



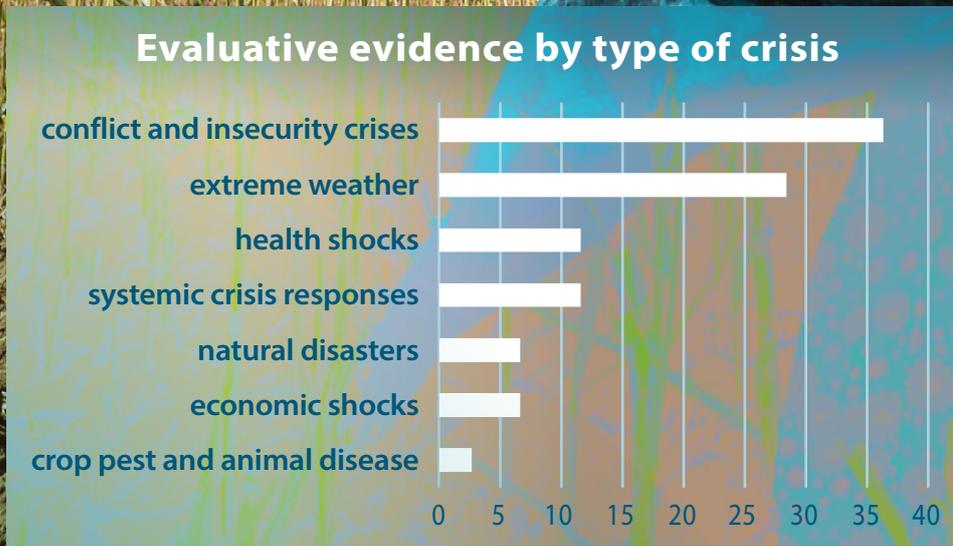
# Evidence summary on COVID-19 and Food Security

EVALFORWARD BRIEFING NOTE

Alongside conflict, economic crises and climate change, COVID-19 has become a factor contributing to increasing global food insecurity. Initial projections suggested that the pandemic may have further added up to 132 million people to the total number of chronically undernourished in the world in 2020.

To contribute to greater effectiveness of the United Nations system response to COVID-19 in the area of food security, the evaluation offices of FAO, WFP, IFAD and UNIDO analyzed the findings, good practices and lessons learned from recent **evaluations of interventions to protect food security in times of crises**. The Evidence Summary published by UNEG is available at: [www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2955](http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2955)

The chart below reports the evaluative evidence analyzed in the Summary per type of crisis: **65 evaluations from 15 multilateral and bilateral organizations were included.**



# Findings

The overarching research questions are based on the three pillars of the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 and potential effects on food security: social protection and basic services; economic response and recovery; and social cohesion and community resilience.

## 1 WHAT INTERVENTIONS WERE EFFECTIVE (OR LESS EFFECTIVE) IN SUPPORTING SOCIAL PROTECTION AND BASIC SERVICES TO PRESERVE FOOD SECURITY DURING CRISES?

*Interventions that support social protection were more effective when designed as a bundle of complementary modalities tailored to the local context and specific needs of target beneficiaries and involving adequate partnerships.*

- **Cash transfers** are an effective modality to support social protection and preserve food security during crises, but are bound to a range of enabling factors, such as functioning markets, available technical capacity, regulated banking services and suitable infrastructure.
- **School meal programmes** are effective to support social protection and preserve food security during crises. Some governments have indicated a willingness to institutionalize and sustain school meal programmes.
- **Food distribution** contributes to preserving food security in response to different types of crises and can sometimes support local production.
- **Distribution of agricultural inputs** (seeds, fertilizer, tools) offers an effective channel to restore agricultural outputs and livelihoods, but with limited long-term welfare effects largely due to timing issues and/or lack of appropriate scale.
- **Key factors influencing the effectiveness of social protection** and basic services interventions are:
  - the level of collaboration with national and local partners and stakeholders;
  - the level of preparedness of UN agencies and national partners;
  - the comprehensiveness of needs assessments;
  - the security situation;
  - the targeting of beneficiaries;
  - the extent of adaptive management, agility and learning to adjust to evolving contexts;
  - the safety of staff and beneficiaries.

## 2 WHAT INTERVENTIONS WERE EFFECTIVE (OR LESS EFFECTIVE) IN SUPPORTING ECONOMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY OF FOOD INSECURE POPULATIONS IN TIMES OF CRISES?

*Programmes supporting economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises were more effective when designed and implemented taking into account the realities of the context (e.g. economic, financial, infrastructural, political, environmental, social) and when including clear scaling-up strategies with involvement of partners, private sector and political actors*

- **Value chain development** can support economic response and recovery of food insecure populations in times of crises; increases in productivity of crops and livestock; facilitating access to new markets; and support poor households.

- **The role of early warning systems** in supporting economic response and recovery returned mixed assessments. While there is significant evidence of early warning information available prior to several crises, these systems have not necessarily triggered early action.
- **Policy advice** is useful when it leads to improved legislative and regulatory frameworks, and is more effective when provided in partnerships with other international organizations (including donors) and/or anchored in dialogues on the development of national strategies and policies.
- **Rural employment and entrepreneurship** promotion programmes are effective in providing poor workers with a source of income while contributing to the rehabilitation - or creation - of public and community infrastructures and restoration of agricultural production.
- **Key factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions supporting economic response and recovery** include:
  - Situation of fragility of the public sector;
  - governance arrangements for policy change/programme implementation;
  - breadth of partnerships especially with the private sector, financial institutions, academia and research institutes;
  - availability of infrastructures and access to credit, resources and knowledge.

### 3 WHAT INTERVENTIONS HAVE BETTER SUPPORTED SOCIAL COHESION AND HELPED VULNERABLE POPULATION GROUPS BECOME MORE RESILIENT TO FOOD INSECURITY?

*Interventions addressing food insecurity can better support social cohesion and more resilient communities by broadening their scope to include not only core target beneficiaries but also the most vulnerable.*

- **Key factors highlighted** include:
  - The importance of **social dialogue, localization, and adopting comprehensive approaches** that consider other local vulnerable communities alongside populations directly affected by crises.
  - Local leadership in supporting social cohesion, and the enabling role of equitable policies and legislation were also important. Avoiding limited scope and focus on small target groups.
  - The added-value of **civil society groups** in the planning, design and implementation of the interventions.