Updated December 2020

IPC
Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions

THE IPC FAMINE FACT SHEET

WHAT IS FAMINE?

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) defines famine as an extreme deprivation of food. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition are or will likely be evident.

A Famine classification (IPC Phase 5) is the highest phase of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale, and is attributed when an area has at least 20% of households facing an extreme lack of food, at least 30% of children suffering from acute malnutrition, and two people for every 10,000 dying each day due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

THE IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY SCALE

The IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale has become the global standard for the classification of acute food insecurity. It is used principally to inform decisions on resource allocation and programming globally and within countries, especially for countries experiencing recurrent or protracted food crises.

Fig. 1: The IPC Acute Food Insecurity Scale

1 None/Minimal (IPC Phase 1)
Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unstainable strategies to access food and income.

2 Stressed (IPC Phase 2)
Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-foodexpenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.

3 Crisis (IPC Phase 3)
Households either: Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or
Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.

4 Emergency (IPC Phase 4)
Households either: Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or
Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.

5 Catastrophe/ Famine (IPC Phase 5)
Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident.
For Famine Classification, area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.

FAMINE VS CATASTROPHE

Famine is a classification of IPC Phase 5 at area level. In a given area, famine occurs when food security, nutrition and mortality altogether portray famine conditions, meaning at least 20% of the population is affected, with about one out of three children being acutely malnourished and two people dying per day for every 10,000 inhabitants due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

Catastrophe: Households may be classified in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe even if the area is not classified in IPC Phase 5 Famine. This is the case when less than 20 percent of the population is experiencing famine conditions and/or when malnutrition and/or mortality levels have not (or not yet) reached famine thresholds. Even if an area has not been classified as being in Famine, it is still crucial to identify households that are facing Catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity.

FAMINE

Famine exists in areas where at least one in five households has or is most likely to have an extreme deprivation of food and face starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition.

CATASTROPHE

Households may be classified in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe even if the area is not classified in IPC Phase 5 Famine.

COMMON CAUSES OF FAMINE AND EXTREME FOOD CRISES

In many cases, famine has multiple causes which can be manmade and naturedriven or a combination of both. Data from the most recent famines shows that the phenomenon is often driven by the complex interaction of four dominant causes related to:

Conflict & Displacement

Conflict often leads to population displacements and disrupts people's traditional ways of dealing with food scarcity (such as gathering wild foods); prevents people from cultivating their land; destroys market centres and transport links; hinders humanitarian access, and brings about long-term economic decline as infrastructure is destroyed and foreign investment collapses.

Economic Decline & High Food Prices

Ailing economies, especially in developing countries, greatly impact access to food. Economic conditions can affect both the prices vulnerable people have to pay for food and their employment opportunities. Disruptions to food trade, food price inflation, and currency volatilities push vulnerable people to extreme levels of hunger and malnutrition.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters, such as drought, flooding, and cyclones, among others, contribute to high levels of acute food insecurity.

Diseases & Pests

Human epidemics such as measles outbreaks present a major challenge to food security and nutrition. Animal diseases can also affect the food availability of households whose livelihoods depend on their livestock. Pests, such as Desert Locusts or Fall Army Worm, can devastate crops and cause higher levels of acute food insecurity.

Inadequate/Untimely Humanitarian Response

When a sudden onset shock occurs, informal safety nets tend to dry up along with the capacity of people to cope, in the short to medium term, depending on the resilience of households and the communities they live in. If the humanitarian response is not sufficient, well-coordinated, or is too slow, the affected populations can only cope for a short period.

HOW THE IPC CLASSIFIES FAMINE

The IPC plays a critical role in identifying famine conditions, and informing the response needed to save millions of lives. The IPC is now the primary mechanism the international community uses to analyse data and arrive at a conclusion whether famine is happening or likely happening in a country. Analyses are based on evidence gathered by a wide range of partners and multi-stakeholder technical consensus.

20% At least 20% of the population has highly inadequate food consumption or near exhaustion of livelihoods.

30% At least 30% of the children are acutely malnourished.

