LESSONS LEARNED RESEARCH: FOOD SECURITY

COVID-19 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS PROJECT

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About this project

In July 2020, iMMAP launched the Global COVID-19 Situation Analysis Project, funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) of USAID. Implemented in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh,1 Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Syria, this project has produced monthly situation analysis reports that provide humanitarian stakeholders with comprehensive information on the spread of COVID-19 and related humanitarian consequences. Data is identified from humanitarian sources and coded using the projects analytical framework, which is closely aligned with the JIAF framework. Data is stored in DEEP where it can be visualized, disaggregated and aggregated to respond to queries about humanitarian situations.

Based on Lessons Learned for the project, iMMAP commissioned a series of sector-specific lessons learned reports to assess data availability and quality, adaptations, challenges, opportunities that emerged in five humanitarian sectors: education, food security, livelihoods, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Alongside this, seven thematic reports that focus on identified gaps in data were also commissioned.

It should be noted that the number of tagged documents on DEEP is an underestimation of the true value of documents available globally. Firstly, no system of literature identification and review will capture 100% of data sources. Secondly, there is a lag between date of publication of a document and date of processing and finalization into DEEP. This delay leads to an underestimation of the number of documents in recent time periods.

"This report is the result of a combination of primary and secondary data review exercises that cross-analyze a number of information sources. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government, the humanitarian clusters or any one of their individual sources."

Author: **Fakhr-e-Alam Khan**
alamkhan1@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms

ACAPS   Assessment Capacities Project
BHA   Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
DFS   Data Friendly Spaces
DRC   Democratic Republic of Congo
FAO   Food and Agriculture Organization
FSC/S   Food Security Cluster / Sector
F2F   Face to Face (Assessments)
HDX   Humanitarian Data Exchange
HH   Household
HR Info   Humanitarian Response Info
IOM   International Organization for Migration
INGO   International Non-Governmental Organization
IPC   Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
PPE   Personal Protective Equipment
REACH   Humanitarian initiative providing granular data, timely information
UN   United Nations
USAID   United States Agency for International Development
VAM   Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
WFP   World Food Programme

Executive Summary

iMMAP initiated the COVID-19 Situational Analysis project that collates data generated by humanitarian actors and other stakeholders including academia, the private sector, and government agencies as a solution to the growing global need for information, assessment, and analysis among humanitarian stakeholders.

After one year of producing the monthly situational analysis reports, the project is now seeking to document and report on lessons learned from a sector-based lens to benefit the humanitarian sector in the future. Through an exploratory study of the data availability and quality challenges humanitarian actors encountered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to mitigate the challenges, the aim of this study was three-fold, namely:

1. Identifying what was particularly helpful in maintaining information flow to humanitarian actors during the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Identifying what was particularly challenging in maintaining information flow to humanitarian actors during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
3. Documenting lessons learned that will ensure the availability of quality data moving forward.

The study adopted a case study methodology involving a detailed review of both project documents and databases as well as key informant interviews across the six countries. The proposed methodology and tools for research comprised of secondary data collection, primary data collection, and analysis. In total iMMAP and DFS identified 360 humanitarian assessments that were conducted over the six countries; Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, and Syria. Unfortunately, in Burkina Faso, the primary data collection through the Key Informants Interview was not able to be conducted due to time constraints and the absence of Food Security experts in the area. In this case, the conclusion on the data collected for this one particular country was drawn solely based on the Secondary Data Collection findings. Generally, the findings of the research comprised inputs about Data Availability and Data Quality.

Overall, the Food Security sector was very well placed and organized owing to adherence to COVID-19 protocols combined with their strong advocacy with the authorities. The Food Security sector was able return more quickly to the face-to-face (F2F) modality of data collection activities after months of predominantly remote data collection relative to the other sectors. The data collected via F2F was richer and contained better analysis in comparison with assessments that used remote data collection. Furthermore, with remote data collection, the number of variables used was reduced, as was sample size in some of the countries and regions. However, with the reduced variables, the focus was very much on the populations most in need, and on prioritized indicators.

The Food Security sector had an abundance of data from a wide range of assessments and secondary data collections such as different Food Security assessments, market price monitoring, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), and Agriculture assessments. However, there were some limitations on the availability of data for the Food Security sector. A large number of datasets available were mostly food-specific, whereby agriculture data was not as rich. Access was highlighted as one of the major concerns in the beginning, making data on mortality issues inaccessible.

