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Comprehensive Report on Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Interventions

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

The **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)** is a globally recognized system for classifying the severity of food insecurity and humanitarian crises. It defines five phases of severity ranging from minimal food insecurity to famine. At Phase 1 (Minimal/Generally Food Secure), most people have adequate and stable food access, with low risk of sliding into worse phases [1]. At Phase 3 (Crisis), households face **acute food and livelihood crises**, with high malnutrition and accelerating loss of livelihood assets that could lead to emergency if not addressed [2]. Phase 4 (Emergency) indicates **severe lack of food access** characterized by excess mortality, widespread malnutrition, and irreversible livelihood depletion [3]. The most extreme is Phase 5 (**Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe**), defined by a complete absence of food access and other basic needs, where "mass starvation, death, and displacement are evident" [3]. IPC provides a "common currency" for analysis, linking each phase to specific **reference outcome indicators** (like mortality rates, malnutrition prevalence, food consumption gaps, livelihood coping) to ensure comparability and accountability in assessments [4]. Developed through multi-agency consultations (FAO, WFP, FEWS NET, etc.), the IPC technical manuals (v1.1 in 2008 through v3.1 in 2021) give protocols for data analysis, classification, and response analysis. Notably, Version 3.1 refined famine detection methods and added the Food Insecurity Experience Scale as a new indicator [5] [6]. By using IPC phase classifications, governments and humanitarian agencies can identify "hotspots" of acute food insecurity and prioritize life-saving interventions accordingly.

World Food Programme (WFP) – Emergency Food Assistance Guidance

WFP, as the UN's leading food aid agency, has extensive guidelines for emergency food security response. The *Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) Handbook* [7] is a foundational manual used in sudden-onset disasters and protracted crises to assess the impact on households and livelihoods. It guides practitioners in covering affected areas and determining the severity of needs and response options [7]. This includes modules on data collection, analysis, and reporting to inform whether food assistance or other interventions are required. WFP's field staff also rely on the *Emergency Field Operations Pocketbook* (2002), a handy, quick-reference guide that synthesizes WFP's policies and procedures for crisis situations [8]. The pocketbook provides concise checklists and data for assessment, planning, monitoring, and problem-solving in the field [9]. It is intended to help personnel deliver assistance "in the most appropriate, secure and effective way" to disaster-affected populations [8]. Over the years, WFP has updated its guidance to adapt to evolving needs – for example, the *Food and Nutrition Handbook (2018)* compiles comprehensive guidance on nutrition-specific interventions (like treatment of malnutrition, supplementary feeding, etc.) to ensure that food assistance also meets nutritional needs. According to field practitioners, this handbook provides clear guidelines on planning and implementing programs such as **blanket supplementary feeding** for vulnerable groups [10] (e.g. distributing SuperCereal or lipid-based supplements to all children

under 2 in a crisis-affected area to prevent malnutrition). WFP's **Essential Needs Guidelines (2018)** further broaden the approach by analyzing how people meet all their basic needs, not just food. "Essential needs" analysis helps identify gaps in food, health care, shelter, etc., and design integrated responses (often via cash-based programs) so that aid recipients can attain an acceptable living standard [11] [12]. This reflects WFP's shift toward a holistic understanding of food security as one part of overall well-being. WFP also emphasizes protecting affected people and ensuring accountability – its *Protection and Accountability Handbook* (2021) provides guidance so that food distributions are safe, dignified, and inclusive (e.g. considering women's and minorities' needs), aligning with humanitarian protection principles. In practice, WFP emergency operations combine immediate **general food distributions** (staple cereals, pulses, oil, etc. meeting ~2,100 kcal/person/day) with nutrition interventions, while increasingly using cash transfers or vouchers where markets function. WFP's extensive field presence (in over 80 countries) and its logistical capacity (airlifts, trucking, warehousing) make it a provider of last resort in many large-scale emergencies.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Refugee Food Security and Nutrition Standards

In refugee emergencies, UNHCR plays a leading role in coordinating assistance to meet the basic food and nutrition needs of displaced populations. **UNHCR's Emergency Handbook** (4th edition, 2015) serves as a comprehensive field manual covering all sectors of response – it is a digital compendium of best practices, replacing previous print editions of the Handbook for Emergencies [13]. In the food security sector, UNHCR works closely with WFP under a global memorandum of understanding: typically WFP provides food or cash assistance, while UNHCR ensures targeting, distribution, and complementary services (like camp management, protection). UNHCR has defined an **Emergency Food Assistance Standard**, which outlines the minimum food basket required in refugee settings. This usually aligns with the Sphere standards – for example, planning for an average **2,100 kilocalories per person per day** to maintain survival and light activity [14], with 10-12% of energy from protein and 17% from fat [15]. Rations should also meet daily requirements for micronutrients (through fortified blended foods or supplements) [16]. These standards ensure that relief food baskets (or cash equivalents) provide not just calories but a balanced diet. In protracted situations, UNHCR and partners might adjust the ration (sometimes covering ~80% of needs if refugees can access some food or income on their own) [17].

Beyond general rations, UNHCR guidance places strong emphasis on **nutrition assessment and intervention** for at-risk groups. The agency's *Nutrition and Food Security Emergency Guidelines* and related tools cover how to conduct nutrition surveys or rapid MUAC screenings, set up selective feeding programs, and monitor nutrition indicators in refugee populations. For example, **Guidelines for Selective Feeding** (developed jointly by UNHCR and WFP) detail how to implement **therapeutic feeding centers** for Severe Acute Malnutrition and **supplementary feeding** for Moderate Acute Malnutrition in emergencies [18]. They specify admission criteria (MUAC or weight-for-height cutoffs, presence of edema), treatment protocols (use of F-75/F-100 therapeutic milk, Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods like Plumpy'Nut, etc.), and discharge criteria. UNHCR also promotes **Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IYCF-E)** – ensuring mothers can continue breastfeeding safely, organizing baby-friendly spaces, and providing appropriate complementary foods for infants 6–23 months. A 2017 multi-sectoral framework on IYCF-E and operational guidance from the Global Nutrition Cluster guide field staff on protecting and supporting infant feeding practices even in the harsh conditions of refugee camps. Additionally, UNHCR's *Operational Guidance on the Use of Specialized Nutritional Products* helps determine when to use products like high-energy biscuits, micronutrient powders, or lipid-based supplements to address nutritional gaps. Overall, UNHCR's approach

is to meet immediate food needs in ways that also prevent malnutrition and respect refugees' rights (e.g. the right to adequate food).

