



Daily Bread Delivery to IDPs.
(Photo Credit: i-APS MENA)

FOOD SECURITY NET

for communities experiencing conflict and natural disasters



This handbook is produced by International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS) and is part of a series of learning products supporting farmers worldwide with best practices in the area of agriculture development.

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Learning Objectives

- Understand basic concepts of Food Security Net Programs (FSNP) with special focus on food security.
- Explore reasons of introducing FSNP, with special focus on Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.
- Highlight primary models of FSNP.
- Understand potential impacts of FSNP on food security.



Onion Vendor in the Market in Turkey
(Photo Credit: i-APS)

Food Security Net at a Glance

- Food-based security net programs aim to ensure equity (access to food), resilience (control coping methods) and building human capital of targeted groups such as poor households and food insecure women and children.
- There are many factors for providing food security net programs, such as protecting needy households from food price fluctuations, protection from the effects of natural and man-made crises, and eradicating poverty and food insecurity.
- Food security net programs can take multiple forms. The most common and widely used instruments in the MENA region are school feeding and humanitarian food aid (used widely in Yemen, Syria and Sudan).
- Case studies from the MENA Region show the positive effects of food security net programs on household consumption, resilience, and repaying debt. However, methods differ in terms of implementation costs (cost-effectiveness).

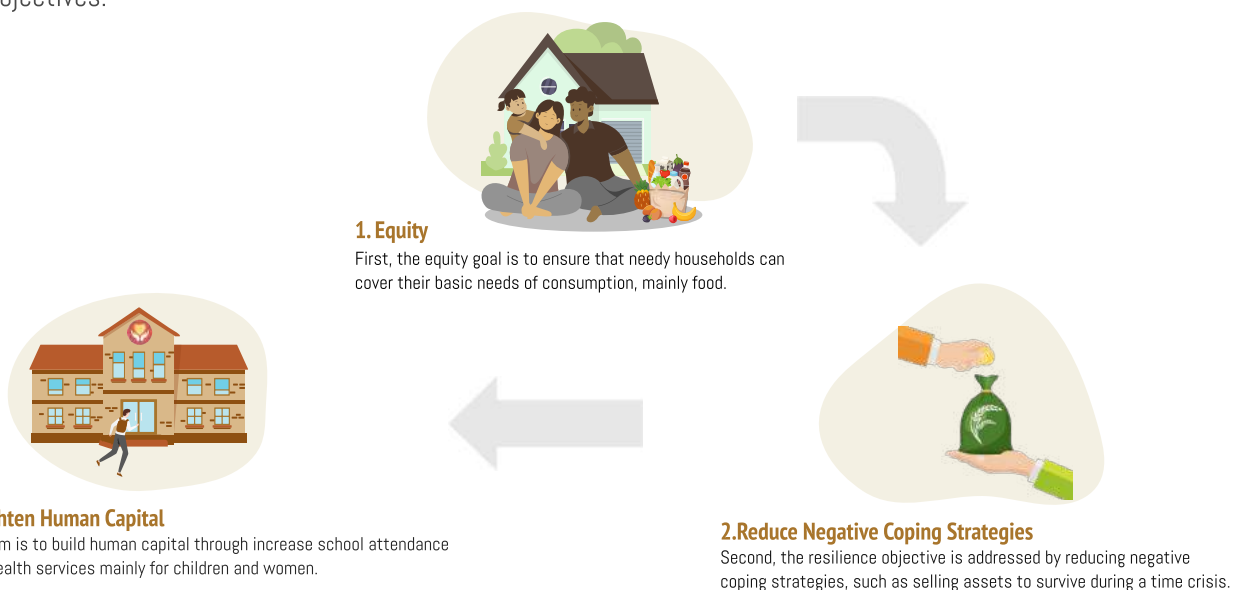
Introduction

This learning product aims to provide an introduction to Food Security Net Programs (FSNP) as a protection policy for communities experiencing conflict and natural disasters. This paper seeks to support stakeholders, including humanitarian aid workers and non-governmental institutions, in understanding basic concepts, reasons, and instruments of FSNP to improve their knowledge and support future program design.



