4-A). Increased programming in urban and peri-urban areas is country-specific. According to the Enabling Development policy, "WFP will work, as appropriate, in urban and peri-urban areas with high concentrations of malnutrition".<sup>1</sup> Urban programming will be consistent with WFP's policy of targeting only those areas and households that are poor and food insecure, and where food aid has a role to play in saving lives and in assisting the hungry poor as outlined in Enabling Development (WFP/EB.A/99/4-A). All urban food-assisted interventions will pay particular attention to their potential impact on markets, making sure that there are no negative effects on either prices or the livelihoods of those engaged in selling commodities and prepared foods.
4. This policy paper explains why urban areas are important for WFP, describes the key parameters of urban food insecurity and how urban food insecurity differs from food insecurity in rural areas and sets out the programming implications of the lessons learned both from WFP operations and from those of WFP partners.
5. Five case studies were carried out in order to capture WFP experiences in different types of urban food-insecure situations.<sup>2</sup> The methodology used to carry out this case studies policy analysis involved the use of four types of data sources. First, key informant interviews were conducted with various stakeholders within and outside WFP's urban programmes, including WFP staff, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, government officials and other United Nations agencies. Second, documentation was obtained from WFP country offices and the Office of Evaluation. Third, interviews were conducted with project beneficiaries at a number of urban project sites. Finally, current research on urban food security and programming was reviewed.

## HUNGER IN CITIES—A GROWING PROBLEM

6. Urbanization is perhaps the most dominant demographic process of recent decades. The urban population in developing countries has increased fivefold over the last 30 years. By 2020 the number of people living in developing countries will have grown from 4.9 billion to 6.8 billion. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, ninety percent

<sup>1</sup> Enabling Development (WFP/EB.A/99/4-A).

<sup>2</sup> The case studies were carried out in Angola, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Mozambique and Zambia.



of this increase will occur in rapidly expanding cities and towns. Over 40 percent of the populations of low- and middle-income countries already live in urban areas. More than half the population of Africa and Asia will be urban dwellers by 2020. More than three quarters of Latin Americans already are.<sup>3</sup>

7. Growth in poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition has accompanied this urbanization process. Although urban poverty levels in the developing world are often lower than rural poverty levels, both populations and poverty in the city are increasing at a more rapid rate. Data from eight developing countries containing two thirds of the developing world's population indicate that:
  - the proportion and absolute number of poor people living in urban areas have grown over the last twenty years; and
  - from the early to mid-1990s, the share of malnourished children in urban areas has increased.<sup>4</sup>
8. Not only has the absolute number of urban poor and undernourished increased in the last 15–20 years, but it has also done so at a rate that outpaces corresponding changes in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> An estimated 600 million or more people live in slums in Africa, Asia and Latin American cities and towns. According to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), up to half the populations of the largest cities in the developing world inhabit unplanned and often illegal squatter settlements. Basic infrastructure and services such as housing, sanitation and clean water are grossly inadequate or non-existent in most urban areas of the poorest countries.
9. Not only are undernutrition, malnutrition and infectious diseases widespread in these urban settlements, but also many of the poorest urban and town dwellers live on the worst-quality land, on the edges of ravines, on flood-prone embankments, and on slopes prone to mudslide or collapse. This makes them highly vulnerable when natural disasters occur. The two cyclones that hit the Indian state of Orissa in 1999, the flooding in Mozambique in 2000, and the El Salvador earthquake in January 2001, all vividly illustrate the risk that poor urban dwellers face, and highlight the consequences when unplanned growth in urban areas converges with natural hazards.
10. Urban areas are affected also by conflict. When there are conflict and insecurity in rural areas, people often flee to urban areas, seeing them as safe havens. For example, Angola and Colombia have experienced large shifts in populations migrating to urban areas to escape civil unrest in rural ones. This places immense strain on impoverished municipal or local governments—disrupting services, distorting trade and saturating the employment market. For the poor, the existence of civil conflict adds additional burdens in terms of securing food and it increases livelihood risk and vulnerability. Sustained conflict may also erase any sense of government authority and scatter populations in and around a city, complicating the provision of services and increasing food insecurity.
11. Conflict and the political instability characteristic of protracted crises undermine the livelihoods of urban communities in a number of ways, with serious food-security implications. Notably, civil conflict can translate into severe food shortages; increases

