



No. 1.4 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

What is Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)?

IPC Integrated Food Security Phase Classification



The IPC is an internationally-recognised process for consolidating and summarising food security analysis. Developed in Eastern Africa to understand the evolving food crisis, it has now expanded to other regions of Africa and Asia.

The IPC creates a consensus on the level of a food security crisis, using a phase classification system and a common analytical framework based on internationally-recognised standards, which can be compared over time and space.

The IPC:

- Is being developed and applied by a partnership of UN agencies (FAO and WFP) and international NGOs (FEWS NET, Oxfam GB, Save the Children US/UK, CARE International and the Joint Research Centre of the EC);
- Is an example of how agencies are working together to develop common analysis of needs and response options;
- Is objective, evidence-based and transparent situation analysis;
- Is comparable over space and time, allowing

stakeholders to identify crises of similar levels of severity;

- Is important for developing effective responses that can protect livelihoods and save lives; and,
- Uses a livelihoods approach and helps to identify both immediate and underlying causes of food insecurity.

Box 1 highlights some frequently asked questions about the IPC.



Fig. 1: The IPC helps create consensus on the severity of a food crisis (Credit: Brendan Cox/OXFAM)

Why was the IPC started?

A number of issues led to the development of the IPC, including:

- Poor allocation of resources. Vested interests (political, institutional and commercial) means that allocation of resources to address food insecurity by governments and international aid is often inappropriate and not needs-based;
- Too many voices. It is difficult to challenge vested interests when there is no consensus as to the severity, scale and causes of food insecurity; and,
- Lack of coherence. There is no consensus because until now, there has not been a common analytical framework or institutional process to enable a critical mass of stakeholders to agree on the situation and how to respond.

The IPC addresses these problems by:

- Improved analysis and decision-making. Provides a common classification and analytical framework which categorises the population according to different levels of vulnerability and highlights the implications for different types of response for different groups;
- A common voice. Provides institutional guiding principles to enable consensus building; and,
- A tool for advocacy. Ensures a critical mass of agencies are able to challenge vested interests.

What is Oxfam's role in the IPC? Why are we involved?

Oxfam's role in the IPC covers numerous geographical scales:

- **Global** – Oxfam is active in the Steering Committee, Technical Working Group and Coordination Unit, influencing IPC development (e.g., taking a leading role in the IPC's technical development, building awareness and establishing the lessons learning process); and,
- **In regions and countries where we work** – Oxfam is involved in the IPC process, participating in analysis workshops, building awareness and giving recommendations for improvement to the Coordination Unit.

We are involved in the IPC because it:

- **Forces us to analyse the wider situation.** The IPC framework requires a broad understanding of the *causes* of a food security crisis;
- **Is easily referable.** The outputs are clear and are comparable;
- **Is transparent on how people came to a decision.** There is a peer review process evaluating the information presented;
- **Develops a common language on what a crisis is.** The reference tables provide clear, comparable, classification of the food security situation and what it actually means; and,
- **Is an important, objective advocacy tool.** The joint analysis provides a very powerful advocacy tool, especially to influence donors and government on where to allocate resources.

Box 1: Frequently asked questions about the IPC

- **How accurate are the results?** The IPC is still being developed and improvements are ongoing. Technical development has had the support from world-renowned leaders in their field. Quality control is a key aspect, ensuring that outputs are a true representation of the food security situation.
- **Is it an FAO tool?** In the initial development stages, the FAO took an active role in the IPC, and are the fund managers. It has now evolved to a true multi-agency partnership with the establishment of the Coordination Unit and various regional Technical Working Groups.

Table 1: Phases of food security and response guidance in the IPC framework

Phase	General description	General response emphasis
1 Generally Food Secure	Usually adequate and stable food access with moderate to low risk of sliding into Phase 3, 4, or 5	Investment in livelihood protection systems, trade, and distribution systems; enabling development; addressing issues of equity and sustainability
2 Moderately / Borderline Food Insecure	Borderline adequate food access with recurrent high risk (due to probable hazard events and high vulnerability) of sliding into Phase 3, 4, or 5	Provision of safety nets; risk reduction interventions; livelihood support; address structural hindrances
3 Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis	Highly stressed and critical lack of food access with high and above usual malnutrition and accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that, if continued, will slide the population into Phase 4 or 5 and/or likely result in chronic poverty	Urgent interventions to increase food access/availability to minimum standards and prevent destruction of livelihood assets
4 Humanitarian Emergency	Severe lack of food access with excess mortality, very high and increasing malnutrition, and irreversible livelihood asset stripping	Urgent interventions to prevent severe malnutrition, starvation, and irreversible asset stripping by increasing food access / availability and other basic needs to minimum standards
5 Famine / Humanitarian Catastrophe	Extreme social upheaval with complete lack of food access and/or other basic needs where mass starvation, death, and displacement are evident	Critically urgent protection of human lives through comprehensive assistance of basic needs (e.g., food, water, health, shelter, protection, ...)

