

# Food security and nutrition

## Introduction

*“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for a healthy and active life.”*

(World Food Summit, 1996)

In recognition of the right to food \*, and the increased vulnerability of households to food insecurity as a result of disasters, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is involved in food security programming to improve the availability, access to and utilisation of food.

Food security programmes span the relief to development continuum by reducing the risk of, mitigating against and where necessary, providing relief and recovery from disasters to the most vulnerable households.

Food security programming can also be a key component of programmes in support of chronically ill people including people living with HIV/AIDS, TB and other communicable diseases. Such households with chronically ill people also require food security programming as production or income-earning opportunities diminish as a result of care for sick individuals and the loss of labour associated with the illness.

Food security programming can encompass many different interventions depending on the objective of the programme. Examples of food security interventions include water for irrigation, livestock or health, seeds distribution or seed bank development, cash or food for work projects and food aid.

\*Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant statement (Article 11 (1)) from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

## Scope

This policy establishes the basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent action in food security. It applies to all types of food security programming i.e. risk reduction, disaster preparedness, response or recovery at local, national,

regional and international levels whether carried out by a single branch of a National Society, by an individual National Society or by the International Federation of National Societies acting together.

## Statement

The International Federation and each individual National Society shall:

- **Recognise the role of the Red Cross/Red Crescent in protecting life, which includes food security, as complementary to Government and other actors** and strive to form partnerships, advocate and raise awareness on food security issues.
- **Strive to build food security upon programming** in disasters or in efforts to reduce risk to disasters as well as health including HIV/AIDS Home Care.
- **Recognise that food insecurity** may have a different impact on men and women, on different individuals and groups of people. Programmes should be designed and implemented in a diversity and gender sensitive way to consider biological, social and cultural differences.
- **Undertake food security assessment and analysis** that demonstrates an understanding of how affected populations normally secure food, the risks, the causes and impact of disasters on the immediate and future food security and the most appropriate responses to address both transient (acute) food insecurity and longer term (chronic) food insecurity, through recognising and supporting household coping mechanisms.
- **Undertake nutrition assessment and analysis** that demonstrates an understanding of public health in order to better determine the causes and impact of disasters as well as the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Support primary production** when it is a viable food security strategy by ensuring that people have the means to e.g. undertake agricultural production, fish, or rear livestock, in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner for consumption or exchange.

- **Support income generation or employment** where there has been a demonstrated loss of income generation opportunities or employment or where this is a key coping mechanism of people affected by food insecurity. Remuneration can be in kind or cash and programmes should not interfere with seasonal livelihood activities.
- **Support asset development, protection or recovery** where those assets support livelihood strategies or provide an opportunity for diversification of such strategies.
- **Support access to markets** both as producers and consumers to buy, sell or exchange food and other essential items at reasonable prices and in an efficient manner. This may include advocacy at International, Regional or National fora or projects such as community village road construction.
- **Provide food aid when appropriate** as either a nutrition input or as an economic input to households. Food aid should be culturally acceptable, free from undesirable long-term consequences and adhere to recipient country specifications for quality and international standards. The impact of food aid on agricultural production and the economy should be considered prior to programming. Food aid programming can take different forms including, free food distributions, food for work, complementary and supplementary feeding.
- **Not accept or distribute donations of Dried Skimmed Milk (DSM)** or other milk powder, e.g. whole milk powder, unless this is done as part of a premix for supplementary feeding or under special circumstances where supervision of preparation and access to sufficient clean water is possible. This recognises the inherent difficulties of ensuring adequate hygiene and appropriate use of milk powder when provided as a separate item for distribution.
- **Promote and protect breast-feeding in line with in-country policies on mother to child transmission of HIV** through awareness raising and distribution of breast milk substitutes when absolutely necessary. In such cases where breast-milk substitutes are necessary and distributed, adherence to the World Health Organisations “International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes” is to be demonstrated by the distributing organisation.
- **Prevent micronutrient deficiencies** through appropriate programming and wherever possible in the most sustainable way through community-based health and nutrition education as well as advocating for national legislation on public health interventions,

e.g. iodisation of salt. Micronutrient deficiencies arising from Vitamin A, Iodine, and Iron deficiency are of primary concern.

- **Ensure that food security programmes are adequately monitored and evaluated in a participatory manner** to ensure impact assessment and lessons learnt for National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent and that lessons learnt are disseminated and used in future programming.

## Responsibilities

National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have a responsibility to ensure that all food security programming is in compliance with this policy; that staff and volunteers participating in such programmes are aware of the rationale and details of this policy and that governmental, United Nations and non-governmental partners are adequately informed of this policy.

National Societies have a responsibility to identify their role in an overall country strategy with regard to food security, while using *Strategy 2010* as a guide to their programming. This may mean that a National Society develops only some of the above issues or develops programming to address all of the above commitments.

## Reference

*This policy was adopted by the 8th Session of the Governing Board in Geneva, 21-23 October 2003. The policy replaces all previously established food and nutrition policies.*

## Links to other policies and standards

- Health Policy
- Disaster Preparedness Policy
- Post Emergency Rehabilitation Policy
- Emergency Response Policy
- HIV/AIDS Policy
- Gender Policy
- Integrating Relief
- Rehabilitation and Development Policy
- the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response

**For more information, please contact:**

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