<sup>3</sup> Garret, J. 2000. *Achieving Urban Food and Nutrition Security in the Developing World. 2020 Vision*, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> Ruel, M., et al., 1998. *Urban Challenges to Nutritional Security: A Review of Food Security, Health and Care in the Cities*. Food Consumption and Nutrition Division Discussion Paper No. 51, IFPRI, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Haddad, L., et al, (1999). "Are Urban Poverty and Undernutrition Growing? Some Newly Assembled Evidence." *World Development* 27(11).



and/or volatility in basic commodity prices; disruptions in employment patterns, markets and rural-urban linkages; and drastic reductions in household food stocks. Additional social effects include the alteration of gender roles and a disruption of household division of labour as a result of, among other factors, the forced recruitment of men.

12. With the share of the poor and undernourished in urban areas on the rise, it is important that WFP take on the challenge of addressing urban food insecurity in a more systematic manner in both its development and relief programming.

## FEATURES OF URBAN FOOD INSECURITY

13. The causes of malnutrition and food insecurity in urban areas are different from those in rural areas, owing to a number of factors that characterize poor people's livelihoods in urban settings. In order to better frame WFP responses, it is critical to understand what is different about urban food insecurity.

### 14. The Structure of Urban Households Is Significantly Different

- While average household size is usually smaller in an urban context, the ratio of children to adults is often higher, thus putting pressure on an income earner's ability to ensure the household's food security.
- Large numbers of non-family members reside in households for short periods of time, and there are often seasonal residents, which complicates household targeting.
- Urban households may be transient, spending time in both rural and urban areas. Connections with rural areas are part of a livelihood diversification strategy maintained explicitly to improve the household's access to food.
- Urban households have a more precarious existence, as members are often living illegally in squatter settlements that are subject to periodic demolition.

### 15. Urban Livelihood Systems Are Highly Dependent on Precarious Employment

- In most cities in developing countries, employment opportunities in the informal sector are growing, while those in the formal sector are rapidly shrinking. The absence of formal employment limits the livelihood opportunities available to the urban poor.
- Informal-sector employment is highly unstable, poorly remunerated and susceptible to seasonal variations. Much of the informal-sector activity takes place outdoors (construction, street vending, or rickshaw drawing) making the rainy season an especially difficult period. Seasonal variations need to be taken into consideration when designing urban interventions.
- Although urban agriculture and rural-to-urban food transfers play an important role in urban household food security, most food is purchased, highlighting the importance of markets and income-earning opportunities to urban livelihoods and household food security.

### 16. Women's Participation in Income-generating Activities Is Key to Urban Livelihood Strategies



- More urban women are engaged in income-producing activities than at any time in history; by 2010 approximately 70 percent of all urban women will be employed in such activities.<sup>6</sup>
- Women typically face problems in accessing employment: their ability to participate in the labour market is circumscribed by domestic obligations, a lack of available family members to take over childcare duties and worsening security problems in slum areas.
- In general, women's occupations are less secure than those of men, and their participation in the informal sector is greater.
- Women's increasing role in both formal- and informal-sector activities has not diminished their household labour obligations.
- Urban women typically work outside the home, making childcare difficult. Women adapt their work schedules to respond to the needs of young children; this can jeopardize their ability to generate sufficient income to maintain their families' food security.

#### 17. The Urban Poor Pay More for Food

- Urban dwellers can pay almost 30 percent more for their food than rural denizens, and the fragmented nature of urban food markets results in even higher food costs in the poorest neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>
- Urban households buy not only most of their food but also their water. Lack of access to clean water forces the poorest populations to devote a significant share of their limited household budget to drinking water.
- Slums are often located at the edges of cities, far from central city markets. Travel to central markets involves prohibitive transportation and time costs.<sup>8</sup>
- The urban poor are subject to fluctuations in the availability of food as well as the price. Lack of storage facilities makes it practically impossible for poor urban households to ride out these fluctuations.
- Many of the urban poor rely on street vendors for a majority of their caloric intake. While street foods are often more expensive than home-prepared foods, they constitute an alternative to home preparation when time for food shopping and preparation and the costs of fuel and transportation are factored. However, reliance on street foods exposes urban residents to higher levels of food contamination.