SOURCE: Adapted from IPC Technical Manual 1.1 (IPC 2008)

How does the IPC work?

Using a variety of direct and indirect sources, the IPC framework classifies the food security situation into five phases (Table 1). Each phase is linked with generic guidance for response.

How can the IPC be used in Oxfam?

There are multiple uses for the IPC within Oxfam, including:

- As a regional and national analytical tool. Oxfam needs to understand the changing food security situation in the areas we work. The IPC can help provide information and structure to our analysis;
- To clarify our language. We often find it difficult to use consistent language when describing the severity of a crisis. The IPC will help us define with consistent language the severity of an emergency;
- To improve our classification of emergencies. The IPC will give more substance to our present classification system, linking it with recognisable indicators and phases;
- To inform donors. Donors are very interested in the IPC and have supported its development. Due to the level of recognition, outputs from IPC analysis will help influence decisions; and,
- To inform decision-makers. The IPC will be an important tool for Oxfam decision makers by giving a synthesis of the changing food security situation, allowing for rapid, well-informed decisions to be made.

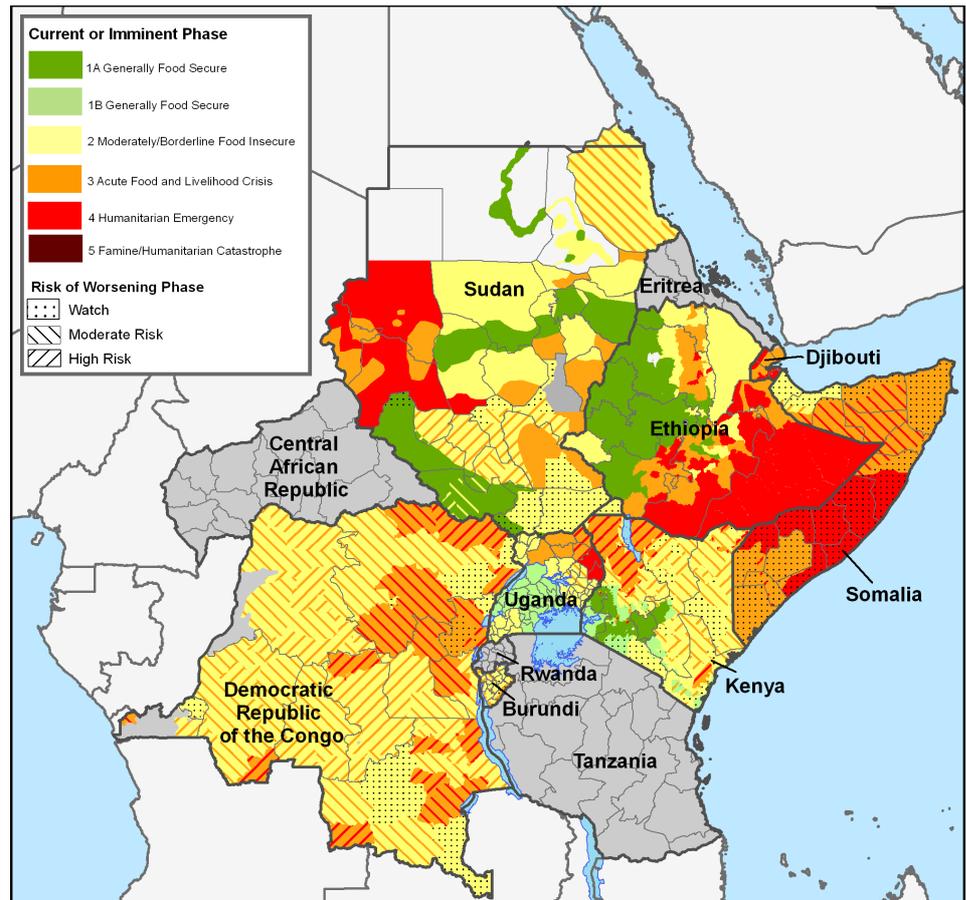


Fig. 2: Information gathered under IPC protocols can be used to generate maps, like this one for Horn, East and Central Africa (SOURCE: IPC 2008)

Where can I find further reading and more detailed information?

Oxfam EFSL Rough Guides

- 1.2 EFSL Assessments
- 1.3 Response Analysis

Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia (IPC in action plus other resources): www.fsasomali.org

IPC 2008. *IPC Technical Manual Version 1.1*

This and other resources can be found at the IPC website www.ipcinfo.org

Famine Early Warning System (FEWS NET, with information on East, West and Southern Africa, and some other areas): www.fews.net

Who can I contact for more information and guidance?

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