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – Addressing Hunger in Conflict

The ICRC is mandated to assist and protect civilians in armed conflicts, and thus it frequently tackles food insecurity in war-torn areas. A core principle under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is that **starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited**. ICRC's recent briefing note *"Starvation, Hunger and Famine in Armed Conflict"* (2022) outlines IHL rules relevant to food security in conflicts [19]. These include rules on the conduct of hostilities (parties must not destroy or remove objects indispensable for survival, like crops or water sources), the **responsibility of warring parties to ensure adequate food and water supplies** for civilians under their control, and obligations to allow rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need [19]. The ICRC uses quiet diplomacy to remind parties of these duties and negotiates access to besieged or hard-to-reach populations at risk of hunger.

In practice, ICRC's **food security interventions** in conflicts often involve direct food distributions, support to agriculture, or cash assistance, tailored to context. The *Handbook of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement* provides general policies, while context-specific strategies are developed for each operation. For instance, in places like Yemen, South Sudan, or Northeast Nigeria, ICRC delivers food parcels (typically cereals, legumes, oil, salt covering a month's needs) to displaced families or communities isolated by fighting. They also may distribute seeds and tools or vaccinate livestock to protect livelihoods during conflict. A key focus is on **resilience in protracted conflicts**: ICRC tries to prevent the collapse of agricultural production by providing inputs, rehabilitating irrigation, or supporting veterinary services, so that communities can maintain some self-sufficiency. Their programming often bridges emergency relief and early recovery (e.g. combining immediate food aid with later programs for restoring income). ICRC's statements highlight that while it's critical to address the humanitarian consequences of hunger (through aid), it's equally important to **treat and prevent the root causes**, which are frequently tied to conflict dynamics and violations of IHL. Thus, ICRC engages in advocacy against tactics like scorched earth or blockade that cause famine, and in promoting respect for IHL to prevent hunger crises. In 2023–24, with acute food insecurity escalating in conflict zones, the ICRC has warned of the risk of famines and urged the international community to both provide resources and push for political solutions enabling humanitarian access [20]. Finally, ICRC has innovated in **remote assessment** methods – for example, developing **Remote Data Collection guidelines** using phone surveys or key informant networks to gauge food security in areas it cannot safely visit, thereby informing response planning even amidst insecurity.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – Emergency Livelihoods and Early Warning

FAO specializes in protecting and rebuilding agricultural livelihoods in emergencies. While agencies like WFP address immediate food consumption, **FAO's emergency response** often aims to ensure the next harvest or the survival of livestock, thus averting longer-term hunger. FAO's field teams provide farmers with seeds, farming tools, fertilizer, or fishing gear after disasters so they can plant again and reduce dependency on food aid. For example, after a drought or flood, FAO might run seed fairs or distributions in time for the planting season, or supply fast-growing vegetable seeds for quick food production. Similarly, in pastoral communities hit by drought, FAO may organize livestock feed distributions, vaccination campaigns, or

destocking programs (buying weak animals for slaughter) to save herds and pastoral livelihoods. These interventions are guided by the **Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS)** – a companion to Sphere focusing on livestock relief, which FAO contributed to. FAO's *Emergency Technical Handbook Series* provides practical guidance on such activities (e.g. how to set up community animal health programs or emergency seed multiplication).

In addition, FAO is a key player in **early warning and food security information systems**. The organization supports governments in establishing **Food Security Information and Early Warning Systems (FSIEWS)** [21] that monitor crops, markets, and nutrition, issuing alerts when food crises threaten. FAO's handbook on setting up FSIEWS (2000) and newer tools (like the Integrated Phase Classification it co-chairs, and the Agricultural Stress Index for drought monitoring) reflect its expertise in analysis. FAO also co-leads the **Global Report on Food Crises** and the **Hunger Hotspots** reports with WFP, which identify countries at risk of severe food insecurity in the coming months [22]. These reports trigger early action: for instance, if forecasts show a likely drought-induced food deficit, FAO can launch an early action plan (cash-for-work, animal feed, etc.) before livelihoods collapse. Another aspect of FAO's emergency work is **food safety in emergencies** – ensuring that in the rush to deliver food, standards are maintained so that people don't consume spoiled or unsafe items. FAO, with WHO, developed a framework for **national food safety emergency response plans** to help countries manage incidents like food contamination or disease outbreaks affecting the food supply. This became important in situations like earthquake responses, where mass food donations need quality control.

At the policy level, FAO advocates that emergency response should be linked to longer-term food security. Its classic definition of **food security** – "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for an active and healthy life" [23] – underlines that availability, access, utilization, and stability are all crucial. FAO's 2006 Food Security Policy Brief elaborated these four pillars and urged that humanitarian programs (which typically focus on short-term availability and access) also lay groundwork for future stability and utilization (e.g. supporting local food production, markets, and nutrition education even during crises). FAO emergency projects now often include a **cash-based component** (to boost local markets) and an element of **capacity building** – for example training community animal health workers or establishing grain banks – to strengthen resilience. With climate change increasing the frequency of climate-related disasters, FAO has also developed guidance for **climate resilience in food security programming** [24], encouraging analysis of climate risks and community-based adaptation measures in every response.

Sphere Standards for Food Security and Nutrition

The **Sphere Handbook (2018)** is a cornerstone of humanitarian standards, outlining the minimum acceptable levels of service in sectors like WASH, shelter, and food security/nutrition. Sphere's **Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Minimum Standards** are a practical expression of the right to adequate food and nutrition in crises [25]. Agencies and donors often use these as baseline targets when designing programs. For general food assistance, Sphere sets the **minimum energy requirement at about 2,100 kcal per person per day** for the average adult [15]. It further specifies that 10–12% of total energy should come from protein and ~17% from fat to ensure a balanced macronutrient intake [26]. Micronutrient needs must also be met – either through diversified diets, fortified foods, or supplements – to prevent deficiencies like scurvy or pellagra in refugee camps [16]. Sphere standards also address food **acceptability and quality**: food distributed should be culturally appropriate and safely stored/prepared. A key indicator is that nearly all (≥90%) surveyed beneficiary households should report that the provided food is of acceptable quality

and meets their local preferences [27], and any complaints of spoilage or safety issues should be minimal [28].