#### 18. Infrastructure and Social Services Are Inadequate Affecting People's Health, Nutritional Status and Food Security

- In general, the urban environment is highly polluted, a burden usually borne disproportionately by the poorest segment of the urban population.
- The lack of basic water, sanitation, drainage and solid-waste disposal services makes it impossible for the poor to prevent contamination of water and food, maintain adequate

<sup>6</sup> Engle, P. L. (2000). Achieving Urban Food and Nutrition Security in the Developing World. Urban Women: Balancing Work and Childcare. Washington, IFPRI.

<sup>7</sup> Argenti, O. (2000). Achieving Urban Food and Nutrition Security in the Developing World: Feeding the Cities: Food Supply and Distribution. Washington, IFPRI.

<sup>8</sup> Argenti, O. (2000). Achieving Urban Food and Nutrition Security in the Developing World: Feeding the Cities: Food Supply and Distribution. Washington, IFPRI.



levels of hygiene or control insect-vectors of diseases such as malaria. All of these factors contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition.

- The close proximity of people living in the environmentally poor conditions typical of most developing cities increases the rates of infectious diseases.
- HIV/AIDS and TB is increasing rapidly in many poor communities in urban areas as a result of extreme poverty, overcrowding, insecurity and separated families. The poorest urban dwellers live on the streets; many of them are children and their numbers are increasing.
- Nutritional status is more variable in the city, but evidence suggests that the poorest urban communities have higher rates of malnutrition than those found in poor rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

#### 19. The Urban Poor Have Little Access to Formal or Informal Safety Nets

- The government may not make safety-net programmes available to the poor living in illegal squatter settlements because they cannot or will not provide services to populations who are residing illegally.
- Food transfers, public works and credit and savings schemes are often not available to the poorest segments of the urban population since most slum dwellers are not officially registered with municipal authorities and often have no legal status.
- Urban areas tend to have weaker informal safety nets to minimize people's exposure to adverse shocks or help households cope with ongoing shocks. They include food-sharing, childcare, loans, membership in groups and sharing of houses.
- Informal safety nets tend to be weaker in urban areas because of the poor definition of community and hence the lack of allegiance to it, lack of family members living close by, particularly from different generations, and the high incidence of violence and crime, which rapidly diminishes the trust necessary for non-family collective action.

#### 20. Urban Agriculture Is an Important Component of Urban Food Security

- Urban agriculture is practised more in peri-urban areas, and can range from small kitchen gardens to whole fields in low-density urban communities.
- In many cities women play a vital role in agricultural production in addition to performing domestic and income-earning activities.
- Urban agriculture is rarely practised by new arrivals to a city; navigating urban land-tenure systems and accumulating start-up resources require time and commitment.
- At the household level, urban agricultural production can provide a key source of food as well as income. However, the poorest often lack access to the land and resources necessary for such production.
- Urban agricultural production can help households mitigate the impact of seasonal or itinerant market-based vulnerability.
- Despite the contributions of urban agriculture to the food security of the urban poor, many civic governments continue actively to dissuade agricultural activity in cities.

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<sup>9</sup> Pryer, J. and N. Cook. (1988). *Cities of Hunger: urban malnutrition in developing countries*. Oxford, Oxfam.





21. Together, these key elements shape urban dwellers' food security and account for the variability in the conditions of the urban poor. In order for food-assisted programmes to be successful, they must take into account these complexities as much as possible.

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## PROGRAMMING CHALLENGES IN URBAN AREAS

22. Given that the various determinants of food and livelihood security for the poor in urban areas are not the same as they are in rural areas, programming food assistance to urban areas will have to take these contextual differences into account. The following programming issues are derived from case studies of areas where WFP and its partners are implementing urban programming.