In terms of data collection during the pandemic, moving forward, there will be a need for more countermeasures for such disasters. Robust infrastructure to facilitate more data sharing, ensure contingency funding, improve harmonization, strengthen the areas of remote work, organize virtual meetings, and conduct data collection and analysis works should be prioritized. From the experiences of the six countries, these lessons were documented.

The support and endeavor of the local governments to cope up with the pandemic in terms of the information availability on Food Security, are extremely vital. Enhanced multi-stakeholders coordination will help data collection and catalyze the information flow among those stakeholders, including humanitarian actors. Information technology and electronic systems become an inevitable element that can be both an asset or a challenge to the dissemination of information during the pandemic. More trainings on how to conduct innovative and attractive online meetings are probably needed.

In supporting the extraordinary efforts of collecting data during the pandemic, more robust infrastructure need to be ensured. In most countries, poor internet connectivity becomes a hazard during disasters, on which rapid remote coordination is direly needed. In this case, a contingency plan shall be in place to address the situation. To address the challenge during disasters, proper allocation of resources and infrastructures is inevitable to ensure a working system of information flow amongst humanitarian actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, iMMAP launched the Global COVID-19 Situation Analysis Project funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) of USAID and implemented in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, DRC, Nigeria, and Syria. The project aims to strengthen the information flow and analysis capacities by addressing challenges in data and information comprehensiveness, consistency, and value. This will enable humanitarian organizations to better understand the humanitarian impact of COVID-19 and support response operations. Based on an in-depth collation, review, and synthesis of secondary data via the DEEP platform, this project produces monthly situation analysis reports that provide humanitarian stakeholders with comprehensive information on the spread of COVID-19 and related humanitarian consequences.

After one year of implementation, the project is now seeking to document and report on lessons learned. Sector-based research was launched in July 2021 to explore data availability and quality; challenges, opportunities, and adaptations for each of the selected sectors for this research; and present lessons learned and recommendations. The sectors that will comprise this global research are Education, Food Security, Livelihoods, Protection, and WASH. The focus of this piece of research is Food Security.

1.1 Purpose:

The purpose of this research was to explore the data availability and quality challenges encountered by humanitarian actors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the measures taken to mitigate these challenges. It also documented the lessons learned along the way that will help in the future. The study was conducted in the six COVID-19 Situational Analysis project countries and hence a sector-based lessons-learned report is being produced.

1.2 Methodology

This study adopted a case study methodology to understand factors that influenced data availability and quality before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, intending to develop explanations that will inform humanitarian actions during the current and future pandemics. It involved a detailed review of both project documents and databases as well as key informant interviews across the six countries. The proposed methodology and tools for research were designed by the researchers and comprised of the following phases.

1.2.1 Phase 1: Secondary data collection

Sources which were screened for data include

- The DEEP platform was reviewed for assessments, and data points with food security cluster (FSC) specific datasets. The backend data was extracted by iMMAP and shared in excel form to be reviewed and analysed further for data availability and data quality for all the six countries.
- A document review was conducted on **iMMAP** COVID-19 monthly situation analysis reports
- Other sources were reviewed such as Humanitarianresponse.info, Global cluster sites, and Humanitarian data exchange (HDX) for additional data, cluster meetings and whether those sites were having latest updates for each research country

The secondary Research Framework is drafted to guide the data collection as per the below table:

Theme	What to Review?	Data Sources	Bangladesh	Burkina Faso	Colombia	DRC	Nigeria	Syria
Context	overview of the operational context - barriers and limitations to the Food Security sector	DEEP; Situation Analysis						
Availability	# assessments Food Security	DEEP						
	# assessments Food Security relative to # assessments total	DEEP						
	evolution of # assessments Food Security (by month)	DEEP						
	# coordinated assessments Food Security	DEEP						
	# uncoordinated assessments Food Security	DEEP						
	# and type of stakeholders leading/collaborating on Food Security assessments	DEEP						
	Availability of Food Security data	Monthly reports						
	Information on data availability/gaps							
	Availability of cluster/sector website/page	Cluster/sector website/page						
	Data availability/gaps	Sector/cluster meeting minutes (if publicly available)						
Quality	Quality scores (average)	DEEP						
	Type of approaches	DEEP						
	Data collection techniques	DEEP						
	Unit of analysis	DEEP						
	Unit of reporting	DEEP						
	Sampling approaches (size; approach; proximity)	DEEP						
	Functionality of cluster/sector website/page (if available)	Cluster/sector website/page						