In nutrition, Sphere provides benchmarks for **management of acute malnutrition** programs. For example, in therapeutic feeding for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), Sphere's outcome indicators are: >75% of children **recover** (i.e. reach discharge criteria), <10% **die**, and <15% **default** (drop out) from treatment [29]. These ensure agencies strive for high cure rates and low mortality in stabilization centers or outpatient therapeutic programs. Similarly, for Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) supplementary feeding, coverage targets are set (e.g. reaching >50% of the affected population in rural areas, >70% in urban, >90% in camp settings) [30]. Sphere also highlights **Infant and Young Child Feeding** support: e.g., ensuring a high proportion of caregivers have access to skilled breastfeeding counseling and to appropriate complementary foods for children 6–23 months [31], even during emergencies. Additionally, Sphere covers **food security in terms of livelihoods** – there are standards for protecting livelihood assets and supporting food production where feasible. One indicator is improvement in household income or food production over 6-12 months among those assisted [32], reflecting a linkage of emergency aid to recovery.

Sphere is complemented by sector-specific standards like **LEGS (Livestock Emergency Guidelines)** for animal health and **MERS (Minimum Economic Recovery Standards)** for post-crisis livelihoods, but Sphere remains the most widely referenced. Humanitarian organizations often design their programs to at least meet Sphere minimums – and if they cannot (due to resource or access constraints), they document the gap and try to address it. The Sphere Handbook also contains the **Humanitarian Charter** and **Protection Principles**, which frame these technical standards with ethical and legal commitments (e.g. the right to life with dignity, the duty to not harm, etc.). Thus, Sphere not only tells practitioners "how much food or nutrition service to provide," but also reminds them of **quality, accountability, and dignity** in delivery. Sphere's core spirit is improving response quality and accountability to crisis-affected people [33], making it a key part of any comprehensive emergency food security and nutrition training.

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) in Food Emergencies

In recent years, there has been a major shift from purely in-kind food aid to **Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)** where appropriate. CVA refers to any humanitarian program that provides cash transfers or vouchers directly to individuals or households, allowing them to purchase the goods and services they need most [34]. This modality can take different forms: *unrestricted cash* (people can spend it on anything, meeting food or other essential needs at their discretion), *restricted vouchers* (e.g. paper or electronic vouchers that can be redeemed for specified foods or at certain shops), or *value vouchers* (like e-cards loaded with a certain value). Many agencies now implement **Multipurpose Cash Grants** to cover a range of needs, or specific *Cash-for-Food* or *Cash-for-Work* programs to improve food security. The **CALP Network (Cash Learning Partnership)** provides extensive guidance on CVA, including decision-making on whether to use cash, vouchers, or in-kind aid. A 2015 guidance note "*Cash, Vouchers or In-Kind?*" discusses the pros and cons of each modality [35]. In summary, the advantages of cash include flexibility and dignity for recipients (they can buy according to their priorities), potential cost-efficiency for agencies, and support for local markets and livelihoods [36]. As CALP notes, giving cash often "allows cost-efficient and safe means of transfer, promotes local economies and creates opportunities for social cohesion" [36]. Vouchers similarly support local traders while restricting assistance to food or other basic items, which can be useful if donors require that or if certain goods (like nutritious foods) should be ensured in the diet. In-kind aid may be preferable in some scenarios – for instance, if local markets are not functioning (due to disaster or conflict), or if inflation is so high that cash would rapidly lose value or buy very little food.

Deciding on the modality requires **response analysis**: agencies assess market availability of food, security situation (will cash pose a security risk for recipients?), beneficiary preferences, cost, and operational constraints. Often a mix is used – e.g. food rations initially, then cash transfers once markets recover. CVA has grown rapidly; in 2019, humanitarian agencies delivered around $5.6 billion in cash/vouchers, about 18% of global humanitarian aid [37], and the share is rising. WFP has become one of the largest cash actors (over $2.3 billion in 2020 via cash-based transfers in 65 countries), reflecting this trend. To ensure quality, organizations follow guidelines such as the **Sphere guidance on cash**, **CALP's Program Quality Toolbox**, and donor-specific rules. USAID/BHA, ECHO, and others have issued guidance on designing and monitoring cash programs (e.g. setting a **Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)** to determine transfer values that cover a household's essential needs, and using post-distribution monitoring to track outcomes). There is also emerging evidence on CVA's effect on nutrition: a 2020 guidance note by CALP and the Global Nutrition Cluster compiles lessons on using cash to achieve nutrition outcomes [38]. Generally, cash alone may not reduce child malnutrition unless paired with nutrition education or services, but it can improve dietary diversity and reduce negative coping (like selling assets for food).

UNHCR and WFP have developed joint approaches for **cash in refugee settings**, including data sharing agreements and common delivery mechanisms, so refugees can receive one cash transfer that covers food and other needs. They have also agreed on **principles for targeting assistance** so that the most vulnerable get help, whether via cash or food [38]. Another important aspect is **monitoring**: specialized tools like *Monitoring for CTP (Cash Transfer Programming) in Emergencies – 2017* guide agencies in tracking how cash is used, its impact on local markets, and any protection concerns (e.g. risk of theft or intra-household conflict). In summary, CVA has become an indispensable tool in food security responses, often used alongside in-kind food aid. It aligns with the **Grand Bargain** commitments made by donors and agencies to increase the use of cash, given evidence that it can be an efficient and effective form of aid in many contexts. However, the choice of modality is context-specific, and agencies are encouraged to remain flexible and **accountable to affected people's preferences** when designing assistance [39].

Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET)

Anticipating food crises before they turn catastrophic is crucial for timely intervention. The **Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET)**, created by USAID in 1985 after the devastating 1984 famine in Ethiopia, is a leading initiative in this area. FEWS NET monitors and analyzes factors that drive food insecurity – rainfall and drought, crop production, markets and prices, conflicts, and more – across roughly 30 vulnerable countries (primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also Central America, Caribbean, and Central Asia). It produces regular reports such as **Food Security Outlooks** (projecting the food security situation 6 months ahead) and **Alerts** for emerging crises. As one expert publication notes, FEWS NET provides "evidence-based guidance for effective humanitarian relief efforts," relying on a sophisticated **Drought Early Warning System (DEWS)** to predict where livelihood disruption and hunger will occur [40]. This system integrates multiple disciplines: **remote sensing** of weather and vegetation, **climate forecasts** (e.g. El Niño/La Niña predictions), **agro-climatic monitoring** (soil moisture, crop health indices), **market and trade analysis** (to see food price spikes or market failures), and on-the-ground assessments. FEWS NET analysts work closely with national meteorological and food security agencies, and with partners like FAO, WFP, and regional bodies. The network's science and partnerships over "over 30 years of drought early warning" have advanced techniques to detect famine risks [41] [42] – for instance, using satellite rainfall data (CHIRPS), crop simulation models, and household economy approaches to estimate how families will cope with a poor season.