### Diagnosis

23. Urban livelihoods are complex and constantly changing, highlighting the importance of performing livelihood and food security assessments prior to programming. Standard approaches used in assessments may need to be modified, as the poor may not readily disclose their coping strategies, which are often illegal, and because safety considerations can constrain data collection. Accurate information derived from urban assessments can assist country offices in targeting food effectively and needs to be built into urban programmes. Good examples of recent WFP urban assessments include those carried out in Dakar, Senegal; Kabul, Afghanistan and Harare, Zimbabwe. In Mozambique, WFP partnered with the local university in Maputo to carry out its urban assessment.
24. Understanding the historical development of a city is important because that development influences rural-urban linkages, social linkages within cities, and how long people will stay in a city. Rural-urban linkages are not the same for all neighbourhoods and it is important to understand the circumstances that led to migration to a given city for each neighbourhood. Moreover, the growth of a city under wartime conditions will have a different character than the incremental growth that occurs under peaceful conditions. These elements should be taken into account in all WFP urban assessments and problem analyses.
25. Time is required to understand some of the more complicated socio-economic issues in urban areas, such as the existence of informal safety nets and how these change in crises situations. Also important is understanding how patron-client relationships work in these settings. Patron-client relationships are more complex in urban settings than rural ones owing to the numerous networks that are found in densely populated areas. Patron-client relationships may be stronger in some neighbourhoods where the poor live, presenting obstacles to people's participation in safety-net programmes.
26. Before food assistance is planned, initial work needs to be carried out to understand these relationships and how they affect programming. WFP will rely both on its partners and on relevant local initiatives to help comprehend and navigate the socio-economic issues that are key to urban programming. WFP's programmes in Ethiopia and in Indonesia demonstrate the usefulness of dialoguing with municipal organizations and NGOs to understand WFP's beneficiaries, their constraints and their needs.
27. Food insecurity has a seasonal dimension in urban areas, much as in rural areas. This seasonality needs to be understood and taken into account in the design of interventions in order to maximize the interventions' impact.



## Targeting

28. Targeting programmes in urban areas is very different from targeting them in rural areas. Administrative targeting based on location is often not appropriate because urban poverty is not necessarily clustered in well-defined areas. Community-based targeting may not work as well in urban areas because poverty and malnutrition are widely dispersed in pockets across a city and because people move frequently and often work outside the areas where they live.
29. Moreover, in urban settings, geographic proximity does not equal “community”. There may be large differences across locations with regards to how people work together in joint activities such as food for work (FFW) or other programme activities. It is important for WFP to take these community differences into account and not implement uniform approaches across all locations in the same urban area.
30. Street children are one of the major vulnerable groups in urban areas. Targeting them, however, requires close coordination with local partners, both NGOs and municipal governments, to identify how best to reach this growing group. WFP’s existing urban projects in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda illustrate how working with local charities and small local NGOs can help in reaching street children who are outside the reach of formal safety-net programmes.
31. The urban strategy outlined in the country strategy outline (CSO), the protracted recovery and relief operation (PRRO) or an emergency operation (EMOP) should be based on the type of urban area and type of vulnerable group targeted. The strategy for unplanned areas will be different than that for planned areas. The type of urban area has an influence on land tenure, whether people rent or own their houses, and whether or not urban dwellers are recognized by the government and have rights to social services.
32. WFP should review targeting procedures used by others involved in urban programming in order to identify best practices that can then be used and adapted for food-assisted projects.
33. There are a number of general targeting concerns emerging from some of WFP’s current urban projects:
  - In many urban areas, in both emergency and development contexts, there are large vulnerable populations not registered with municipal governments. As a result, most formal safety-net programmes miss these populations. It is important that WFP targeting takes these groups into account.
  - Safety nets in urban areas must target both structural or chronic poverty and those who are vulnerable to economic shocks affecting food security, such as inflation and decreasing employment opportunities. As vulnerability changes, the safety net should expand or contract to take into account the new hungry poor.
  - The decision to move into urban areas can be justified on the basis of achieving scale and efficiency. Urban programming offers the advantage of reaching large numbers of needy people in areas that are easily accessible and where control over resources is easier to manage.
  - Different types of interventions require different targeting approaches. For example, infrastructure interventions are geographically based in particular administrative units, whereas health messages, training opportunities and income-generating activities can target specific vulnerable groups across areas. In this case, local or neighbourhood development committees should be used to help identify vulnerable groups, in particular street children.



## Programme Design

34. Programme design must take into account the complex political environment in urban areas. Local, municipal and national governments, along with NGOs and community organizations, from inside and outside a community, can exert influence over local activities.

