

FOOD SECURITY

POLICY





CHAD

Photo: Alessandro Gandolfi

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INTERNAL REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- Corporate Social Responsibility Policy
- Child Policy
- Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy
- Gender Policy
- Protection Policy
- Nutrition Security Policy
- WASH Guidelines

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Introduction



COOPI - Cooperazione Internazionale is a humanitarian organization that for nearly 60 years has been committed to fighting against all forms of poverty and accompanying populations affected by wars, socio-economic crises or natural hazards, towards recovery and lasting, sustainable development. COOPI today is present in 33 countries in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean, with more than 252 humanitarian projects reaching nearly 7 million people. With the engagement, motivation, determination and professionalism of its staff, COOPI aims at fighting poverty and developing the communities it works with all over the world by intervening in emergency situations, reconstruction and development in order to achieve a better balance between the North and South of the world, between underdeveloped or developing areas.

Since its early days, **food security has been one of COOPI's sectors of intervention.** The complexity of

the topic and the extensive experience gained over the years has led the organisation to reflect in order to define the pivotal elements of its actions in the sector and, at the same time, capitalise on, share and promote the many good practices implemented.

COOPI's food security programming covers **the continuum between emergency, development and peace**, and includes different interventions such as support for agriculture and livestock; concerted and sustainable management of natural and environmental resources; climate change adaptation; enhancement of the value chain approach; promotion of rural development and livelihoods; resource availability, access and utilisation; and food assistance in humanitarian emergencies.

This document aims at illustrating **COOPI's positioning on food security**, describing its operational approach, and highlighting some good practices implemented in this sector.

Why focusing on food security?



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In a globalised world, where local crises are increasingly exacerbated and aggravated by global factors and dynamics, and vice versa, the planet is facing an enormous challenge: to feed, house and **ensure a healthy life for the growing human population, while preserving the environment and natural resources** for the benefit of future generations. To meet these challenges, sustainable food production and environmental management are crucial. Population growth (9.7 billion by 2050, 10.8 billion by 2080 and 11.2 billion by 2100) will increase the demand for food, which will be produced under more difficult conditions due to loss of biodiversity and soil fertility.

In recent decades, **the agricultural sector has been facing multiple crises interconnected with the agricultural production system, food systems, diets and nutrition**¹. This also affects all dimensions of food security, as well as the quantity, quality, safety and ultimately the price of food, with significant implications for the availability of and access to healthy diets. Climate change may also contribute to changes in the nutrient composition of major staple crops, including

a decrease in protein and some essential minerals and vitamins. Extreme weather events are on the rise and have a negative impact, especially on family farming², which produces 80% of the food consumed worldwide³. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recorded climate shocks as the main cause of food crises. In turn, the current agriculture system has been recognized as being, directly and indirectly, responsible for more than 30% of the emissions responsible for global warming⁴. Intensive food systems, through their unsustainable use of natural resources, endanger biodiversity and facilitate the spread of zoonotic diseases, further reducing incomes from small-scale family farming. **To grasp the growing complexity of the relationships between environment, biodiversity and health, it is useful to refer to the One Health approach**⁵, developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and supported by a growing partnership in the United Nations system⁶. This approach recognises how human, animal and environmental health are systematically linked, making the food-health nexus explicit and offering policy recommendations that highlight the

¹ CFS, 2021.

² FAO, 2016.

³ FAO, 2014.

⁴ OECD, 2015.

⁵ WHO, 2017.

⁶ FAO, UNEP, and WOAHP also promoted this approach after 2017.

interconnectedness of the operational components of food systems (in terms of food production, processing, distribution and consumption) that hinder or enhance health resilience. The relationship between food and health was also highlighted in the first and second International Conference on Nutrition organised by FAO and WHO, in 1992 and 2014 respectively, and is widely recognised by the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

According to the latest report by the FAO⁷ and the World Food Programme (WFP)⁸, the number of people affected by hunger in 2021 is estimated at 828 million, an increase of about 150 million since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (104 million in 2019 compared to 46 million in 2020). In addition, 50 million people in 45 countries are on the brink of famine. **According to estimates, almost 670 million people will go hungry in 2030:** this will be 8% of the world's population, the same percentage as in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda was launched. Considering that 70% of the world's people experiencing extreme poverty (1.4 billion people living on less than 1,25 dollars/day) reside in rural areas, with difficult access to food and with problems of malnutrition (even though most of them are at least partly dependent on farming), it is clear how urgent and undeniable the need to place

family farming at the centre of key policies is, in order to ensure food security. With this in mind, the United Nations has declared the **United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-28)** to highlight the important contribution of family farmers in ensuring food and nutrition security, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such a global panorama makes it possible to recognise food security as a tool to guarantee a fundamental right, the right to adequate food:

“The right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”⁹

This approach, now recognised at UN level, strategically guides COOPI's interventions, confirming the incisiveness of the multi-sectoral approach to food security that it adopts in all its interventions. This document, therefore, details the organisation's positioning on food security through the guiding key concepts and the good practices that translate these concepts into action.

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7 FAO/WFP, 2022.
8 WFP, 2022.

9 CESCR, 1999.

Theoretical Framework

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?



CHAD

Photo: Michele Papa

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The concept of food security dates back to the 1970s and has since then **undergone continuous evolution**, reflecting its complexity and the difficulty of fitting it correctly into a changing political and operational framework. The term *food security* and its initial meaning were first proposed in the *Report of the World Food Conference*¹⁰ following FAO's World Food Conference held in 1974 in the wake of the food crisis of the mid-1970s. However, this definition reflected a simplistic approach that understood food insecurity as due to a **lack of food resources in quantitative terms and to the high level of food prices on an international scale**. This traditional idea that food security was not guaranteed when there was a difference

between the demand and supply of food was then replaced by a policy approach based on **people's entitlements to food**¹¹, then on the **right to food**. The innovative idea behind this concept is that individuals go hungry because they do not have sufficient control over food resources, rather than because of an insufficient food supply. Based on these considerations, FAO introduced the concept of **access to resources**, encompassing and going beyond the simple equation of food supply and demand¹². The next milestone was the inclusion of the concept of **food quality**, no longer evaluated only in terms of caloric intake but also in terms of micronutrient content¹³ as well as a subject of preferences and choices based on the traditions

¹⁰ UN, 1975.

¹¹ Amartya Sen, 1981.

¹² FAO, 1983.

¹³ Micronutrients are defined as nutrients required by living beings in small amounts (humans generally require less than 100 milligrams daily) to perform physiological functions essential for proper metabolism (Canadian UNICEF Committee 2006). An unbalanced intake of these substances causes nutritional deficiencies and metabolic dysfunctions.

of local communities. The perspective was then broadened following the introduction of the concept of **human security**¹⁴, of which food security, along with health, economic and environmental security, to name a few, is a component¹⁵. The definition of food security that is commonly accepted and cited is the one proposed at the World Food Summit in 1996 and updated in 2021, according to which:

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, (social) and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”¹⁶

The above definition emphasises the multisectoral character of food security, which was initially considered to be based on four dimensions: availability, access, utilisation and stability of food resources.

The **availability** of food resources is defined as their actual presence in quantity and quality appropriate to the needs of individuals¹⁷. The availability of resources, however, does not necessarily mean that the people who need them actually manage to acquire them; for this to happen, access to them needs to be ensured. **Access** to resources is therefore complementary to their availability and has both a physical and an economic component. The **utilisation** component is equally important, as it has a great impact on both the quality and quantity of food resources. Utilisation refers to all processes of resource preparation/processing and storage. Connected to the concepts of resources availability, access and utilisation is the concept of **stability**. Indeed, for a community to be food-secure, it must have continuous access to the resources it needs, which in turn implies their continuous availability over time and space, even in shock situations such as market fluctuations, price rises or famine.



¹⁴ Human security is defined as safety from chronic threats and protection from sudden hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life. Seven types of security are regarded as components of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNDP 1994).

¹⁵ UNDP, 1994.

¹⁶ FAO, 1996-2001. The term social has been added to the definition of food security included in the 2001 FAO State of Food Insecurity report.

¹⁷ Meaning the availability of resources of a country given by the combination of domestic production, imports, domestic stocks and external aid.

These four dimensions of food security are implicitly or explicitly recognised in the legal interpretation of the right to food¹⁸ which mentions the availability and accessibility of food, and refers to utilisation as food needs and stability as the need for states to ensure that vulnerable population groups and individuals receive adequate food even in times of severe resource constraints. Furthermore, the 2004 *Right to Food Guidelines* strengthen the link between the right to food and these four dimensions of food security¹⁹.

An important step in defining the concept of food security was taken with the **reform process of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** in 2009, which put in place inclusive mechanisms of dialogue with the civil society (Civil Society Mechanism - CSM now Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism - CSIPM), the private sector (Private Sector Mechanism - PSM) and academia and research (High Level Panel of Experts - HLPE) (Table 1). The Committee thus gained greater legitimacy in global

agricultural governance and made **the definition of food security dialogue with emerging priorities in the international context**, such as protracted crises, access to natural resources and geographic markets.