FEWS NET typically uses a classification similar to IPC's Phase scale (in fact, it was an early adopter of IPC analysis). If FEWS NET projections indicate that an area will likely deteriorate to IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) or 5 (Catastrophe/Famine), it issues alerts that often trigger donor action and scale-up of aid. A famous example was Somalia in 2017: FEWS NET's alerts and analysis prompted earlier response, which is credited with averting a famine that year, in contrast to 2011 when delays contributed to tens of thousands of deaths [43]. FEWS NET also monitors **market prices** and publishes **Price Watch** reports since food affordability is as important as food production in many crises. Additionally, it partners on the **FEWS NET InfoRM** and **CHIRPS** tools that open up its data. Another FEWS NET contribution is building local capacity – training ministries to do food security outlooks and set up national early warning systems (like Ethiopia's LEAP early warning or Kenya's NDMA drought monitoring). By providing rigorous, publicly accessible analysis, FEWS NET helps the humanitarian community prioritize responses based on likely scenarios. For instance, if FEWS NET warns that, due to conflict and drought, Yemen will have 17 million people in Crisis or worse next lean season, it helps galvanize funding and planning (such as pre-positioning of food stocks or allocation of contingency cash). In summary, FEWS NET has become an exemplar of using **science for early action**, showing that famine is often predictable and thus preventable with timely response. It is a key resource in the toolbox for emergency food security planning, often cited in IPC reports and UN appeals as the analytical underpinning for response decisions.

Nutrition in Emergencies: Managing Acute Malnutrition

Acute malnutrition often surges during food security crises, making nutrition interventions a lifesaving priority alongside food assistance. Humanitarian agencies follow well-established protocols to **prevent and treat malnutrition** in emergencies, grounded in global guidelines and decades of field experience. One cornerstone is the **Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM)** approach (originally developed in the 2000s), which allows the majority of children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) to be treated at home with Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) and regular follow-up, rather than in inpatient care. UNICEF, WHO, and NGOs have training guides (e.g. a 2018 CMAM Training Guide [44]) to help health workers implement these programs. In CMAM, only the most severe cases with medical complications (e.g. severe edema or infections) are referred to stabilization centers (hospitals) for intensive care, following the **WHO Inpatient Treatment Guidelines** for SAM. Those guidelines cover steps like careful rehydration, treatment of hypoglycemia and hypothermia, and a two-phase dietary therapy (starting with F-75 therapeutic milk then transitioning to F-100 or RUTF) to rehabilitate a severely malnourished child. For **Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM)**, agencies often run **Supplementary Feeding Programs (SFP)**, where moderately malnourished children and pregnant or lactating women receive fortified blends (like SuperCereal/CSB++) or ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSF like Plumpy'Sup) to boost their caloric and nutrient intake. A *"MAM Decision Tool for Emergencies"* (2017) by the Global Nutrition Cluster provides a flowchart on when to start blanket or targeted SFPs based on malnutrition rates, risks, and context constraints. For example, in a refugee camp with GAM (Global Acute Malnutrition) >15% or aggravating factors, a **Blanket SFP** might be implemented to give all young children supplementary rations, as a preventive measure [45]. Indeed, experts note that in an acute crisis, **blanket feeding** can serve both as a nutritional safety net and an opportunity to screen children for SAM/MAM for referral [45].

To coordinate these efforts, the **Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC)** (led by UNICEF) produces harmonized guidance. The *Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Operational Guidance* (2017) is one such key document, detailing how to protect breastfeeding (e.g. creating mother-baby spaces, supporting relactation if needed, and strictly controlling the use of breastmilk substitutes) and ensure infants 6-23 months receive appropriate complementary foods even when family diets are disrupted. The GNC also addresses

micronutrient interventions in emergencies – such as Vitamin A supplementation campaigns, distribution of micronutrient powders for home fortification, or mass fortification of staple foods. **Disease and malnutrition are tightly interlinked**, so emergency nutrition programs integrate with health: e.g., deworming children, providing measles immunizations (since measles can spike mortality in malnourished kids), and ensuring access to safe water and sanitation to reduce diarrheal diseases.

Agencies like Action Against Hunger, MSF, and World Vision have produced **field manuals** for nutrition in emergencies. These cover practical steps like setting up a stabilization center or outpatient therapeutic program, calculating supply needs (RUTF, therapeutic milks), training community volunteers for MUAC screening, and monitoring program performance (against Sphere standards noted earlier). For instance, Action Against Hunger's manuals give recipes for local therapeutic foods and guidance on engaging communities in referral of malnourished children. **Coordination** is critical: in large emergencies, a Nutrition Cluster or Sector will map all actors to ensure coverage across affected areas and avoid overlaps. They use tools like the **Joint Nutrition and Food Security Cluster Checklist** [46] to align food distribution with nutrition activities (ensuring, say, that general rations are nutritionally adequate and that families of malnourished children also receive food support so that the therapeutic foods are not shared among the whole family).

Another vulnerable group is **infants under 6 months who are not breastfed or whose mothers are very weak** – recent initiatives like the MAMI (Management of At-risk Mothers and Infants <6 months) approach provide guidance on assessing and supporting these infants (for example, supplementary feeding for the mother, counseling, and if necessary using donor human milk or formula with strict protocols).