Food Security Net Programs FSNP

Food Security Nets are formal or informal mechanisms that are applied to protect needy people. The term needy people refer to vulnerable people or living in poverty, malnutrition and other forms of deprivation.¹ Food-based safety nets represent a category of broader safety net programs and tying to food as a resource. They are formulated to achieve several objectives:



¹ Devereux Stephen, 2015. "Social Protection and Safety Nets in the Middle East and North Africa". Research Report 80. Institute of Development Studies. URL: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/social-protection-and-safety-nets-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>

The intended outcome of such measures is to reduce child labour, improve health care for pregnant women, reduce gender inequality and improve productivity of resources (e.g. human resources) ².



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Reasons for FSNP

Cope with food price volatility



Evidence shows that poor people in low-income countries spend on average, around 50 percent of their income on food items.³ Thus, an increase in a price of main staples negatively affects access to food by needy people, leading to a decline in food security and the related food security indicators. For example, in the MENA region, wheat is often consumed despite finite production capacity. Based on the Arab Food security report for the year 2018, the wheat crop has a low level of self-sufficiency rate (difference between total production and total consumption), which has decreased from 44.5 percent in 2015 to 37 percent in 2017. This implies that the MENA region is importing more quantities of wheat to satisfy local demand. The total quantity of imported wheat rose by eight percent between 2015 and 2017. Therefore, a change in international wheat prices impacts imported quantities. If prices increase, the cost of importing would similarly increase. However, governments may intervene to keep the price of wheat affordable for needy households by, among other techniques, providing food security net programs.

² Andrews Colin, Hsiao Allan, and Ralston Laura, 2018. Chapter Two Social Safety Nets Promote Poverty Reduction, Increase Resilience and Expand Opportunities

³ FAO/WB 2018 Food Data Collection in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys Guidelines for Low and Middle-Income Countries

Protection from the effects of natural and human-induced hazards and disasters



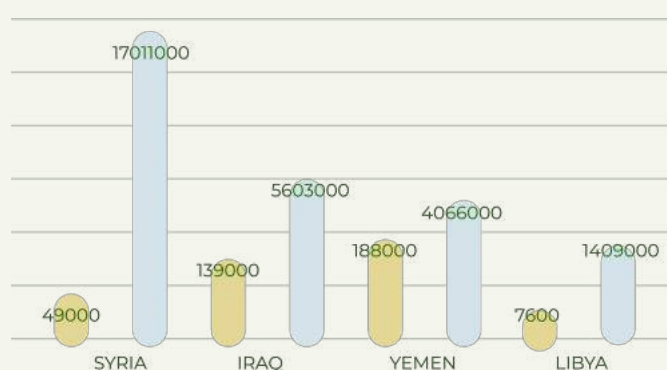
Food security net programs may be used to mitigate the negative effects of certain factors such as natural disasters and conflict. For example, drought would reduce the supply of land for cultivation, which in turn would cause a reduction of farming outputs.

A decrease in output leads to lower income for farmers affected by drought, forcing them to sell assets to survive. Similarly, conflicts would lead to people fleeing from productive areas and increase the rate of Internal Displacement Persons (IDP) and/or number of refugees. Such a situation requires intervention at national and international levels. For example, IDPs represent an estimated 3 percent of total population in the MENA region, driven mainly by conflicts in countries such as Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen (see infographic below).⁴ In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there are an estimated 10 million IDPs in 2018.⁵

Burnt wheat field in the MENA region
(Photo Credit: i-APS MENA regional team)



New displacements by conflicts and natural disasters between 2010 and 2019



Source: IDMC, 2020

⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2020

⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2019

To alleviate poverty and food insecurity



In the MENA region, some countries are characterized by high levels of poverty, such as Sudan (46%), Egypt (49%) and Yemen (54.5%). Moreover, food insecurity is a primary challenge across the region due to many factors including protracted conflict and economic sanctions. In Yemen, over 19 million people are classified as food insecure.⁶ Additionally, malnutrition rates have been increasing since 2000 across the MENA region. For instance, child stunting rates are high and recorded more than 20 percent and, in some countries (such as Sudan), more than 30 percent.⁷ In Syria, more than 9.3 million people have become food insecure and over 80 percent are living below the poverty line.⁸