In the context of the CFS discussions and negotiations over the past decade, findings and analyses in the academic literature point to the need to add **agency** and **sustainability** as key food security dimensions, alongside availability, access, utilisation and stability. The concept of **agency** is defined, in the specific case of food security, as the ability of individuals or groups to make their own decisions on what to eat and what to produce, defining both the food production model and food distribution model in food systems, up to and including participation in the definition of agri-food policies²⁰. The concept of agency in food systems is deeply linked to human rights, including the right to food. **Sustainability**, on the other hand, refers to the long-term ability of food systems to ensure food security and adequate levels

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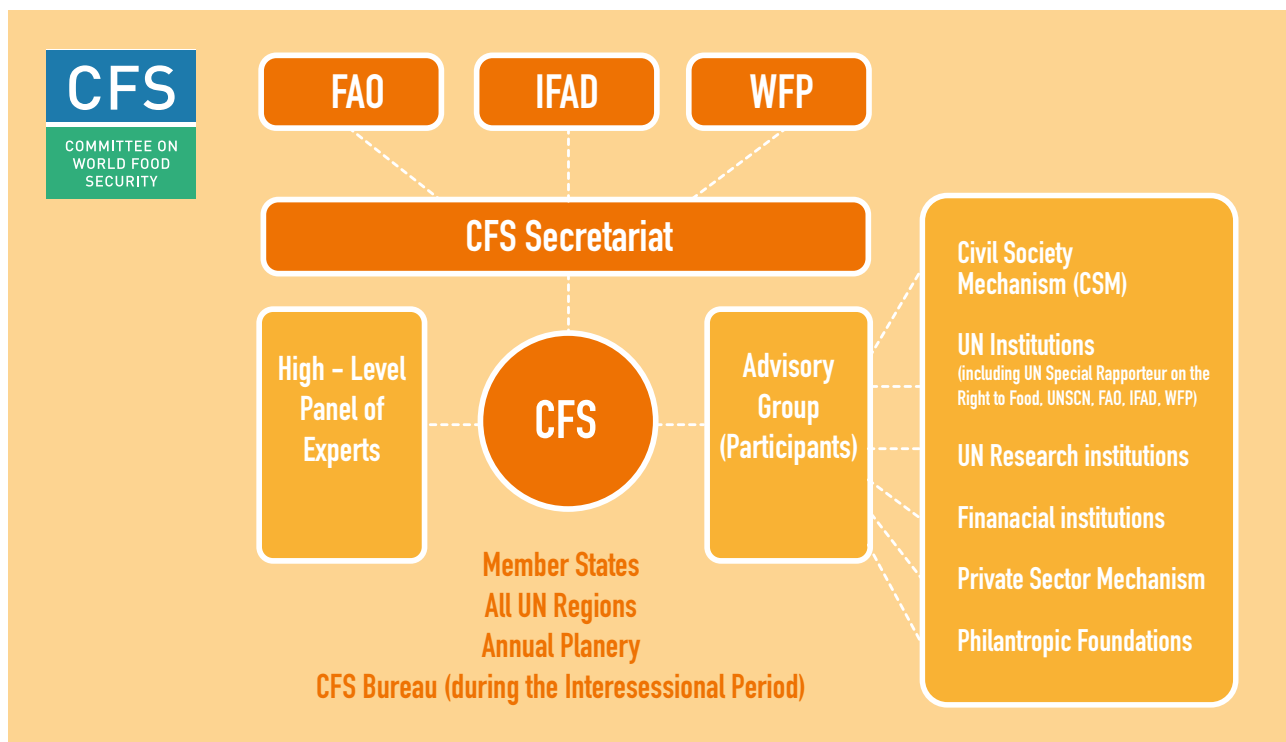


Table 1. Structure of the Committee on World Food Security (adapted from CSF 2022 – COOPI 2022).

¹⁸ CESCR,1999.
¹⁹ FAO, 2005.

²⁰ Burchi and de Muro, 2016; HLPE 12, 2017; HLPE 14, 2019.

of nutrition in the present, without compromising the environmental, economic and social foundations for future generations. Sustainability, as a dimension of food security, entails the implementation within food systems of practices that respect and protect ecosystems over the long term, considering their complex interaction with the economic and social systems required to provide food security and nutrition²¹.

Thus, **the six dimensions of food security - availability, access, utilisation, stability, agency and sustainability - are all interconnected** through a complex web of relationships. For example, food must be available if it is to be accessible, but it is not accessible to all if individuals and groups cannot exercise the agency to purchase the food they need and to shape food systems to suit their preferences. Similarly, if food is not produced with sustainable practices, its stability and utilisation are at risk, which in turn threatens long-term availability and access (Table 2).

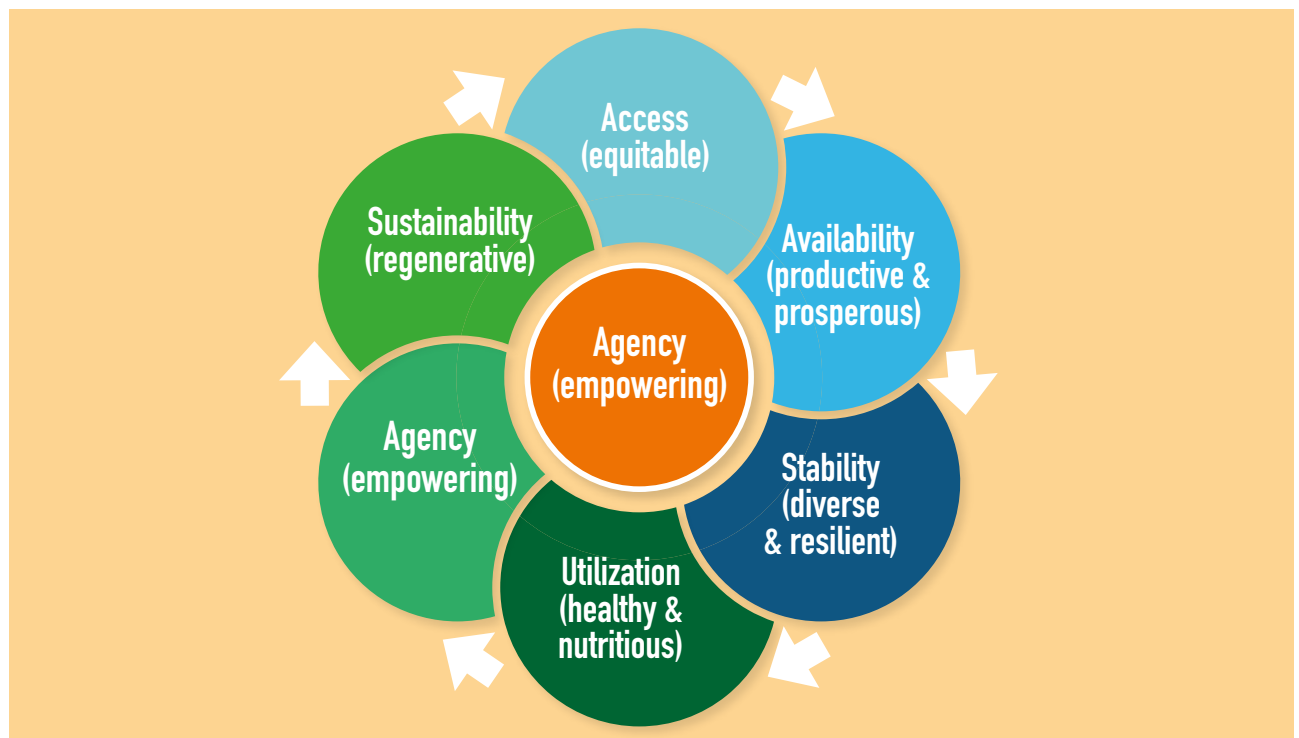
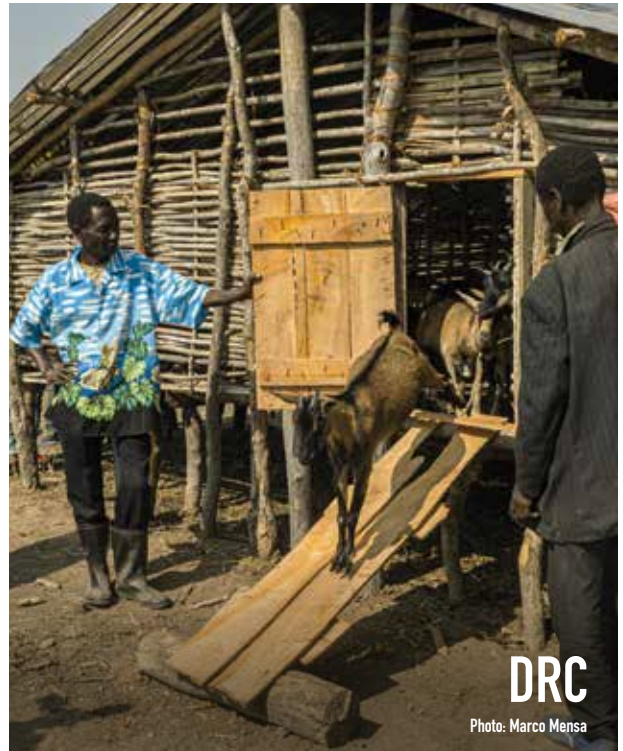


Table 2. The six dimensions of food security (adapted from HPLE 2020 – COOPI 2022).

²¹ El Bilali et al., 2018; Meybeck e Gitz, 2017; Carlsson et al., 2017.

A BROADER APPROACH TO FOOD SECURITY AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The concept of food security must be considered in the broader context of climate crisis and of planetary health, by adopting a **sustainable food systems approach** as a framework. The food systems framework²² recognises the complexity of the relationships among the systems that support food production, food supply chains, the behaviours of individual consumers, diets, and nutritional and wider outcomes that feed back into the system²³. The systems that define food production include ecosystems, human systems, energy systems, economic systems and health systems, which provide essential inputs to the food system.