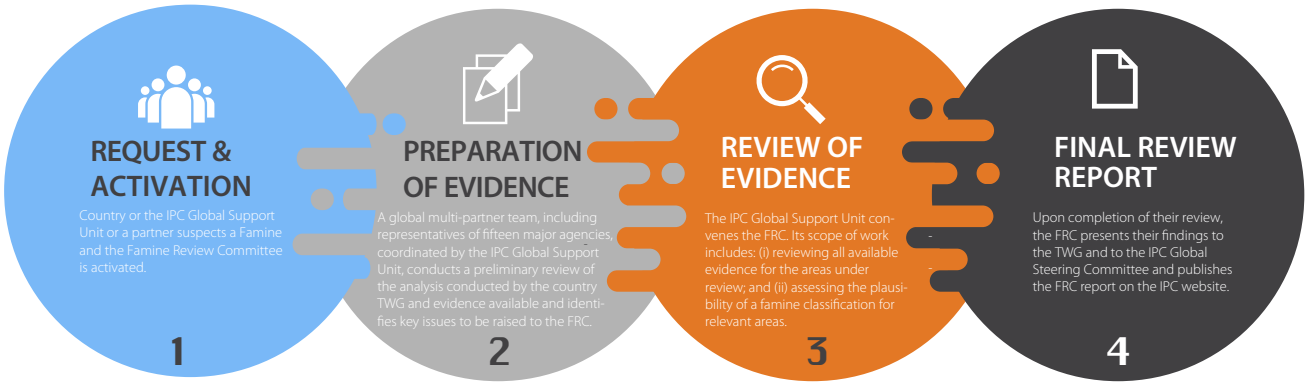
X 2 DEATHS There are two deaths per 10,000 people, or four child deaths per 10,000 children, every day.

HOW THE FAMINE REVIEW COMMITTEE WORKS

When a country IPC analysis shows a potential, or already identified situation of famine, a specific procedure is activated in order to confirm or disprove a Famine classification. Famine Reviews can be triggered in several ways: (1) when the country IPC Technical Working Group (TWG) reaches the conclusion that at least one area is classified in Famine or Famine Likely; (2) when there is a breakdown in technical consensus regarding a Famine or Famine Likely classification; (3) when the IPC Global Support Unit is concerned about famine conditions; (4) when an IPC Global Partner officially requests its activation.

Once the process is triggered, the Famine Review Committee (FRC) is requested to conduct a review to ensure technical rigor and neutrality of the analysis before the results are confirmed and communicated. The FRC is a team of leading independent international food security and nutrition experts. The committee is tasked with reviewing and debating evidence available and IPC analysis results and reach conclusions on whether a Famine/Famine likely classification is warranted.

Fig. 2: The IPC Famine Review Process



WHAT 'FAMINE LIKELY' IS VS 'FAMINE'

Based on the IPC protocols, a Famine classification requires evidence on food security, nutrition and mortality at or above IPC Phase 5 thresholds. If there is insufficient data for Famine classification, usually because either nutrition or mortality data are lacking, but the avail¬able information indicates that Famine is likely occurring or will occur, then the famine classification is called 'Famine Likely'. Famine Likely classification thus allows the IPC to warn about potential Famine in con¬texts when there is limited data. Famines tend to occur in areas where access is not possible or very restricted, which has implications on the ability to collect data and makes it difficult to meet all the criteria for a Famine classification. Based on this observation, it has been realized that famine situations can be reliably identified and classified through a robust analysis process using available data. Based on those experiences, the IPC Global Support Unit and IPC partners have agreed to 'institutionalize' the Famine Likely methodology and classification and to add it to the famine protocols of the IPC Technical Manual Version 3.0. Even in cases with less than optimal evidence, Famine Likely applied to projections acts as an early warning mechanism and allows the IPC to inform decisions and humanitarian response to help food insecurity crises from deteriorating further. It is important to note that Famine and Famine Likely are equally severe, the only difference is the amount of reliable evidence available to support the statement.

HOW TO AVOID & AVERT FAMINE

Famines should be avoided at all costs. Although further deaths can and should be prevented by urgent action, it is evident that these actions will be, de facto, a late response because many people will have died by the time a famine is declared. The IPC supports famine prevention by highlighting the following:

> ***"Famines should be avoided at all costs".***
>
> - IPC Technical Manual 3.0

Early Warning/Action

Early warning messages should trigger early response, especially for households classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) to save lives and livelihoods. This requires a robust multi-stakeholder monitoring tool of all drivers and outcomes of food insecurity.