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Instruments of food safety net programs

Food security nets take many forms. Direct-food programs contain supplementary feeding, school feeding and emergency feeding. The central objectives are to improve the nutritional status of targeted groups. Food security net programs are sub-divided into two primary categories: cash transfers and in-kind transfers. Each type has multiple modalities. The criteria for selecting an appropriate program relies on different factors such as the nature or characteristics of targeted groups (poor people, IDPs, children and women) and associated costs (such as administrative costs which usually refers to costs of methods used to determine targeted group, as well as costs of transportation and storage).⁹

⁶ Yemen Emergency, World Food Programme <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/yemen-emergency>

⁷ Devereux Stephen, 2015. "Social Protection and Safety Nets in the Middle East and North Africa". Research Report 80. Institute of Development Studies. U

⁸ Human Rights Watch Nov, 2021

⁹ Rachel Slater, 2011 Cash transfers, social protection and poverty reduction



Key informant interview with vegetable farmer from Yemen
(Photo Credit: i-APS MENA regional team)

Evidence shows that direct-food programs are widely used especially in developing countries. A recent study from World Food Program (WFP) indicates that school feeding has expanded substantially at a global level, reaching 388 million children. Similarly, governments of low-income countries have increased spending on school feeding and decreased dependence on international donors.¹⁰ Another study suggests that the value of global food aid increased significantly and was driven mainly by a rise in humanitarian food aid. For example, in 2018, the value of global food aid was 6.5 billion (USD), with a share of 37 percent being allocated to the MENA region countries (namely Yemen, Syria, and Sudan).¹¹ Indirect food programs include food stamps (a small paper or a government-issued coupon given to a selected group of people that can be used to buy food) and vouchers (normally used to purchase food for a given quantity or value in selected shops). Compared to direct food programs, indirect-food programs introduce more options to increase consumption of food. However, implementation requires a well-developed retail food sector and payment system. Indirect food instruments tend to be modestly used in the poorest countries for these reasons.¹²

Case Study:

i-APS has conducted over 45 studies to assess the impacts of humanitarian interventions on communities in the MENA region. For example, i-APS implemented a study to evaluate the effects of food assistance programs provided by an Organization to mitigate the consequences of the decade-long neglected investment in agricultural sector compounded by the ongoing conflict and insecurity.

The study aimed to assess the impacts of the intervention program on households and local markets and cost effectiveness of different cash and commodities transfers methods. Between December 2021 and March 2022, an Organization launched a program which aimed to improve food security outcomes of vulnerable households through three methods of in-kind food transfers and voucher programs. The study found that food transfers are more secure for households for food access as it is not affected by changes in the price of food. Additionally, food transfers are an effective technique in reducing the use of coping strategies, but are costly to administer.

¹⁰ WFP, 2020 State of School Feeding worldwide

¹¹ WFP, 2020 Global Report on Food Crises

¹² Brown, Lynn; Gentilini, Ugo, 2006 On the edge: The role of food-based safety nets in helping vulnerable households manage food insecurity

The same study found that voucher programs are financially more protective for the targeted group as the respondents managed to spend on several items beside food in addition to meeting their food needs. Moreover, the instrument had an effect in decreasing the need for borrowing or selling assets to satisfy consumption needs. It is also more cost-effective administratively compared to in-kind programs and most importantly led to increasing food consumption .

Another study implemented by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) evaluated the impacts of cash transfers programs in Egypt. Findings show that beneficiaries spent more on basic items such as food, clothes and school. In some cases, the program led to paying off debt .¹³

¹³ IFPRI, 2018 Impact Evaluation Study for Egypt's Taka <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/132719/fileName/132930.pdf> and Karama Cash Transfer Program Part 1: Quantitative Report



Food Voucher Program
(Photo Credit: i-APS MENA regional team)



i-APS Agriculture and Food Security work focuses on implementing practical, relevant and innovative solutions for more efficient and sustainable agricultural production to enhance local food security, income, and nutrition.

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Contact us at:



info@i-aps.com