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At the same time, the evolution of the concept of food security at a global level places **the right to food**²⁴ - in other words: the right to adequate food - at the centre, as an essential legal framework to ensure food security and the sustainability of food systems. The concept of the right to food was introduced in the *FAO Voluntary Guidelines* adopted in 2004, which, based on the now widely recognised assumption that states have an obligation to respect, protect and realise the right to food, can be used to guide state action and promote a system to fight hunger through a human rights-based approach.

In conclusion, the concept of food security has evolved over time recognising, in addition to the four dimensions of availability, access, utilisation and stability, the centrality of the additional dimensions of agency and sustainability, which are to be declined within a sustainable food systems approach and interpreted according to the legal definition of the right to food.



MALAWI

Photo: Il maestro e Margherita

²² HLPE 2017; HLPE 2020.

²³ Fanzo et al., 2020; Maestre, Poole and Henson, 2017; Béné et al., 2019.

²⁴ FAO, 2005.

FOOD SECURITY AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

At the global level, it is useful to highlight how the subject of food security was reflected in the **Millennium Declaration** (UN 2000): in fact, the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) stated in the Declaration aimed to reduce by half the percentage of the world's population suffering from hunger. The international community then continued its commitment by adopting the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, signed by all UN Member States in 2015. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. The second goal of the 2030 Agenda “End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” and its first two specific targets are of particular relevance to the food security debate:

- **Target 2.1** By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. Two indicators are used to monitor progress towards this target: the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) and the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity according to the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).
- **Target 2.2** By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

The evolving international climate emergency outlines a potential global food crisis, with increasing

numbers of people suffering from hunger and food insecurity. Global food supply systems have been partially undermined by a cascading combination of escalating conflicts, climate-related shocks and increasing inequalities. **A careful analysis of the critical issues** in current global food governance systems, together with sustainable food systems interconnected with the six dimensions of food security, **can enable the achievement of the SDGs**, especially those related to the eradication of world hunger.



KEY MILESTONES

1974 – Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

The Committee on World Food Security was created in 1974 as a technical committee of the FAO with a mandate to coordinate and monitor food security and nutrition practices.

1975 – Report of the World Food Conference

Introduction of the concept of food security, according to which a country's food security status is measured in terms of the amount of food resources stored and the ability to overcome temporary food shortages.

1994 – Human development report (UNDP)

Introduction of the concept of human security, of which food security is a component, along with health, economic and environmental security.

1996 – World Food Summit (FAO)

Adoption of the still-accepted definition of food security that places emphasis on multidimensionality and encompasses the components of availability, access, utilisation and stability. Introduction of the concept of the right to food, widely debated in the years to follow.

2001 – The State of Food Insecurity (FAO)

The 1996 definition is confirmed and the social component is considered as essential as the physical and economic component in determining access to food resources.

2004 – Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the national food security (FAO) – These guidelines took into account international instruments that sanctioned the progressive realisation of the right of every individual to an adequate standard of living, including food.

2009 – Reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – The CFS is thoroughly reformed with the establishment of a new governance model and a new definition of the concept of food security.

2011 – Creation of the Global Food Security Cluster, to coordinate the food security response during a humanitarian crisis by addressing issues of food availability, access and utilisation.

2012 – Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (CFS)

2014 – Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), Rome Declaration on Nutrition (FAO/WHO)

2015 – Framework for Action for food security and nutrition in protracted crises – FFA (CFS)

2019 – Ten Elements of Agroecology (FAO)

COOPI's take on food security: key concepts



MALAWI

Photo: Il maestro e Margherita

Food security is an essential and cross-cutting theme in all development interventions and projects implemented by COOPI worldwide. The topic is very complex and full of factors and variables intrinsic to each local context and each intervention. It thus needs to be properly framed, in order to structure targeted and effective emergency response actions while at the same time promoting medium to long-term development processes.

COOPI devotes resources and attention to the **context analysis** phase, in order to correctly identify

the causes of the food insecurity state, so as to better define intervention methods and strategies. In conducting such an analysis, it is of paramount importance to refer to international, formally recognised classification systems that are comparable across different local contexts and geographical areas. Moving beyond the logic of past decades, COOPI now refers to the **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)**²⁵, which is a standardised global scale for classifying the severity and extent of food insecurity and malnutrition. The IPC is the result of a collaboration between several organisations at global,

²⁵ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/>

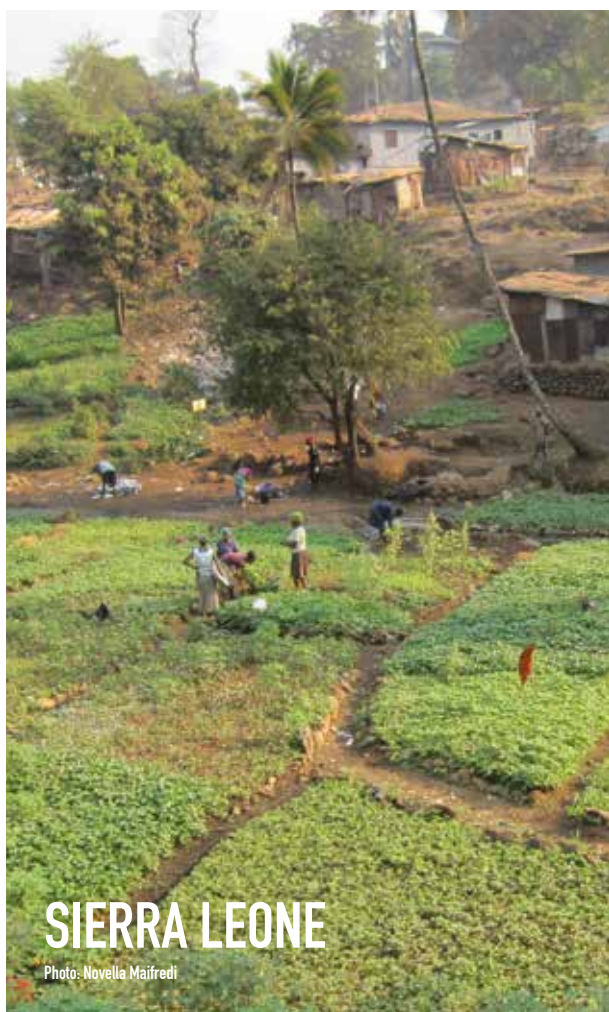
regional and national levels, committed to developing and maintaining a high-quality analysis of food security and nutrition in a given country or geographical area, and is increasingly the international standard for their classification. Against this background, it is possible to distinguish between *acute food insecurity*, *chronic food insecurity* and *acute malnutrition*. Different, well-targeted interventions are needed for each of these scenarios. The IPC is a platform that highlights the links between food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as between acute and chronic food insecurity, to support **response planning according to an integrated and multifactorial approach** that ensures the highest level of coordination between different jurisdictions.

Once the problem of food insecurity has been identified and analysed based on the often-interconnected causes that contribute to it, COOPI structures its intervention in such a way as to **act not only on its consequences but also and above all on its causes**, putting the internationally recognised right to food at the heart of its work.

COOPI's objective is in fact to ensure that the populations with which it cooperates have access to adequate and sufficient food resources, while at the same time working on capacity building in terms of preparedness, response and recovery in the event of any shocks impacting on the state of food security itself. This objective is therefore realised through the implementation of **emergency** response interventions that provide support to populations to meet their immediate needs, mainly due to problems of availability and/or access to food. Within the logic of an integrated approach, COOPI also works to promote food security in **development** contexts. COOPI aims to consolidate development processes through community capacity building, since it is precisely in the weakness of these processes that it identifies the cause of the occurrence of crises, including food crises.

To maximise the effectiveness of its work, COOPI has also joined a further initiative at the international level: the **global Food Security Cluster (gFSC)**²⁶. The gFSC works to strengthen global cooperation and partnerships by working directly with a variety of stakeholders, including NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UN organisations, governments and donors. The gFSC was established in 2011 **to coordinate the food security response during a humanitarian crisis**, addressing issues of food availability, access and utilisation. The Cluster is based at WFP headquarters in Rome and is co-led by WFP and FAO. It provides guidance at the country level that supports a broad base and timely response. The gFSC works with national cluster systems in both sudden onset disasters, be they from natural or human causes, and protracted crises.

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²⁶ <https://www.fscluster.org/>

AN INTEGRATED AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

In both emergency and development settings, **COOPI's approach accounts for the multidimensionality of factors** affecting the food security status of individuals, communities and populations. This is concretely reflected in its complex interventions which, often encompassing multiple policy areas, adopt an integrated approach to food security. In fact, **each of the sectors in which COOPI operates is considered fundamental** in helping to create the conditions within which food security can be guaranteed and sustained over time by adopting precisely a multidimensional approach to the problem.