### *Better Health, Better Nutrition*

35. Given the disastrous health conditions in slums, health and nutrition interventions linked to improvements in sanitation should be a priority for urban programmes. Interventions that address the health and care factors that influence malnutrition should be coupled, when possible, with improvements in infrastructure to ameliorate the health and sanitation environment. Building access roads and drainage systems and piping in safe water (“hard” infrastructure) will do little for health and nutrition problems if such improvements are not linked with other interventions that focus on good caring and health practices, such as mother-and-child health programmes, nutrition and health education, and female literacy (“soft” infrastructure). WFP and its partners need to take this into account in urban interventions, as is being attempted in Ethiopia.
36. Access to potable water is a significant problem for many of the poor in urban areas. Water is both an economic and a health issue with direct consequences for urban dwellers’ nutritional status. Access to safe water needs to be highlighted (as it is in Mozambique) in collaboration with other agencies and partners. It should be a key element of any urban health and nutrition intervention.
37. Mother–child health (MCH) activities are well suited to urban areas, and WFP has a number of successful urban MCH projects such as the one in Dakar, Senegal. However, care must be taken that proper screening is carried out so that only the poorest women are targeted. As well, there are security issues which need to be taken into account, particularly if take-home rations are given.

### *Education in Urban Settings*

38. School feeding programmes in urban areas, like those in rural areas, can help address some of the factors that limit educational attainment of school-age children and can be especially effective for street children and children living in slums. The advantages of carrying out such programmes in urban settings is that in urban areas there tends to be a higher availability of qualified teachers, the institutional infrastructure tends to be of higher quality, and the educational system tends to function better.
39. However, urban settings present challenges for school feeding programmes, including problems associated with targeting in heterogeneous neighbourhoods and where there is considerable ethnic diversity. Because WFP targets schools, rather than children in schools, school feeding programmes in heterogeneous neighbourhoods may mean a high inclusion rate, with the poor and not-so-poor both receiving food. If possible, school feeding activities should be initiated in neighbourhoods where the population is more homogeneous.
40. Both the increased size of urban schools and the lack of community sometimes found in urban neighbourhoods can translate into a lack of parent and community involvement in school feeding activities and management. Targeting neighbourhoods that have experience in carrying out community-based activities should make it easier to generate commitment for school programmes. If this is not possible, then a concerted effort must be made from the outset to involve parents in school feeding activities.



41. Lastly, there are logistical problems associated with feeding the large numbers of children who attend urban schools. Working with partners that can complement school feeding programmes with the necessary non-food inputs, such as kitchen equipment, will facilitate the functioning of such programmes in schools with large student populations. These are issues that WFP is facing in its school feeding programmes in Kabul, Afghanistan. Partnering with local development committees and small charities that have other urban activities is also a means of reaching street children and children living in extremely poor neighbourhoods.

### ***Food for Work in Urban Areas***

42. Some urban programmes include food-for-work components designed to improve the environment in which poor urban dwellers live, such as the building of sidewalks and sewage canals. Food for work can provide a valuable safety-net for vulnerable urban populations. However, WFP experience shows that food for work in urban areas should be limited in scope, and in development settings, combined with health and nutrition activities. Additionally, this type of intervention must take into consideration a number of issues that are specific to the urban context.
43. When designing urban food-for-work projects, care must be taken to prevent infrastructural improvements leading to rent increases. As poor urban populations do not own their homes, such increases can jeopardize poor households' living arrangements, possibly forcing them to relocate to different neighbourhoods. This potential negative effect can be prevented by first negotiating with local landlords and local government, as WFP has done in Addis Ababa. It is critical for WFP to monitor any unintended consequences of its urban programmes and to make adjustments as necessary.
44. Infrastructure projects appear to be more expensive in urban than in rural areas, as a result of urban standards, codes, regulations, the types of infrastructure built and the materials needed. This makes it more difficult for implementing partners to achieve scale owing to lack of non-food resources. When designing urban infrastructure projects, these factors must be taken into account, and careful consideration given to selecting appropriate partners. An important consequence of this lack of non-food resources is that partnering with municipal government becomes inevitable and desirable. It may also provide opportunities for working with the private sector, such as local construction firms.
45. Since urban residents are dependent on wages to purchase food, building capacity for employment, entrepreneurship, literacy and other life skills should be a key element in any urban programming. Food for work should try to include skills training as a complementary component in infrastructure development. Training efforts should also be linked to micro-finance and micro-credit, if available.
46. Women are often targeted for food-for-work projects as a result of the key role they play in ensuring household food security. Food-for-work activities that are not coupled with childcare support in urban areas can hinder the participation of women with small children in programme activities. Childcare should be incorporated in all urban food-for-work activities targeting women, with women participants rotating in the child-carer role. Food-for-work projects must be sensitive to the domestic demands of women, and daily work schedules need to be organized according to women's household responsibilities.
47. Finally, if the potential for urban agriculture exists, it should be taken into account in programming in urban areas. Urban neighbourhoods that are not densely populated have potential for urban agriculture. In these cases WFP may have an opportunity to partner



with some of its traditional rural-based partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