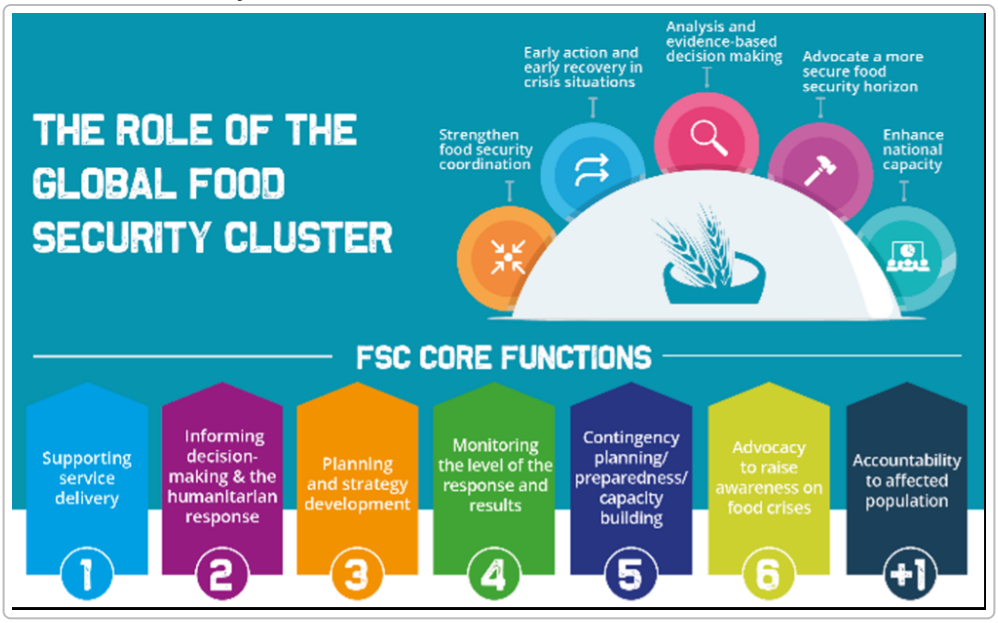
Field experience and research (summarized by initiatives like Evidence Aid) show that with prompt action, even high levels of acute malnutrition can be brought under control. For example, in the Horn of Africa drought of 2017, massive scale-up of emergency OTPs/SFPs by UNICEF, NGOs, and governments treated hundreds of thousands of children, helping to avert famine-level mortality. However, in more dire situations like Somalia 2011 or parts of South Sudan in 2017, conflict and access problems hampered these efforts, contributing to famine declarations. **Lessons learned** emphasize the need for early deployment of nutrition supplies (RUTF pipelines often need months of lead time) and integration of nutrition into overall response planning from the start of an emergency. Through coordination platforms like the **Global Nutrition Cluster's Rapid Response Team**, surge nutrition specialists can be sent to support countries in crisis. All these measures reflect a consensus: **nutritional status** is a key outcome to monitor in food emergencies, and multi-sectoral efforts (food, health, WASH, and care practices) are required to prevent excess mortality from malnutrition.

Coordination through Food Security and Nutrition Clusters

In large-scale humanitarian crises, coordination is facilitated by the **Cluster system**, which groups agencies by sector to improve the effectiveness of the response. For food security and nutrition, two main clusters often work closely: the **Food Security Cluster (FSC)** and the **Nutrition Cluster**. The **FSC** was formally established in 2011 and is co-led globally by WFP and FAO [47]. Its mandate is to coordinate the food security response in emergencies – covering both **food assistance** (in-kind, cash, voucher) and **agricultural livelihoods support**. The FSC operates in around 30 countries with active crises, coordinating a network of UN agencies, NGOs, and government partners [48]. At the country level, a Food Security Cluster (or Sector Working Group in some cases) is chaired by WFP/FAO and open to all implementing agencies. They conduct joint needs analysis, plan **coherent strategies**, divide geographic areas or target populations to cover,

develop a sectoral response plan (often as part of the broader UN Humanitarian Response Plan), and monitor progress (using 5W matrices: Who does What, Where, When, for Whom) [49]. The FSC also ensures common standards are applied and avoids duplication of aid. For example, if one NGO is distributing food in District X, the cluster will try to make sure another NGO covers District Y, rather than both piling into X and leaving Y unserved. Or, if FAO plans a seed distribution, the cluster can coordinate timing so that WFP's food distribution happens earlier, ensuring that vulnerable farmers don't consume the seeds out of hunger.

The **Global Food Security Cluster** support team in Rome/Geneva provides guidance and surge support to country clusters [50]. An infographic from the gFSC illustrates its core functions – from supporting service delivery and informing strategic decision-making, to contingency planning and advocacy (see figure: "The Role of the Global Food Security Cluster")



. Notably, the FSC engages in **inter-cluster coordination**, especially with the Nutrition Cluster (to align on assessments and response gaps), WASH (water/sanitation support to food distributions or kitchen gardens), and others like Health. In recent years, the FSC has also been involved in initiatives around the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus**, trying to design responses that not only save lives in the short term but reduce needs and vulnerabilities over time [51] – for instance, linking emergency safety nets to social protection systems, where feasible.

Meanwhile, the **Nutrition Cluster** (led by UNICEF globally) coordinates agencies focusing on **nutrition-specific interventions**: treatment of acute malnutrition, IYCF, micronutrient supplementation, etc. In some countries (especially where malnutrition is very high, such as South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen), the Nutrition Cluster is separate and works in tandem with the FSC. In others, nutrition might be a sub-group or combined (e.g. a joint Food Security and Nutrition Cluster) if capacity is limited. The Nutrition Cluster ensures common **nutrition surveys and surveillance** are carried out (often using the SMART methodology), shares **admissions data** from feeding centers to track the nutrition situation, and leads on technical protocols (with Ministry of Health involvement). It also coordinates supply pipelines for RUTF and other commodities, which are critical to avoid stockouts. Global tools like the **Nutrition Cluster Toolkit** and coordination handbooks help cluster coordinators manage these tasks. Importantly, there is a *Global Nutrition Cluster Coordination Team* that can dispatch **Rapid Response Team** members to establish or reinforce a cluster during a sudden onset emergency. Both the FSC and Nutrition Cluster are part of the

overall humanitarian architecture led by the Humanitarian Coordinator/OCHA in-country, and they contribute to joint appeals and funding mechanisms (like CERF or country-based pooled funds) by prioritizing needs within their sectors.

One practical example of collaboration is the **Joint Food Security and Nutrition Cluster checklist** developed by the global clusters [46]. This checklist helps ensure that when, say, famine is looming, food and nutrition actors plan together: food rations are designed to support nutritional recovery (including sufficient protein and fat, family rations to reduce sharing of therapeutic foods, etc.), and nutrition programs consider what general food support exists (since treating a malnourished child is futile if the family still has no food at home). Another example is **IPC Acute Malnutrition analysis**, which often requires both food security and health/nutrition input; clusters coordinate to contribute data and validate analysis of both IPC food insecurity phase and IPC acute malnutrition phase in a given region.