Food security is, therefore, seen as dependent on a number of external conditions that can be divided into three levels of intervention (Table 3):

- **regional and national** - at this level, both the context of intervention (socio-economic, political, environmental, etc.) and the economic performance of the agri-food sector must be considered;
- **household;**
- **individual.**

COOPI's intervention focuses mainly on the individual and household levels, while also considering the geographic level. In concrete terms, readjusting the above conceptual framework to its intervention logic (Table 3), COOPI implements interventions aimed at **increasing agricultural productivity**, to guarantee constant availability and access to resources (both in the agricultural and livestock sectors). At the same time, it implements interventions in other sectors that can allow for the correct and rational use of resources, thus also guaranteeing a multidimensional approach to food security. An example of such a multidimensional approach is the great importance given to the adoption of **good hygienic and sanitary practices, access to sources of drinking water, and comprehensive and efficient health services** that ensure that people are in optimal health conditions to derive maximum benefit from food resources. From the nutrition security perspective, COOPI's activities in the area of **food and nutrition education** also point in the same direction. COOPI actively includes good food practices and healthy

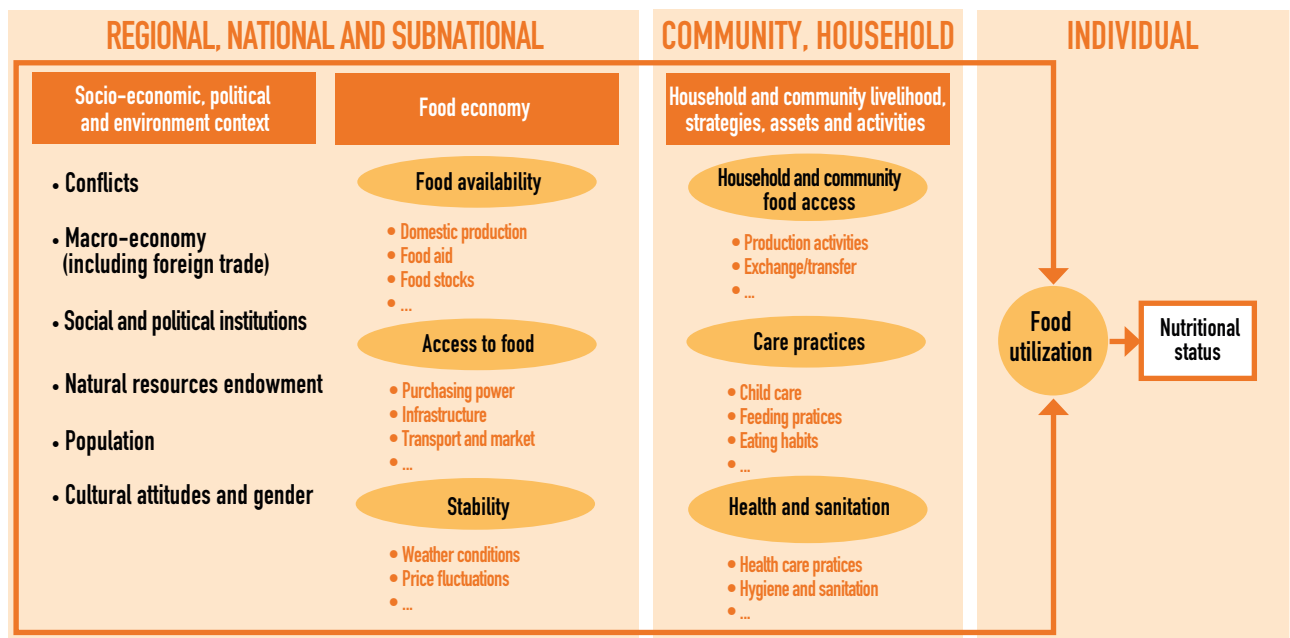


Table 3. The determinants of food security (adapted from FAO 2008) – COOPI 2022

Legend
 Level
 Classes of determinants
 Determinants
 Outcome

diets in its projects, in terms of food choice, storage and preparation, while respecting the habits of families and communities. On the other hand, the support offered in starting and running **income-generating activities** is to be understood as a way to increase the purchasing power of individuals and, thus, as an improvement of their access to food and non-food resources. It is worth noting that although most of its interventions are at the community level, COOPIs gives great importance and consideration to the context (regional and national) and involves all the **different stakeholders, formal and informal institutions** that can contribute to achieving its goal. Adopting a multidimensional approach means that COOPI structures its intervention to support communities in all their components. These components, namely the capital, structures, processes and strategies upon which the community depends for its sustenance²⁷, determine a community's ability to **cope with external pressures, be they timely (shocks) or long-lasting (stress)**. In other words, they determine its ability to adapt to such events. According to this understanding, the concepts of vulnerability and resilience are of fundamental importance (Table 4).

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Vulnerability refers to the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase an individual's or a community's susceptibility to the impacts of hazards²⁸.

Resilience, on the other hand, refers to an individual', a community' or a system's ability to positively and effectively prevent, resist and respond to risks while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning²⁹. **The two concepts are strongly interconnected** since the more vulnerable a community is to a shock/stress, the less resilient it will be in relation to it.

COOPI aligns with this food security framework, which applies to **both emergency and development interventions** according to an integrated approach. Specifically, emergency interventions focus on responding to crisis generated by exposure to a disruptive element - shock or stress - to ensure availability of and access to food resources. However, the organisation believes that emergency interventions, if limited to resolving a contingent crisis, neither avert nor mitigate the risk of serious loss of life and resources from subsequent crises. For this reason, COOPI's interventions in development contexts are focused on strengthening the above-mentioned components and, thus, **strengthening community adaptive capacities with the aim of reducing vulnerability to shocks or stress that are at the origin of food insecurity**. This approach is therefore at the core of COOPI's choice to implement food security programmes that, by making communities stable and prepared, act on the root causes of any crises by mitigating their effects.

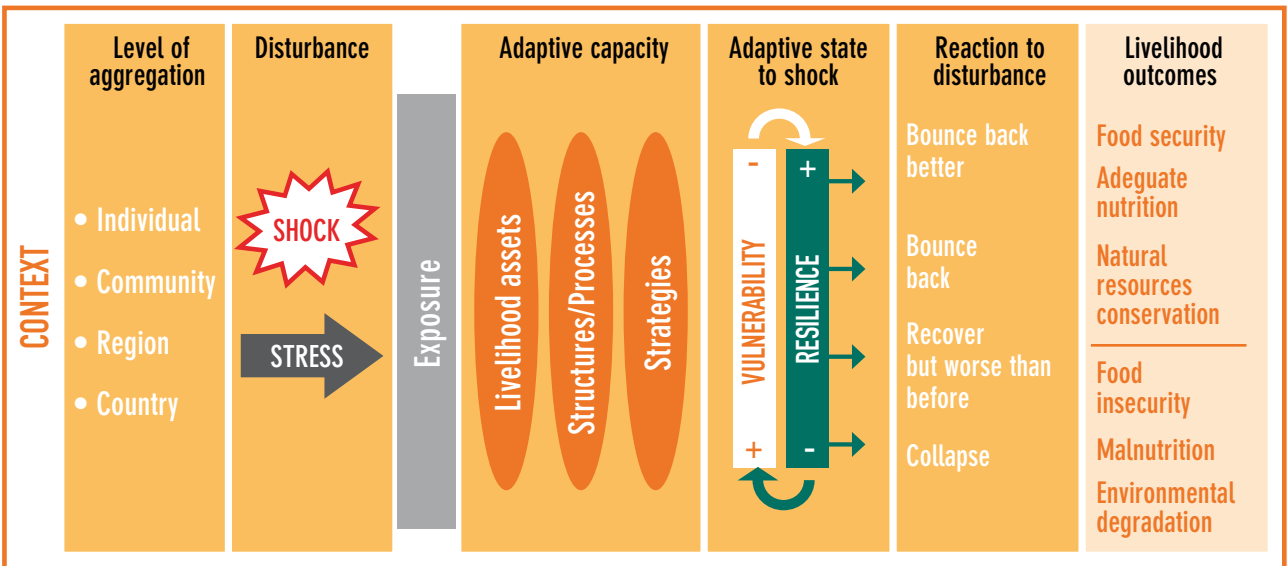


Table 4. Vulnerability and resilience in food security (adapted from Frankenberger et al. 2012 - COOPI 2022).

27 The livelihood of a community comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. The livelihood dynamics of a community can be considered sustainable when that community can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation (Chambers & Conway 1992).

28 UN, 2016

29 UN, 2017.

NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH BETWEEN EMERGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT.

When implementing an emergency response intervention in the food security sector with an integrated approach, it is key to combine actions aimed at achieving food security with actions aimed at improving nutrition security. Such pairing emphasises the strong link between the food security and health sectors in a multidimensional approach logic. In fact, instances of acute malnutrition that indicate a serious health problem are increasingly detected in conjunction with criticalities of various kinds which compromise the achievement of food security status, by affecting the availability, access and/or utilisation of resources. It is precisely for this reason that **COOPI structures its interventions with a twofold objective: on the one hand, to resolve the nutrition emergency** by assisting those suffering from acute malnutrition (mainly children under five years of age) through specific support programmes; **on the other hand, to lifting their families out of food insecurity**, which is often at the origin of malnutrition. **To achieve the first objective, COOPI implements activities focused on the prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition**, ranging from the initial assistance

to beneficiaries to the administration of nutritional supplements, to raising the awareness of local communities on good nutritional practices. **Particular attention is given to the involvement of women** in such activities as they are directly responsible for the nutritional status of children and, very often, unable to ensure it as a result of an unequal intra-household distribution of resources due to gender discrimination. **Interventions associated with the second objective**, on the other hand, **aim at improving the availability, access and/or utilisation of food resources of the families** of malnourished children and other vulnerable persons (e.g. people living with AIDS, SGBV survivors³⁰). Activities may include the distribution of seeds and tools for agricultural activities as well as start-up assistance for small income-generating activities mainly related to food processing. These latter activities are intended for the medium and long term: this is further evidence of COOPI's intention to **link emergency and development interventions** to strengthen the resilience of the communities that it works with, also from the nutritional point of view.

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³⁰ SGBV stands for Sexual and Gender-based Violence.