### Urban Food Assistance and Markets

48. All of WFP operations in urban areas must take into consideration the impact food aid may have on markets, particularly on prices. Experience with WFP programmes and those of other agencies and NGOs has shown that the amount of food introduced by food-assisted projects, even in very large programmes, is too small to disturb the market prices of basic commodities. Nevertheless, as in its rural programmes WFP needs to be vigilant in ensuring that its urban programmes have no adverse effects on urban markets. At the same time, it must also be open to new ideas to protect the poorest from high and volatile food prices.
49. Sources of vulnerability to food insecurity in urban environments are often related to fluctuations in prices and the availability of food and other necessities. Devaluation, taxation and job retrenchments can affect people's access to wages, and hence to food. High food costs and lost income mean that a greater percentage of household resources are required to purchase food, leading to lower-quality diets and smaller quantities consumed. This can result both in increases in child malnutrition and in micronutrient deficiencies. To track these important changes in the nutritional status of WFP beneficiaries, country offices need to partner with organizations that specialize in monitoring such changes, as WFP Indonesia did with Helen Keller International in Jakarta.
50. When nutritional conditions of the poor in urban areas worsen as a result of large reductions in purchasing power, particularly in situations of high inflation, targeted food subsidy programmes may be an appropriate response. WFP has experience in this type of programming with its Indonesia operations, where a subsidized rice programme is used as a safety net for the hungry poor. With this programme, small quantities of rice were sold to identified beneficiaries at a much-reduced price. With the savings, families bought high-protein foods, such as eggs and chicken. The advantages of the Indonesia programme, many of which are transferable to other countries, include: (i) a commodity-based income transfer leaves both a physical and financial accounting trail that can be monitored and evaluated; (ii) the subsidy represents a significant income saving for the poorest with a decided nutritional effect; and (iii) the amount of food aid used for the rice subsidy programme was small enough that it did not disrupt urban food markets. The funds generated from these closed-circuit sales are being used to purchase more rice, and support nutrition education and community-development activities promoting long-term food security and self-reliance.
51. Using urban marketing structures to reach the poorest, especially under conditions of high inflation and price variability, is an area that WFP country offices need to explore further. However, caution must be used in the implementation of such programmes as they can be difficult to manage if partners are not sufficiently trained or the proper infrastructure, in terms of transportation and storage, is not in place. It is critical to work through existing market structures and local institutions as illustrated in the Indonesia programme. These kinds of interventions may also offer WFP the opportunity to work more closely with private-sector entities.

### Emergency Programming Considerations

52. Conflicts in rural areas causing flight to urban areas or conflicts in cities themselves put immense strain on often-impoorished governments—disrupting services, distorting markets and eliminating employment opportunities. Conflict may erase any sense of



governmental authority and scatter populations in and around a city, complicating service provision. Even in the midst of conflict, WFP needs to work with its partners (the government, other United Nations agencies, and NGOs) to protect people's access to services, food and other goods.

53. In emergency operations with free distribution, care needs to be taken regarding the impact of food aid programmes on small petty traders and food vendors. Free distributions can disrupt the livelihoods of the poor who rely on petty trading and the sale of street foods. Food aid in urban areas may also adversely affect the re-establishment of market linkages to rural areas during the recovery phase. Close monitoring of market activity, especially when the acute phase of a crisis has passed, is essential in determining how and when shifts in programming are necessary.
54. Additionally, when disasters affect both rural and urban areas simultaneously, a coordinated programme needs to be implemented that takes the linkages of both areas into account. For example, the flood that destroys the crops in adjacent rural areas can negatively affect both the supply and the price of food in urban areas. For poor households, a decline in food remittances from rural areas can mean a significant decrease in their food security. The implementation of food aid programmes needs to be carefully planned and monitored, with rural-urban linkages taken into consideration.
55. Given the magnitude and recurrent nature of emergencies in some rural areas, urban areas can receive less attention even though the food insecurity there may be just as severe. Advocacy on behalf of the urban destitute needs to be part of WFP's dialogue with all partners.
56. When the food security of urban dwellers is undermined in an atmosphere of insecurity, households resort to a range of coping mechanisms, some of which are illegal activities such as petty trade in contraband, theft and prostitution. Any programming of food assistance, whether direct distribution or activity-based distribution, needs to take into account the changes brought about by insecurity and conflict to the livelihoods of those affected.