Multisectoral Response

A massive multi-sectoral response is critical to prevent additional deaths and total livelihood/social collapse. This includes coordinated access to food, agricultural inputs, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition response, among others.

Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian access is a fundamental pre-requisite to effective humanitarian action to avert famine conditions. Full and unimpeded access is essential to establish operations, as well as move goods and personnel where they are needed.

Cessation of Conflicts

Where conflict is a key driver of famine conditions, the suspension of active hostilities will allow for the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to affected populations.

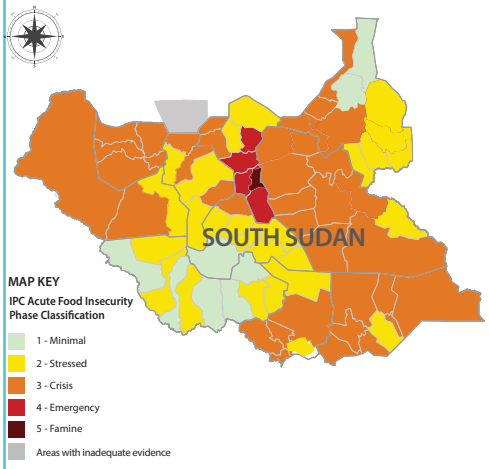
KEY FACTS ON PREVIOUS FAMINES

The last decade has witnessed two examples of famine classification, in Somalia in 2011 and in South Sudan in 2017, that resulted in widespread acute malnutrition and the deaths of tens of thousands of people. The famines in Somalia and South Sudan were extreme food crises in which large populations lacked adequate access to food, mainly driven by conflict and erratic weather patterns.

Fig. 3: Facts About Previous Famines

2017 SOUTH SUDAN FAMINE

Food Security Situation | January 2017



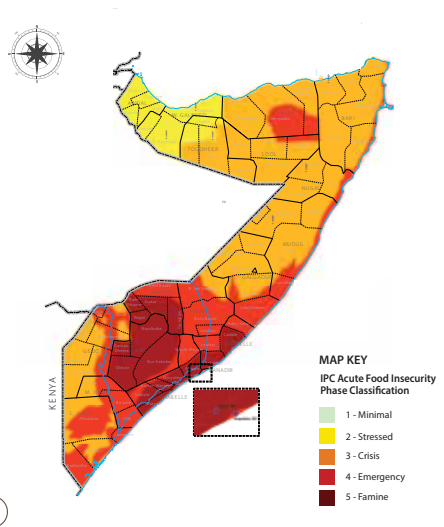
80,000

Famine was declared in parts of South Sudan on February 20, 2017, where nearly 80,000 people faced Famine conditions (IPC Phase 5) in parts of Unity State (the central-northern part of South Sudan), with another one million people being classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). By then, three years of civil war had devastated livelihoods, coupled with an ailing economy and high food prices. Unity State, which borders Sudan, was at the centre of some of the fiercest fighting, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee from their homes.

Source: The South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group

2011 SOMALIA FAMINE

Food Security Situation | August - September 2011



490,000

On July 20, 2011, the FAO-managed Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia (FSNAU) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) declared a famine in parts of Southern Somalia including Balcad and Cadale districts of Middle Shabelle, the Afgoye corridor IDP settlement, and the Mogadishu IDP community. About 490,000 people in Somalia were experiencing Catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 5) due to conflict, drought, and poor rains.

Source: FSNAU/FAO Somalia & FEWSNET

About the IPC

The IPC is a global, multi-partner initiative that facilitates improved decision-making through the provision of consensus-based food insecurity and malnutrition analysis. It is founded on a complementary set of analytical tools and procedures for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition. The IPC was developed in 2004 in Somalia, based on the need for a common food security classification tool driven by evidence to provide actionable information and facilitate effective humanitarian responses. Today, the IPC is used in over 30 countries, including in protracted crises and contexts of chronic food insecurity. The IPC works in close collaboration with the Cadre Harmonisé, a similar tool used in the Sahel and West Africa for food insecurity and malnutrition analysis.

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