GUATEMALA

Photo: COOPI Archive

GOOD PRACTICES

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION GOVERNANCE - GUATEMALA -

In 2019-2021 COOPI implemented an EU-funded project intending to promote inclusive public policies on food and nutrition security in two municipalities of Mam in north-western Guatemala. The intervention consisted of the implementation of action plans aimed at ensuring food security and nutrition through communal and inter-municipal strategies and alliances; the implementation of accountability and transparency processes in favour of the well-rounded development of the inhabitants; and the promotion of citizen participation, particularly of women and young people, in the implementation of actions for sustainable, inclusive and equitable land management at community and municipal level. During the action, two trainings on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) were carried out with a focus on women leaders and midwives in the two municipalities of San Gaspar

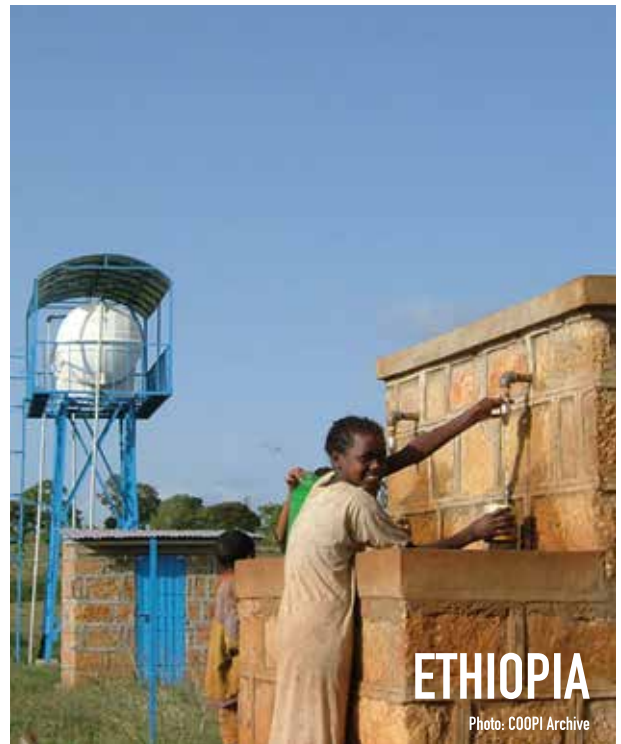
Ixchil and Colotenango, reaching 58 communities in inter-institutional coordination. Similarly, 47 young people were trained on FSN and economic entrepreneurship, whereas 40 local authorities and leaders, both male and female, were trained on FSN governance and public administration. The project also led to the creation of a municipal food security and nutrition office and the establishment of a round table of the Association of Municipalities of the South West of Huehuetenango, to promote participation and exchange on the issue of FSN governance. Finally, a dialogue process was set up with institutional actors in the municipalities of intervention, which led to the identification of priority issues and the development of action plans. This process was strategic for the creation of territorial synergies and strategic multi-stakeholder alliances.

WATER: A KEY RESOURCE

In line with the sixth Sustainable Development Goal, COOPI acknowledges the strong link between water management and food security, as well as the importance of ensuring adequate access to and sustainable management of water to enable the development of the communities with which it cooperates. In fact, considering that **90% of the world's water resources are consumed for food production** and that agriculture alone (through irrigation) accounts for 70% of all freshwater withdrawals³¹, the increasing pressure of food production and demand on this resource and the close connection between food security and water scarcity are self-evident. In particular, **the lower a country's human development index³², the higher the priority of water use in the agricultural sector**, which reflects the importance of this resource to satisfy the need to feed the population. The need to decouple the increase in food production from the consequent increase in water consumption is very clear; this is reflected in COOPI's efforts to guide farmers and breeders in the adoption of appropriate water management practices.

COOPI advocates for a strategic approach to ensure the fair, efficient and sustainable management of water resources. This positioning stems from the realisation that its countries of work are affected by dynamics such as growing population pressure, which is increasingly concentrated in urban areas, the depletion of groundwater and the increasing unpredictability of rainfall linked to climate change. These dynamics call for even more careful resource management, which COOPI accepts as an ongoing as well as future challenge. The challenge involves guaranteeing the poorest populations access to water resources **both in terms of production and in terms of hygiene and health**, in a logic of a multidimensional approach: this means taking the appropriate measures to ensure that this access is **constant over time**, despite the

erratic nature of rainfall which in the arid areas, where COOPI intervenes, is the primary water supply source. **Water storage, therefore, becomes crucial** not only to building up water reserves but also to limiting runoff³³ and increase soil water content which is essential for maintaining pastures even in the dry season. It is precisely access to water sources and grazing land that is the subject of increasing tensions between farming and herding communities in areas of Africa where COOPI works. COOPI has also intensified activities related to **recovering rainwater from the roofs** of both private and public buildings in order to build up a single water supply for various uses, including running family vegetable gardens, maintaining livestock and carrying out household activities. In addition, COOPI supports and implements programmes aimed at functional



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³¹ FAO, 2021.

³² The Human Development Index (HDI) developed by UNDP and updated annually in the Human Development Report combines health, education and standard of living indicators to provide an indicative benchmark of a country's economic and social development (UNDP 1990). The HDI can be considered a good proxy for a country's development potential, resulting from the combination of its human and economic components.

³³ The term runoff refers to the phenomenon of rainwater flowing over the ground surface, which occurs when the infiltration capacity of the soil has been exceeded so that the water cannot penetrate deep into the ground (Beven 2004).

innovation and efficient utilisation of water resources. These programmes include **interventions designed to ensure access to water**, such as the construction of wells, the installation of collection systems, the rehabilitation or construction of water supply points on transhumance routes, and the construction of irrigation systems. These are accompanied by **awareness raising activities on the need to manage available** resources in a balanced way to ensure the sustainability of the activities that depend on them. As well as for performing productive activities, water is also crucial for ensuring the use of natural resources, which is as essential to food security as their availability. Indeed, the **correct preparation of food** depends on adequate water availability, not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms. According to the latest official reports, it is estimated that 3 billion people in the world still lack handwashing facilities with soap and water at home and that 2.2 billion people do not have access to clean water³⁴. For this reason, COOPI includes in its food security

interventions activities aimed at **purifying water**, guaranteeing **access to basic sanitation** and raising awareness on the adoption of appropriate hygienic measures in direct consumption and in the use of water for food preparation. When conducting interventions aimed at guaranteeing access to water, whether for agriculture, human or animal consumption, COOPI places great emphasis on raising community awareness about common property use and distribution, and on **mediating potential conflicts** that may arise over its management.

Finally, based on the environmental upheavals that have been taking place over the past decades, COOPI recognises climate change as a factor that may limit both the availability of and access to water. In fact, water is the resource most likely to be affected³⁵, especially in some areas where COOPI works. **Climate change adaptation** and **strengthening the resilience** of communities towards climate change are now cross-cutting themes in COOPI's interventions, especially in the areas most prone to water use issues.

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CHAD

Photo: Massimo Zecchini

³⁴ UNICEF, WHO, 2021.

³⁵ IPCC, 2022.

PROMOTING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

COOPI places women's empowerment at the heart of its food security interventions because it recognises the importance of women's contribution to both the availability of resources and their proper utilisation. The contribution women make in this area is enhanced by promoting their **active role** while respecting the cultural differences of their geographic, social and ethnic backgrounds. Proof of this contribution is the fact that **women make up more than 37% of the world's rural agricultural labour force**, a percentage that rises to 48% in low-income countries, where they also account for almost 50% of the 600 million small-scale farmers and about half of the workforce in small-scale fisheries³⁶. In agriculture, women generally carry out the activities requiring longer times and little physical strength, such as sowing, planting, weeding and post-harvest operations, if any. To add to this, women are also responsible for household work including childcare and food preparation. Despite such a strong presence in the sector, **women still do not have equal opportunities in accessing and controlling the production factors**, first and foremost land: in fact, women still account for less than 15% of agricultural landowners in the world³⁷. To address these issues, COOPI advocates the need for action to **eliminate gender inequalities**³⁸, which are a major obstacle to community development. Therefore, even in food security projects, COOPI promotes **actions to increase women's awareness of their rights**, in order to make them advocates for their empowerment. Specifically, these actions aim to grant them access to and control over land, water, animal capital and other productive inputs that enable them to effectively contribute to the development of their communities. For the same purpose, COOPI develops programmes to train **women as leaders of farmers' organisations and associations**, as well as other professional associations; it also supports start-up and **management of income-generating activities**. These actions, which aim at empowering

women, are intended to promote their **recognition first at the local level** and then to extend it to regional and national levels.



³⁶ FAO, 2020.

³⁷ FAO, 2020.

³⁸ Commonly known as the gender gap.

PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING IN FOOD SECURITY

Because of the nature of the contexts and crises in which it operates, it is necessary for COOPI to integrate the four Protection Principles into all its food security interventions, in order to limit as much as possible the risk that they end up harming, rather than benefiting, populations affected by crises.

The four Protection Principles were formulated within the framework of the Humanitarian Charter: *(1) Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions; (2) Ensure people's access to impartial assistance; (3) Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion; (4) Assist crisis-affected people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse.* In light of the risks involved in implementing food security interventions in contexts of crises, environmental disasters, conflicts, etc., COOPI recognises the importance of integrating these principles (in other words, of **mainstreaming protection**) into its work. It is precisely through these principles that COOPI ensures that its interventions are

inclusive and non-discriminatory, that they benefit all social groups equally, and that they do not contribute to the perpetuation or exacerbation of tensions, conflicts, discrimination, violence and abuse.

Context analysis and risk assessments enable COOPI to design projects that respond to the actual needs of the various segments of the population and that respect the specific needs and experiences of people of all genders, ages, ethnic and social backgrounds, and disability status. On the other hand, the **regular and systematic monitoring** of the positive and the potential negative impacts of its interventions allows COOPI to ensure that the assistance is provided in an inclusive, impartial and non-discriminatory manner and that it reaches all segments of the affected populations equally. In addition, the **systematic and timely integration of the Protection Principles** into the interventions ensures respect for the dignity of the beneficiaries, promoting and protecting their fundamental rights and guaranteeing their safety.