### Partnering in Urban Programmes

57. All of WFP urban programming will be done in partnership with governments, the appropriate United Nations agencies and NGOs. In particular, WFP may start new working relationships with Habitat, as well as continue working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in order to achieve comprehensive urban programming. WFP's work with both FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will necessarily be limited in these types of programmes.
58. Currently, urban programming tends to be characterized by localized safety-net programmes run by small charitable institutions. The larger-scale urban programmes are often managed by branches of municipal governments. This trend is explained by the rural orientation of most donor agencies, and the masking of urban poverty by the unequal distribution of wealth that is reflected in urban statistics. This has serious implications for urban programmes needing to scale up. It may mean that WFP will be working with a myriad of small partners, making it difficult for it to coordinate programming across the range of partner institutions. This highlights the importance of having both a comprehensive strategy and the necessary coordination and management systems for handling multiple partners. These are issues that the Ethiopia and Uganda country offices and their counterparts are facing.



59. Identifying appropriate partners to assist WFP in targeting its urban programmes is essential. Organizations with permanent presence on the ground (e.g. local government and NGOs) can improve WFPs targeting efforts by providing good contextual information. Identification of vulnerable households is not as geographically based in urban as in rural areas, and the conditions of individual households may change significantly over a short period of time. Individual NGOs have their own strategies for identifying and selecting beneficiaries.

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## EXIT STRATEGIES

60. Given the importance of the market to food access in urban settings, well-thought-out exit strategies will be critical to ensuring that phasing out food assistance does not have detrimental effects. A number of issues should be considered in the development of exit strategies for urban programmes. These include:
- Targeting vulnerable urban populations that are not recognized by municipal authorities may make it difficult eventually to hand a programme over to the government. WFP must work with the government throughout the life of an operation to facilitate eventual handover.
  - In some cases, WFP's exit strategy might be linked to the flexible nature of existing formal safety-net programmes. WFP's intervention should be a means to expand the social safety net to accommodate an increased number of needy households. When this number contracts, then WFP can phase out its intervention.
  - City government agencies are not unified into one government structure. For this reason, urban activities carried out by one part of the government might not be supported by other government agencies. Understanding the political milieu will be critical to designing effective exit strategies.



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## SUMMARY

61. Urban poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are problems that affect many of the cities in the countries where WFP works. This situation will continue to worsen in the foreseeable future. To address it, WFP and its partners will need to consider many of the factors that affect the food and livelihood security of the poor. These include greater dependency on cash income and less reliance on agriculture and natural resources; low wages from work at insecure jobs; a large number of women working outside the home; legal obstacles, including insecure land and housing tenure; inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and health services; and frequently weak social networks, which often transcend the geographic boundaries of communities.
62. Recognizing that the poor will not lift themselves out of poverty unless they have access to secure employment, targeted food programmes to urban areas will continue to be necessary as safety-net interventions, especially in situations of dramatic economic downturns. It is in these situations that the lessons drawn from ongoing programmes will be critical for programme planners. These include:
- the need for a good diagnosis to understand vulnerability in urban contexts; the challenges of targeting in heterogeneous settings that characterize the urban milieu;
  - the importance of complementary programming to address the poor service delivery found in urban slums;
  - the nature of partnering in highly politicized environments; and
  - the need for well-thought-out exit strategies so that food assistance programmes do not have a negative effect on the economy.
63. Although WFP considers urban food insecurity to be a growing problem demanding greater attention, the majority of WFP's interventions will continue to be in rural areas.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

64. WFP food assistance in emergency and development settings should address urban food insecurity. WFP should expand its analysis of food needs in urban settings and its efforts in urban programming, as the number of people experiencing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition in urban areas is increasing. Urban programming will be consistent with all WFP policies, in particular Enabling Development (WFP/EB.A/99/4-A), and From Crisis to Recovery (WFP/EB/98/4-A). Programming for both emergencies and development needs to address urban food insecurity.
65. WFP should develop a set of guidelines to assist country offices in programming more effectively in urban settings. Such guidelines will build on the experiences from urban programming being carried out in the field by WFP and others.





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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CSO	Country Strategy Outline
EMOP	Emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFW	Food for work
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MCH	Mother-child health
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PRRO	Protracted relief and recovery operation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