Finally, clusters also serve as information hubs for **lessons learned and best practices**. After a major food security emergency, the clusters may organize after-action reviews or compile case studies. For instance, the Somalia FSC and Nutrition Cluster documented the massive scale-up in 2017 as a best-practice example of integrated famine prevention. Such knowledge sharing through clusters helps improve future responses globally. In summary, effective coordination through the cluster system is a linchpin in translating all the aforementioned guidelines and capacities into a **unified, effective field response** that maximizes coverage and impact.

Action Against Hunger (ACF) – Field Practice in Food Security & Livelihoods

Action Against Hunger (ACF) is a prominent international NGO focused on ending hunger, and it has contributed significantly to field practice through its technical manuals and programs. ACF's approach typically combines emergency nutrition interventions with food security and livelihood support to tackle underlying causes. One of ACF's key resources is the manual *"Food Security and Livelihood Assessments – A Practical Guide for Field Workers"* [52]. Originally published in 2010 (updated 2024), this guide gives very practical, step-by-step advice on how to conduct assessments in various scenarios (rapid assessments right after a disaster, in-depth surveys during protracted crises, etc.) [53]. It is intended for field practitioners and covers methods such as household interviews, market surveys, seasonal calendars, and community mapping to identify food security status and vulnerabilities. Using this guide, ACF teams and other NGOs can determine the most appropriate interventions – whether general food distributions, cash-for-work programs, agricultural inputs, or others – based on the local context and needs.

ACF also developed **monitoring and evaluation guidelines** for food security programs, ensuring that interventions are achieving their goals (for example, measuring changes in household dietary diversity or coping strategies index among program beneficiaries). They stress the importance of baseline and endline surveys and the use of indicators like Food Consumption Score (FCS) and Household Hunger Scale (HHS) to quantify impact. Another notable ACF publication is the *"Guideline for Enhancing Climate Resilience of Food and Nutrition Security"*. This 2014 guide acknowledges that many food crises are climate-related (droughts, floods) and recommends integrating climate risk management into projects. For instance, it advises on diversifying livelihoods, promoting drought-resistant crops, early warning at community level, and disaster risk reduction activities as part of emergency response [54]. This forward-looking approach aims to reduce communities' vulnerability to future shocks even as immediate needs are addressed.

In emergencies, ACF often implements **cash transfer programs** (they were pioneers in some early cash projects) and **"Nutrition-sensitive" food security projects**. For example, an ACF program in the Sahel might distribute food rations or cash during the lean season while also delivering nutrition education to mothers and supporting vegetable gardens for dietary diversity. ACF's policy papers emphasize linking **food security and livelihoods (FSL)** – recognizing that to sustainably prevent hunger, one must support income-generating activities and strengthen local food systems. In an emergency context, ACF might support **Income-Generating Activities (IGA)** for vulnerable households (small grants or inputs to restart petty trade, fishing, or handicrafts) as a complement to direct food aid, thereby hastening recovery. They have a dedicated IGA manual that describes how to select beneficiaries, develop business plans, and monitor IGAs in a post-crisis setting.

Another area ACF stresses is **preparedness**. Their *Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning (EPRP) manual* helps country teams map out likely crises, pre-position stocks (or at least identify suppliers), and establish contingency plans. This paid off in responses like Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and the West Africa Ebola crisis, where ACF was able to rapidly adjust its programs. When it comes to nutrition, ACF is known for implementing therapeutic feeding centers and community nutrition programs, but always paired with addressing food access. They strongly advocate for **multisectoral responses** – combining WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) with nutrition and food security (since dirty water can negate nutritional gains).

In summary, Action Against Hunger contributes both operational capacity on the ground and a wealth of practical knowledge resources for the humanitarian community. Their guides and field experience underscore many best practices: *assess needs thoroughly*, *target the most vulnerable (often children, women, marginalized groups)*, *ensure the intervention is context-appropriate*, and *monitor outcomes to learn and improve*. By integrating these practices, emergency programs can be more effective in saving lives and restoring livelihoods in the wake of food crises.

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) – Emergency Food Aid Guidelines

The United States, through USAID's **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)**, is one of the largest donors of emergency food assistance globally. BHA (formed by merging the former OFDA and Food for Peace offices) provides funding and food commodities to UN agencies and NGOs, and it issues detailed guidelines to ensure these resources are used effectively. The **Emergency Application Guidelines (EAG)** are a key set of documents for NGO partners applying for BHA grants. They outline everything from proposal formats and required assessments to compliance rules and reporting requirements [55]. Essentially, they serve as a "how to apply and implement" manual for partners. For example, BHA's guidelines require that proposals include a sound problem analysis (often referencing IPC or FEWS NET data to justify need), a description of the target population and selection criteria, plans for how interventions will meet Sphere standards, and a monitoring and evaluation plan with specific indicators. BHA has a companion **Indicator Handbook** with standardized indicators (e.g. "Household Hunger Score", "Number of individuals participating in livelihoods activities", "Recovery rate of malnourished children") that partners must report on [56]. This allows BHA to aggregate results across its global portfolio.

USAID/BHA is unique in that it still provides a portion of food aid as **U.S.-sourced commodities** (like rice, wheat, vegetable oil, fortified blends) under the **Food for Peace Act (Title II)**. There are guidelines on how partners can request these commodities and how to handle logistics. In acute emergencies, BHA often uses

the **USAID Food for Peace Emergency Program** to ship in-kind food or increasingly to fund local/regional procurement of food. BHA also supports the **International Food Relief Partnership (IFRP)**, a program that provides smaller grants (often to faith-based organizations or local NGOs) to deliver specialized shelf-stable food products (like fortified meals) to vulnerable groups. Partners receiving these grants must follow IFRP guidelines on commodity management, nutritional content, and distribution monitoring.

Another component is **Cash and Voucher** programming: BHA has embraced cash assistance (in line with the Grand Bargain). Its guidelines include annexes on cash programming, market assessments, and risk mitigation (for example, requiring partners to analyze if cash might cause inflation in local markets or be subject to theft/diversion, and to plan accordingly). **Coordination and duplication avoidance** are emphasized as well – BHA expects partners to participate in the clusters and local coordination. If multiple BHA-funded NGOs are in the same area, they should harmonize transfer values or ration sizes. BHA's *Technical Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for Emergency Activities* (2020) provides tips and requirements for real-time monitoring in volatile settings, use of remote monitoring if needed, and gender, age, and disability disaggregation of data to ensure aid reaches diverse groups.