PARTICIPATORY APPROACH



PARAGUAY

Photo: Giuseppe Polini

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COOPI promotes communities' participation in all its interventions by encouraging community members to take part in both the management of activities and decision-making processes. In this sense, the organisation believes that the **active participation of the population** is central to the implementation of its interventions and therefore involves the communities it works with in all project phases – namely context analysis, the identification of actions to be undertaken, the implementation of activities and the evaluation of results. In implementing activities, the contribution made by communities (in terms of skills, time and/or materials) strengthens their feeling of being part of the intervention and improves the sustainability of project results. COOPI also promotes **communities' capacity-building** through extensive awareness-raising interventions aimed at increasing their knowledge and understanding of their rights. Indeed, knowledge is regarded as the

basis for individual empowerment and a necessary condition for development. Alongside community participation, COOPI promotes **collaboration with local governmental and non-governmental organisations, bodies and institutions**. This collaboration takes place at different levels, from community to national level, and aims to actively involve these partners in both the implementation of activities and their supervision. Specifically, this collaboration entails involving local organisations, bodies and institutions in all phases of the work while improving their structure, functioning and capacity for representation. **Government agencies** - such as ministries (mainly the Ministries of Agriculture, Animal Resources and Tourism) - **play a central role in this regard** as they are responsible for the development and implementation of targeted policies in the context of food security

FOOD SECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

COOPI deems the current climate change situation at the global level more worrying than ever, given the string of now chronic catastrophic events due to excessive rainfall on the one hand, the absence of rainfall on the other, or the stabilisation of high temperatures in unusual times and geographical contexts. COOPI considers food security to be intimately linked to the issue of climate change, as climate change can affect all components of a food system (production, transport, processing, packaging, storage, retailing, consumption, losses and waste). According to recent reports published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)³⁹, **the vulnerability of livestock systems to climate change is very high**: there is an ongoing reduction of pastures and animal productivity, including their reproductive function, which results in biodiversity erosion. **Crop production is also largely compromised** by climate-change-driven high unpredictability of weather events, which often become catastrophic. Moreover, according

to the IPCC, **structural and production yields are expected to decrease** due to altered seasonality, especially in tropical and subtropical regions, **as well as an increase in food losses and wastage**, on account of decreased shelf life in some contexts. COOPI believes that **climate change impacts differently depending on the social groups** affected (age, ethnicity, gender, wealth and class); however, it has an immediate and long-term impact on the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable communities, contributing to food insecurity. Against this background, COOPI promotes in its interventions the adoption of sustainable production methods with a low environmental impact; the increase in cultivated and farmed biodiversity; the rethinking of food systems from production to consumption; the adoption of healthy diets that privilege local markets and products. These are essential factors for **guaranteeing food security through climate change adaptation and mitigation actions**.

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³⁹ IPCC, 2020.

THE NEXUS APPROACH AND THE GRADUATION APPROACH FOR FOOD SECURITY

The current global context is characterised by a high number of protracted crises, with populations and food systems facing recurring shocks and stresses over long periods of time. The link between conflicts and food security is very clear and extensively demonstrated: while food insecurity can exacerbate conflicts, violent conflicts are a primary factor in food insecurity and displacement. Addressing food crises in a sustainable manner, therefore, requires going beyond traditional humanitarian approaches and sectoral coordination. With this in mind, **COOPI adheres to the triple Nexus, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) approach** introduced by the European Union in 2017⁴⁰. As part of efforts to tackle the causes and triggers of conflict, this approach addresses the challenge of protracted crises and proposes solutions that integrate humanitarian, development and peace-building interventions in all sectors to promote lasting change. Specifically, COOPI strives to ensure that peacebuilding addresses issues of food insecurity and that its humanitarian and development interventions aimed at strengthening local food systems and resilience capacities are conflict sensitive.

Likewise, COOPI is aware of the close link between extreme poverty and food insecurity. Worsening economic, climatic and agricultural shocks, such as droughts and floods resulting from less predictable rainy seasons, have a disproportionate impact on people living in extreme poverty, making it harder for them to consistently feed families and livestock. The effective enjoyment of the right to food requires holistic approaches that recognise and address the deeply intertwined realities of food insecurity and extreme poverty. Therefore, COOPI proposes interventions that enable families to build resilient livelihoods so that they can access and afford nutritious food in the short and long term. The **graduation approach promotes food security**



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holistically: by supporting individuals in developing diversified income-generating activities, it enables them to meet basic needs while improving their resilience to climatic and market stressors. Training on livelihood management, hygiene and sanitation practices and nutrition education helps to ensure that the beneficiaries of the interventions have the necessary tools to maximise their food security status and maintain resilience to shocks. Thanks to this multidimensional approach, programmes based on the graduation approach provide a safety net for beneficiaries and their families, enabling them to improve their food security and economic prospects.

⁴⁰ European Council, 2017.

AGROECOLOGY, FAMILY FARMING, CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE

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Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agricultural and food systems⁴¹. Interactions between animal and plant species, humans and the environment are optimised to create food systems that are based on natural cycles, respect dynamic management of biodiversity, and at the same time are socially equitable, allowing individuals to choose what they eat and how and where the food is produced in the first place. Thus, **agroecology is based on the sustainable management of natural resources and production practices** that reduce farmers' dependence on external inputs: **this production model concerns a large part of family farming**. Family farming is a “means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family, predominantly reliant on family labour” and on the dynamic management of crop diversity⁴². In the context of family farming, “the family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions”. Family farmers include mountain farmers, artisanal fishers, shepherds and forest dwellers; family farms may include members of several generations who run and work on the farm⁴³. **COOPI has always favoured in its interventions the involvement of small food**

producers who adopt a family approach to farming and animal husbandry. Although the concept of agroecology originated in Latin America with the first movement in its support, it has now become part of the global political debate and has been included in the political agenda of the United Nations (FAO, Agenda 2030, CFS). **It is an approach universally believed to be capable of eradicating hunger in the world** by ensuring the sustainability of food systems and the food security of local communities, which are undisputed actors of the current paradigm shift through a radical modification of food systems.

By adopting an agro-ecological approach in its interventions, **COOPI also promotes conservation agriculture practices**⁴⁴ as a means of improving agricultural production in terms of quantity and quality, i.e. increasing yields while ensuring conservation of natural resources and environmental protection. The adoption of these types of practices not only improves agricultural production by reducing the vulnerability of production systems in terms of dependence on external inputs but also shortens the time spent on agricultural activities. This, in turn, encourages the diversification and development of other activities such as family care, education, and starting small businesses, which contribute to the development of the community as a whole.



SUDAN

Photo: Valentina Zita

⁴¹ FAO, 2014.

⁴² FAO, 2013.

⁴³ CFS, 2013.

⁴⁴ Conservation Agriculture is a “farming system that can prevent losses of arable land while regenerating degraded lands. It promotes minimum soil disturbance, maintenance of a permanent soil cover and diversification of plant species. It enhances biodiversity and natural biological processes above and below the ground surface, which contribute to increased water and nutrient quality and use efficiency” (FAO 2022).

COOPI in action

Alongside the key concepts related to food security, COOPI has adopted many virtuous operational approaches as a result of its experience in several countries around the world that are experiencing

crises and difficulties in access to food. These approaches are outlined and illustrated below, starting with the projects and programmes that COOPI implements globally.



CAR

Photo: Silvano Pupella

CONCERTED AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

COOPI believes that proper and sustainable management of natural and environmental resources must be the basis of its interventions. In fact, it recognises these resources as a fundamental factor in the start-up of any productive activity and works to ensure that the communities it works with gain control over them as a necessary paradigm to make their development sustainable.

Conflicts related to resources such as water, land, pastures and forests arise from **disputes over access, control, use and management** of these resources, which in turn are caused by various factors, such as conflicts of interest between the different stakeholders involved and dynamics of social marginalisation of certain groups.

Therefore, COOPI devotes special attention to these issues, as it deems their understanding and rational management to be a prerequisite for fair and participatory development. The organisation's action

in this context focuses on ensuring **fair access to land** for farmers and breeders with a special focus on the **participation of youth, women and indigenous peoples**. Exemplary is COOPI's intervention in Chad, which aims to contribute to the promotion of a concerted and sustainable management of agro-pastoral resources, by strengthening resilience to climate change and reducing the poverty of local populations.

Making the target groups aware of their rights is a crucial step in this direction for COOPI and it is precisely the objective of the awareness-raising and training activities that COOPI carries out. Through training and knowledge-sharing, the organisation promotes the inclusion of these tools **in district-level, national and regional plans** and raises public awareness about a less confrontational use of resources. The organisation transversally includes **awareness-raising campaigns** on the reduction of conflicts related to land tenure in its food security programmes.

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ETHIOPIA

Photo: Coralie Maneri



CHAD

Photo: Massimo Zecchini

GOOD PRACTICES

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF AGRO-PASTORAL RESOURCES - CHAD -

In 2018, COOPI launched a project to promote concerted and sustainable management of agro-pastoral resources in Chad, thanks to funds from the European Union and in partnership with the Chadian Red Cross (CRT) and the Humanitarian Organisation for Local Development (OHDEL). The project was implemented in the areas of Salamat, Sila and Ouaddaï, where the use of natural resources is often competitive and tense, in particular due to land pressure and the absence of local conventions on natural resource management and land-use plans. The intervention was based on a multi-stakeholder and multi-level approach, involving all stakeholders concerned with pastoral and environmental issues in the area of intervention (regional, departmental and local action committees; administrative authorities, agro-pastoral groups and public sector partners). Over the three years since the action began, a total of 13,714 beneficiaries, including 6,295 livestock breeders and 7,419 farmers, have been heard and made aware of the issue of resource management. The project aimed to strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders through training, development support and the implementation of local agreements. A total of 100 stakeholders from

3 departments as well as 14 identified organisations were involved in the training for conflict prevention and management. The areas of intervention were identified at the level of prefectures and cantons, taking into account the criteria of concentration of livestock and recurrence of conflicts. This allowed for a more precise definition of the specific intervention sites in terms of the realisation of livestock corridors and the implementation of local conventions. The project's major achievements include a regional pastoral development strategy and the creation of useful tools for its implementation and continuous updating; constant dissemination of existing texts regulating pastoralism; the development of livestock farming and local resource management to encourage affective ownership of these frameworks; and the strengthening of local rural resource management capacities, with the development and implementation of conventions integrated into local development plans, including land-use plans.

The rural populations in the provinces of Ouaddaï, Sila and Salamat that will benefit from the regional strategy and local development plans are estimated at 1,410,928, of which 733,680 are women.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION: SUPPORTING CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE



Photo: COOPI Archive

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Climate-Smart agriculture (CSA) is an approach that supports farmers in the sustainable management of agricultural systems that can respond effectively to climate change⁴⁵. The CSA approach has three main objectives:

1. **increasing the productivity and profitability of farmers in a sustainable way;**
2. **adopting production methods capable of adapting to climate change;**
3. **reducing climate-altering gas emissions.**

The three objectives can also be pursued individually, but the CSA approach promotes synergies between different decision-making processes at several levels (local and global). The poorest and therefore most vulnerable people

reside in rural areas and agricultural activity is their main source of livelihood: the heavy toll that climate change is having on agricultural production globally makes the adoption of CSA practices by small-scale food producers particularly important. CSA aims to increase the output and profits of small-scale agricultural, livestock, fish and forestry production systems, as this is key to ensure global food security. **COOPI adopts the CSA approach in its interventions, as it can support sustainable growth and development of the local beneficiary communities through mitigation actions.** For example, in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, where the effects of climate change have now disrupted the microclimate and thus the availability of resources needed to maintain minimum output levels, COOPI intervenes by promoting CSA practices.

⁴⁵ FAO, 2021.

GOOD PRACTICES

SMART AGRICULTURE SOLUTIONS FOR THE RESILIENCE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES - ETHIOPIA -

In the Horn of Africa, the vulnerability of local communities is increasing due to a string of catastrophic events that undermine the equilibrium of local communities already hard hit by poverty, conflict and lack of access to resources. In Ethiopia, between 2016 and 2020, COOPI implemented two projects with a focus on climate-smart agriculture within the framework of the EU programmes Reset II and Reset Plus Innovation Fund. As part of the first initiative, COOPI worked in Liben, an area particularly affected by drought and food insecurity. The project objective was to strengthen the economic opportunities and resilience of communities most vulnerable to man-made crises and natural disasters by introducing measures to increase livelihoods and access to basic services. In particular, training sessions were held on income-generating activities (leather processing, waste management, entrepreneurial skills, fodder production), involving more than 100 households in total. Start-up tools (including irrigation pumps, several varieties of seeds and agricultural tools) were distributed to the beneficiaries and 122 hectares of land were allocated and used for irrigation activities, in which 250 families were involved. Although farmland

was affected by flooding with moderate damage, the actions implemented by the project contributed greatly to the dietary diversity of the households, increasing their average incomes and reducing malnutrition rates. In the second initiative, on the other hand, COOPI developed an intervention aimed at strengthening the resilience of Ethiopian farmers. The intervention model supported the transition from subsistence to modern and adaptive agriculture by influencing stakeholders to promote its implementation on a large scale. The project provided support to farmers engaged in small-scale diesel irrigation through an integrated three-pronged intervention to pilot solar technology that improves agricultural production in a sustainable way. At each farm site, 32 solar panels with a maximum power output of 370w were installed, which allowed the farmers to achieve significant savings in fuel, oil and maintenance to irrigate the farmland: these savings were used to expand the size of the irrigable land and to purchase livestock. Tailor-made climate-smart farming techniques were introduced to increase production and productivity, and social structures were transformed to link isolated communities to agricultural inputs and product markets.

**ETHIOPIA**

Photo: Alessandro Gandolfi



GOOD PRACTICES

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY - NIGER -

Climate change-induced chronicisation of natural disasters cause certain parts of the planet to be more prone to prolonged emergencies, with dire consequences on the food security situation of vast populations. Between 2016 and 2019, COOPI implemented a project to improve the climate resilience and food security of the rural municipalities of Soucoucutane and Dogonkiria in Niger. It was a project geared towards adapting populations and production systems to climate change, with the aim of improving the resilience of the rural population to climate change. Specifically, improved seeds were distributed in 13 villages and a training session was conducted on the use of these seeds. This resulted in an improved yield, with production doubling from 10,607 kg in 2017 to 24,672 kg in 2018. A network

of agricultural input shops (Boutique d'Intrants Agricoles – B.I.A.) was established and training for its management committee was conducted. The project also allowed the construction of a communal warehouse for storing cereals and two cattle feed shops (Boutiques Aliments Bétail – B.A.B.) in the village of Soucoucutane. Around 50 agricultural tools were also distributed in the identified villages for the spreading of ploughing. Finally, to strengthen the off-season produce sector as well as to improve food diversification, 212 horticulturists were supported by creating five horticultural sites and strengthening their technical capacities in off-season production. All these activities have contributed to greatly improving the resilience of populations and mitigating the impact of climate change.

FOOD SECURITY BETWEEN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

COOPI conducts most of its food security interventions in rural areas, as in these contexts the drivers of food insecurity are the most critical. In rural settings, agricultural production is in fact predominantly based on small-scale subsistence farming, where farmers very often do not own the land they cultivate. This explains why of the approximately 736 million hungry people in the world, most live in rural areas⁴⁶. For this reason, COOPI supports the rural development of local communities with the aim of **improving small-scale farming productivity, leading small communities to self-sufficiency** and diversifying local markets. To this end, the organisation works to promote and ensure recognition of access rights to land, access to agricultural inputs, the introduction of new techniques and technologies and the strengthening of operational capacities through

knowledge transfer. In addition, **COOPI supports rural communities' livelihoods through the promotion of farming-related income-generating activities** as a means to increase the communities' purchasing power.

The organisation, therefore, acts at the forefront to ensure that investments in this sector are effectively used in programmes to promote the development of rural areas. **COOPI also pays close attention to pastoral and livestock breeding communities**, both where livestock breeding complements agricultural activities and where it is the main source of livelihood. In areas classified as 'arid' or 'semi-arid', in fact, agricultural activities are severely limited due to unfavourable environmental conditions, first and foremost drought, which seriously jeopardises the subsistence of pastoral communities.



CAR

Photo: Francesca Longo

ADOPTING THE VALUE CHAIN APPROACH TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS

Strengthening production systems is central to supporting the revitalisation of a community. Therefore, in contexts where conditions have not compromised the development of a structured and stable agricultural production system, COOPI adopts a value chain approach. This approach **consists in strengthening, in addition to production activities,**

the stages of product preservation, processing and marketing – and thus all production chain operations – that contribute to increasing the value of products. Firstly, these phases are often identified by the beneficiaries themselves as being **critical for the production process as a whole**, and secondly, they offer the opportunity of enhancing



DRC

Photo: Marco Palombi

personal initiative, participation and empowerment, which COOPI recognises as the basis for the sustainability of the interventions. In addition, **the focus on production chains makes it possible to provide overall support** to formal and informal, institutional and private stakeholders, **with the aim of redefining more sustainable local food systems** in both rural and urban contexts. Starting from the participatory analysis of local markets, **COOPI identifies the value chains that offer the most interesting development prospects**, detects their critical stages, supports and trains the beneficiaries in the correct execution of activities, and supports the local system linked to the specific value chain (e.g. milk, fish, fruit value chain). For COOPI, the development of the entire production chain **not only increases the value of the products** and thus the derived income for the producers but also allows for a diversification of the activities carried out by community members. This **offers the possibility of actively involving otherwise marginalised groups** in certain stages of the production process. Exemplary is the case of women for whom access to and control over production dynamics offers the possibility of increasing their purchasing power and fosters their social integration and empowerment. Examples of this are COOPI's activities in Mauritania, in support of specific high value-added chains (e.g. poultry, hides, gum Arabic), and in the Central African Republic, where management models and monitoring tools are implemented for specific production chains, together with access to microcredit for local enterprises. Particular attention is also paid to how food systems can **converge on the urban dynamics of certain large centres** in different geographical areas. In doing so, COOPI takes up a highly topical global challenge, since at current urban population growth rates, the entire world population increase expected by 2030 will affect precisely the urban areas of the less developed regions. This will result in the expansion

of cities, which will not have sufficient resources and services to support such large numbers of people. COOPI therefore intervenes **in informal settlements by promoting the start-up of agricultural activities aimed at addressing the critical issues of the context**, first and foremost the shortage of arable land. The objective of these actions is to provide communities with the means to meet their needs independently and, where possible, to create income-generating opportunities. To increase the availability of affordable food resources in urban areas, COOPI also supports the creation and strengthening of market systems that **enable the transfer of goods from production sites in urban peripheries to cities**, as it recognises the existence and functionality of such systems as a fundamental pillar of urban food security.