Overall, these USAID guidelines help translate high-level policy into operational practice. They push for interventions that are evidence-based (hence lots of assessments and data in proposals), accountable (through standard indicators and reporting), and aligned with international standards (like Sphere and CHS). For instance, BHA will not fund a general ration that is, say, 1,500 kcal/day unless there's justification and a plan to complement it, because that falls below accepted minimums. If a partner proposes a cash program, BHA will look for a market assessment and a clear rationale why cash is preferable to in-kind in that context. In effect, donors like BHA shape the emergency response by setting these guidelines and ensuring partners adhere to best practices. Humanitarian organizations have to build their programs to meet both the urgent needs on the ground and the donor requirements – which, ideally, are aligned with global standards we've discussed (IPC analysis, Sphere metrics, etc.). BHA also frequently conducts **evaluations** of its large-scale responses (either jointly with WFP for big food operations or independently for NGO consortia) to learn what worked or not, feeding back into the guidance revision process. One recent trend is the integration of **essential needs programming** in BHA's strategy, meaning food aid is considered alongside other basics like shelter and health, echoing the "essential needs" approach WFP and others champion.

In summary, USAID/BHA's emergency food aid guidelines ensure that the considerable U.S. contributions (whether food commodities, cash transfers, or agricultural aid) are delivered efficiently and effectively. They require NGOs to plan robust programs that tie in with all the elements covered in this report – early warning data, technical standards, coordinated approaches, and accountability to affected populations.

Additional Humanitarian Standards and Tools

Beyond the major frameworks above, there are several **cross-cutting standards and tools** that guide emergency food security and nutrition work:

- **Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)**: This is an industry-wide standard focusing on the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. It lays out nine commitments, such as appropriate and relevant assistance, effective communication with communities, and mechanisms for feedback and complaints. Agencies delivering food assistance are expected to inform communities about what they can expect (e.g. ration quantities, selection criteria) and enable feedback (for instance, setting

up help desks at distribution sites) in line with CHS. Adhering to CHS ensures that interventions are not only technically sound but also accountable and participatory.

- **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief: This classic document (1994) sets ethical principles, including humanitarian imperative (priority to save lives), impartiality (aid based on need alone, not discriminating), and independence. It specifically also notes that aid should not be used to further political or religious agendas and that we should respect local culture and custom. Food assistance programs reference this to maintain neutrality and impartiality – for example, targeting must be needs-based and not exclude or favor any group arbitrarily. The Code of Conduct also encourages building local capacities and involves disaster victims in aid decisions where possible.

- **Humanitarian Charter**: Incorporated in Sphere, the Charter grounds humanitarian action in principles of humanity and in international law (like the right to food and life with dignity). It essentially underpins why providing adequate food and nutrition is not just charity but a matter of rights and obligations. Practitioners use it to advocate for access – e.g. reminding belligerents that civilians have a right to receive food assistance and that agencies have the right to offer it.

- **Protection Principles**: Food distributions can pose risks (riots, exploitation, theft, gender-based violence when women travel to distribution points, etc.). The protection principles (do no harm, ensure safety, meaningful access, accountability, and participation) guide agencies to design food security interventions that minimize those risks. For instance, ensuring distribution sites are secure, well-organized, and that women or other vulnerable groups are not exposed to harm; or designing cash programs in a way that mitigates risk of domestic violence over control of cash.

- **Grand Bargain Commitments**: This 2016 initiative by major donors and agencies included commitments highly relevant to food security responses, such as increasing the use of **cash assistance**, improving **localization** (working with local NGOs and communities), and enhancing **needs assessments**. The Grand Bargain spurred more cash-based programming (as discussed) and also pushes for joint assessments – so instead of each NGO doing separate surveys, the IPC or a multi-sector assessment serves everyone. It also encourages multi-year funding in protracted crises, which helps agencies like WFP or FAO plan better beyond a 6-month emergency phase and link to resilience-building.

- **Sectoral Standards**: We've touched on LEGS (for livestock) and INEE Minimum Standards (for Education in Emergencies). While not directly about food, they matter because holistic disaster response addresses all needs. For example, if an operation involves pastoral communities, applying LEGS guidelines on destocking or vet services can save livelihoods, complementing food aid. If school feeding is planned to improve child nutrition and school attendance, INEE standards ensure the education aspect is quality. Another set is the **Inclusion Standards** (for older people and people with disabilities, by ADCAP), which remind food security actors to consider those who might be unable to access aid (e.g. an elderly person who cannot travel to a distribution). Simple actions like community-based targeting, home delivery for the immobile, or customizing ration packaging (smaller portions easier to carry) can greatly enhance equity.

- **Analytical tools and methodologies**: Humanitarians use various tools to quantify food insecurity and livelihood status. The **Household Economy Approach (HEA)**, for instance, helps predict how

households will cope with shocks by analyzing their sources of food and income vs. survival thresholds. Many IPC analyses draw on HEA outcomes to estimate food gaps ("deficit of 210 kcal/person/day" etc.). The **Food Consumption Score (FCS)** is a WFP-developed indicator measuring dietary diversity and frequency, often collected in assessments to categorize households' food security status (poor, borderline, acceptable consumption). The **Coping Strategies Index (CSI)** tracks behaviors people resort to when food is scarce (e.g. eating fewer meals, borrowing food, selling assets) – a rising CSI indicates worsening stress. The **Household Hunger Scale (HHS)** is a simple 6-question indicator that gauges hunger experience (like going a whole day without eating); it's used in many surveys for global comparability. And as mentioned, defining a **Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)** is crucial for cash programs – calculating the cost of a basic basket of food and non-food items for survival, to set transfer values. These tools are often referenced in the technical guidelines from IPC, WFP VAM, USAID, and others [57] [58]. They enable evidence-based programming and monitoring. For example, agencies might decide to implement a food aid intervention if FCS data show a high percentage of households with "poor" food consumption and high CSI, even if a famine threshold isn't reached – these subtler indicators provide early warning.

In summary, the emergency food security and nutrition sector is governed not just by agency-specific manuals but by a **framework of standards, principles, and analytical methods** that ensure we address hunger crises effectively and ethically. By adhering to these, humanitarian responders strive to continually improve the quality of aid, learn from past crises, and ultimately save lives while upholding the dignity of those affected.

Lessons from Major Food Crises and Ongoing Challenges

Looking back at major food emergencies provides critical insights for the future. The famine in **Somalia in 2011** demonstrated the lethal cost of delayed response: by the time famine was declared, an estimated 260,000 people had already died. Contributing factors included late recognition of the severity (early warnings were not acted upon in time), access impediments due to Al-Shabaab's restrictions, and insufficient humanitarian funding until images of starving children made headlines. In contrast, the **risk of famine in Somalia in 2017** was met with earlier action – FEWS NET and IPC sounded alarms by late 2016, donors responded faster, and a massive scale-up of food and nutrition aid (along with good rainfall in mid-2017) prevented famine [43]. The lesson is clear: **early warning must trigger early response**. Tools like FEWS NET outlooks and IPC projections are only as good as the will to act on them. This has improved, as seen again in 2020–2021 when early warnings of COVID-19's economic impacts led WFP to expand assistance preemptively in many countries.

The **2011 famine in Somalia** and the **2017 near-miss** also underscored the importance of **humanitarian access and security**. Where fighters or governments block aid, starvation can be used as a weapon. This is tragically evident in **Yemen's ongoing crisis** – despite massive international aid, parts of Yemen edged close to famine because conflict disruptions, blockades, and bureaucratic impediments prevented food, fuel, and medical imports from reaching those in need. Negotiating access and upholding IHL remains a challenge; the global community has at times used UN Security Council resolutions (e.g. on Syria cross-border aid) or sanctions exemptions to facilitate food aid delivery, but field teams still navigate dangerous territories to reach pockets of hungry people.

Ethiopia provides another instructive case. In **2015–2016, an El Niño-induced drought** hit Ethiopia's highlands, threatening millions with extreme food shortages. Thanks to improved government early

warning and a Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) already supporting many chronically food-insecure households, the Ethiopian government and international partners mounted a huge response that averted a famine. Over 10 million people received emergency food aid and supplementary rations. However, this effort was very costly (over $1 billion) and highlighted the strain on resources as climate shocks worsen. It proved the value of having development programs that can flex in a crisis (PSNP was scaled up temporarily) and of pre-arranged financing (some funds were unlocked via forecast-based financing mechanisms). Conversely, **Ethiopia's Tigray conflict in 2020–2021** showed how quickly gains can reverse: conflict cut off aid to Tigray for months, plunging the region into near-famine despite early warning, because access was the bottleneck.

In **South Sudan**, a famine was declared in early 2017 in parts of Unity State, primarily conflict-driven. The declaration (by IPC analysis) spurred a surge of aid that helped alleviate the famine in a few months, but the broader lesson from South Sudan is about **protracted crises**. Years of civil war destroyed livelihoods, displaced millions, and disrupted farming – no single short-term fix exists. It requires simultaneous life-saving aid and long-term peacebuilding and development. South Sudan also illustrates the need for **multi-sector action**: alongside food drops by air, agencies had to deliver fishing kits (so families by swamps could fish when cut off from markets), run mobile clinics for malnourished kids in swamps, and negotiate days of tranquility for aid convoys. Flexibility and creativity in response were key.

Yemen, often called the world's largest humanitarian crisis in recent years, has seen UN-led innovative approaches like **integrated famine risk reduction** programs (combined food, nutrition, WASH, and health interventions in the same communities) and **large-scale cash transfers** to keep the market system functioning in a war economy. One success in Yemen has been the resilience of markets – traders continued importing food, so WFP expanded vouchers and cash in many areas. But economic collapse (currency depreciation) taught another lesson: food security is not just about food supply, but also people's purchasing power. In Yemen and Syria, macroeconomic factors (inflation, currency crisis) drove up food insecurity even when food was available. Thus, humanitarian actors increasingly need to coordinate with entities like the World Bank or IMF working on economic stabilization, as seen in 2022+ efforts to bolster Yemen's currency to indirectly improve food access.

Another angle from case studies is the role of **climate change**. The frequency of droughts in the Horn of Africa (e.g. an unprecedented *five-season drought* ongoing in 2020-2023) is testing the limits of humanitarian response. Communities that used to recover between droughts now have little time to do so, leading to cumulative loss of resilience. Agencies are exploring anticipatory action – releasing funds based on forecasts before a drought fully hits – as was piloted by FAO and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for the 2020 drought in Somalia (with some success in protecting livestock). The scale of need also pushes collaboration with development donors: for example, in Somalia and Kenya, development programs are funding cash assistance for drought-affected people alongside humanitarian relief, blurring the traditional lines.

Finally, **accountability and localization** have been highlighted by past responses. After the Haiti earthquake (2010) and other mega-emergencies, criticisms arose about sidelining local actors. In food security responses now, there is more effort to engage local NGOs, local government structures, and even diaspora groups. Local responders are often first on scene and last to leave; they also have access and trust that foreigners might not, especially in conflict zones. Localization is not without challenges (capacity, neutrality, donor compliance rules), but progress is being made to sub-grant to local groups and include them in cluster leadership.

In conclusion, every major food emergency has yielded **lessons that have shaped current practice**: early warning must trigger early action; multi-sector responses are required for famine prevention; protecting livelihoods is as important as feeding people; conflict and access are defining factors – necessitating political action alongside humanitarian aid; and affected people must be at the center of responses (listening to their voices, whether in designing a cash program or in deciding where to set up a food distribution point). The corpus of guidelines and standards discussed throughout this report stems directly from these hard-earned lessons. As the world faces new challenges – from pandemics to climate extremes – the humanitarian community continues to refine its tools. The ultimate goal remains **zero hunger** even in emergencies, meaning not only preventing death from starvation but also mitigating suffering and preserving dignity. Achieving this will depend on the robust application of these integrated food security and nutrition interventions, and on the collective will to act decisively when warning signs first appear.

Sources: The information in this report was synthesized from a wide range of technical manuals, guidelines, and reports by global food security and nutrition actors, including the IPC Technical Manuals [1] [3], WFP handbooks and publications [7] [8], UNHCR emergency guidance [13] [18], ICRC policy notes [19], FAO frameworks [23], Sphere standards [15] [29], CALP network resources on cash [36], FEWS NET analyses [40], Global Nutrition Cluster tools [10], cluster coordination documents [47] [49], Action Against Hunger field guides [52], USAID/BHA guidelines [55], and evaluations of past crises [43]. These sources collectively inform the best practices and approaches described above.

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