FOOD SECURITY IN EMERGENCY



CHAD

Photo: Andoni Lubaki

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At the heart of COOPI's work in the field of food security is the need to deliver emergency responses while kick-starting medium- to long-term development processes. As already mentioned, if not human lives, resources are lost when an emergency occurs. This disrupts the community's development process and thus an increase in its vulnerability to external

shocks. Therefore, by strengthening the link between emergency and development phases, **COOPI is committed to ensuring aid in an emergency and reducing the impact of a possible crisis while laying the foundation for the subsequent development phase.**

COOPI, which over the years has worked and still

works on the front line in response to numerous food emergencies, structures its intervention around constant monitoring and a **context analysis** that takes into account several issues, including:

- **the causes of the shock, the possibility and frequency with which they might recur;**
- **the geographical extent of the effects of this shock;**
- **the groups and categories most affected;**
- **the effects of the shock on communities, in terms of capital and strategies;**
- **the effects on institutions and services such as markets, banking systems and government structures;**
- **the timeframe within which to structure and deliver the emergency response.**

Once the causes and effects of the emergency have been identified, COOPI pays great attention to analysing the context of action, as the choice of the most appropriate measures depends on this analysis.

Of particular importance are: a) the state of local markets and b) the availability of food resources.

The first assessment must therefore be aimed at verifying whether, due to the crisis, the existence and functionality of local markets have been completely subverted. If this is the case, it is usually appropriate to **distribute food directly as such**, or as compensation for work activities (**Food-for-work**). The origin of the distributed food resources depends on their local availability: if they are available in sufficient quantity and quality in the surrounding areas, they are sourced locally. Otherwise, the food products are supplied from outside and only their distribution is carried out on site. On the other hand, if local markets are efficient, accessible, secure and able to cope with an increased cash inflow, COOPI favours measures based on cash transfer to the beneficiary communities. Cash can be given to beneficiaries as such (**Cash Transfer**), as compensation for work activities aimed at restoring public services (**Cash-for-Work**) or



distributed in the form of vouchers to be exchanged for water, food products or non-food items (**Voucher assistance**). Where food distribution is not the only way to ensure immediate access to food, **COOPI prefers to adopt measures based on cash transfers** as they expand the possibility for the beneficiary communities to also purchase non-food items. Such items, e.g. agricultural tools, can in fact then be used to support productive activities, be they subsistence or trade-related. Moreover, a shift in which COOPI firmly believes is made explicit by adopting this modality: **from being passive receptors of external support, the communities become dynamic actors** who are custodians of and responsible for the means of their own recovery. Through increasing engagement and empowerment, communities reach food self-sufficiency. To this end, the emergency response is extended through the implementation of food security programmes and, in the long run, the development of rural development plans as an integral part of poverty reduction strategies.

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Whether it is implementing a direct distribution of food items or cash transfer measures, **COOPI pays special attention to the dynamics of local markets**. Regardless of the chosen modality, post-emergency interventions can have considerable impacts on local markets, so much so that their functionality and, consequently, the livelihoods of the communities relying on them can be compromised. For example, it should be noted that the immediate availability of large quantities of goods, resulting in a **price drop**, can seriously harm small producers who derive their source of income precisely from local markets. Similarly, the distribution of cash to purchase food items in a market that is unable to respond to a substantial increase in demand may generate dysfunctions in the acquisition of resources or an **increase in prices**. Therefore, on the one hand, COOPI advocates the importance of **carrying out a proper evaluation** of these processes to intervene in the framework of the existing systems, thereby strengthening and enhancing them; on the other hand, COOPI recommends **careful monitoring** of the

implemented measures, to identify and correct any malfunctions. Whenever possible, **COOPI prefers to focus on local markets even in post-emergency interventions**; it considers them a fundamental means for reaching the ultimate goal of the intervention, i.e. the achievement of food security in the short term and the subsequent start of the community development phase, thus enhancing the multidimensionality of an intervention.



SYRIA

Photo: COOPI Archive

SYRIA

Photo: COOPI Archive



GOOD PRACTICES

PROTECTION AND RESILIENCE FOR CONFLICT-AFFECTED POPULATIONS - SYRIA -

In the Middle East, where protracted conflicts persist, ensuring the food security of affected populations requires a multi-faceted intervention that takes into account a variety of external factors. From 2018 to 2020, COOPI carried out an emergency assistance and resilience building project in Syria for the population of Nashabye, in eastern Ghouta. The objective of the action was to help meet basic needs while contributing to building resilience and thus self-sufficiency of the affected populations. The action strategy focused on ensuring that beneficiaries had access to sufficient and nutritious food by distributing hot meals to 1,640 families and restoring

family vegetable and poultry farming in 13 villages - a traditional livelihood activity in Eastern Ghouta. This action aimed to support families to produce a family-sized quantity of vegetables during the summer and winter seasons, as well as to ensure that rural families could partially restore their livelihood protection. The action achieved its objective as it succeeded in increasing the local availability of food, particularly for the most vulnerable, including newly displaced and returnees, by complementing actions planned by other agencies in the protection and WASH sectors; it also carried out coordinated activities and collective advocacy actions to expand humanitarian access.

ANTICIPATING AND REDUCING RISKS OF NATURAL DISASTERS

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Reducing the risks associated with disasters is a key component in achieving a state of food security: the occurrence of extreme events such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes can in fact severely compromise or **interrupt agricultural production and related activities**. The incidence of such events, some of which are strongly linked to the effects of climate change and anthropic action, has been steadily increasing in recent decades and therefore points to the need for prevention; anticipatory actions should be undertaken to limit their consequences, which mainly affect countries already suffering from critical levels of food insecurity. Therefore, **recognising the high vulnerability of the populations it works with, COOPI acts to reduce the effects of disasters; it does not only guarantee a timely response in emergencies but undertakes anticipatory actions and implements adequate measures beforehand to prevent and mitigate the effects of disasters on the food security of affected populations**. Relevant in this regard are the actions that COOPI undertakes to **ensure the continuity of the processes that guarantee food resources availability, access and proper utilisation**. These range from promoting locally adapted production methods that minimise the risk of crop loss – such as the introduction of drought-resistant crops and varieties, for example – to strengthening the infrastructure for the storage, processing and transport of food resources. COOPI also recognises that the effectiveness of emergency response and the subsequent recovery are highly dependent on the degree of preparedness at all levels, particularly in light of the expected increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme events with a negative impact on food security. Therefore, the organisation works at the community level to **improve disaster preparedness by focusing on raising awareness and training the local population on the adoption of appropriate**

measures. In parallel, at the regional and national level, **COOPI works closely with authorities in the region** to improve their capacity to supervise and implement specific strategies **to integrate disaster preparedness measures into nationwide food and nutrition security programmes**.

COOPI's frontline presence in dealing with food-related emergencies is closely linked to its **continuous monitoring of the state of food security**, especially in the most critical and vulnerable areas. Anticipatory action is therefore of crucial importance as a set of activities undertaken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock, or before acute impacts are felt. Anticipatory action makes it possible to identify and respond in a timely manner to the onset of crises resulting from long-term critical issues such as unresolved conflicts or extreme events such as droughts, floods and hurricanes, which can severely compromise, if not interrupt, agricultural production and related activities. In this context, **preparedness activities in view of slow-onset extreme events** are of paramount importance. In particular, COOPI implements interventions aimed at **protecting productive assets before the emergency** in order to limit the impacts of a possible crisis. These interventions consist mainly of providing technical assistance to communities through training of veterinary staff; livestock vaccination campaigns; rehabilitation and construction of water supply sources; and support to local authorities in monitoring endemic diseases. In the **emergency response** phase (e.g. drought or epidemic), COOPI intervenes to support affected communities in selling livestock in the very early stages of the onset of the crisis, to ensure that beneficiaries have an income before the quality of livestock is compromised. The same support is then provided to rebuild animal capital **after the crisis**. To act quickly in response to emergencies, it is very



PARAGUAY

Foto: Andrea Ruffini

important to identify and monitor the risk factors to which populations are exposed, as well as their coping mechanisms. In this regard, **Early Warning Systems (EWS)**⁴⁷ are particularly useful, as they signal the escalation of critical issues at the origin of food crises, to identify possible emergencies before they occur. Such an approach is adopted by COOPI by promoting the resilience of local communities and sustainable livelihoods to better respond to and cope with climate change also through the structuring of early warning systems. The use of such systems and the triangulation of available direct and indirect data makes it possible to **continuously monitor (on a local, national or regional scale) trends** in food stocks, food demand trends based on harvest forecasts, market prices of

the main foodstuffs, but also forecasts of population growth and the presence of displaced persons in the area, in order to immediately detect trends and changes that could lead to a risk to the food security of the population. In this regard, **COOPI promotes collaboration with institutions, NGOs, associations and local communities for local data retrieval, as well as with research institutes and international agencies for access to aggregated data on a global scale** (IPC). These collaborations serve to constantly monitor situations at risk and allow COOPI to be part of an international network within which the exchange of information is of fundamental importance, not only to detect contexts on which to intervene but also to structure responses based on the critical issues detected (gFSC).

⁴⁷ An early warning system (EWS) is defined as the set of capacities needed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful warning information to enable individuals, communities and organizations threatened by a hazard to prepare and to act appropriately and in sufficient time to reduce the possibility of harm or loss (UN/ISDR 2009).

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ACRONYMS

CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
CSIPM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism
CSM	Civil Society Mechanism
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIES	Food Insecurity Experience Scale
FSN	Food Security and Nutrition
gFSC	global Food Security Cluster
HDI	Human Development Index
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HLPE	High Level Panel of Expert
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POU	Prevalence of Undernourishment
PSM	Private Sector Mechanism
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
UN	United Nations
UN/ISDR	United Nations/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCN	United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health



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