1.2.2 Phase 2: Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection was considered as the key method due to the nature of the data required. There were six countries of the project, in which one interview was conducted per country, except in Burkina Faso. The majority of Key Informants (KIs) were involved in humanitarian services in the study countries in the area of food security, which were identified by iMMAP country leads. All the KI's were contacted by iMMAP country leads via email to schedule timing for the interviews. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams platform and interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees for note-taking purposes, which were then coded and transcribed. The data will be kept anonymous with iMMAP for period of three months, after which all copies will be permanently deleted.

1.2.3 Phase 3: Analysis

Data collected through the above primary and secondary data methods was analysed using descriptive, thematic, and comparative analysis methods. Information collected through the data sources employed for this report – secondary data review and KIIs, was triangulated to strengthen the validity of analysis. It has to be stated that data collection and analysis are interrelated processes. Collecting data is already a form of analysis where new data are compared and confronted with old ones.

2. FINDINGS

2.1. Data Availability

2.1.1. Bangladesh

Overall situation – The data availability was *good* at the start of the pandemic in 2020. However, the availability of data declined through 2021 due to the implementation of very strict COVID-19 containment measures which restricted access to camps for data collection purposes.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of interviewees indicated that before the pandemic, data availability was considered to be good, although there was a lack of agricultural data in regards to food security, and the majority of data focused on refugees as opposed to the host communities.

Assessment Sources – In Bangladesh throughout the pandemic, the majority of the assessments were conducted remotely by the UN and NGO community, with inter-sectoral working groups and universities conducting several assessments including the age and disability assessment across the Rohingya population.

What went well – Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic teams in Bangladesh did well in ensuring data availability by conducting the following:

- being prepared to conduct data collection through virtual modalities when required – due to the movement restrictions, coordination was conducted through online correspondence. In that term, staff were able to adjust to the situation and comply with the most suitable options of communicating; and
- continuous data collection from the urban poor in the country; the large-scale restrictions in accessing the camps encouraged the sector to attempts to shift their focus toxards the poor urban population.

Challenges – The key challenges faced by the teams in Bangladesh include:

- the postponement of assessments plans;
- the large scale restrictions especially where the teams could not access the camps; and
- the poor internet connectivity, which made virtual data collection difficult.

Secondary Data Findings – Findings from the secondary data reveal that:

- the data availability on cluster pages was quite good and updated on regular basis;
- the number of FSC assessments was 31, which makes up 60% of the total number of assessments conducted across all sectors in Bangladesh. This means that the FSC data availability was high as compared to the other sectors. Every quarter, five major assessments were performed. Meanwhile, the number of interagency coordinated assessments was lower (14) than the uncoordinated (single agency) assessments (17). However, the cases where stakeholders collaborate on the assessments were quite high, with 60 partners working together, showing good coordination in the country;
- the assessments that were present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange were 10, which was a limited number. However, they were all very crucial and depicted large-scale assessments.

2.1.2. Burkina Faso

Unfortunately, in Burkina Faso, the primary data collection through the Key Informants Interview was not able to be conducted due to time constraints and the absence of Food Security experts in the area.

Overall situation – Based on the Secondary Data Findings, the overall rating of data availability during the pandemic was considered *very good*. Burkina Faso had the highest number of assessments of any country.

Secondary Data Findings – If we look at the secondary data from different sources including (DEEP, iMMAP), the number of the FSC assessments was 105, making up 49% of the total number of assessments, and consisted of 51 coordinated assessments and 54 uncoordinated assessments and an average of 18 assessments per quarter. The number of organizational stakeholders that collaborated on the coordinated needs assessments was 196, indicating a high degree of coordination beween actors. The assessments that were present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange were 7. The overall FSC data points available were 353.

2.1.3. Colombia

Overall situation – The data availability during the pandemic was considered *medium*, with the majority of data focused exclusively on migrants, and not for the host population.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of KIs indicated that data availability in Colombia before COVID-19 was not that good, since there were not many Food Security assessments which assessed food consumption scores and market price monitoring in the country.

Assessment Sources – UN agencies and NGOs were the only organizations that collected data. Due to COVID-19, the data collection was prompted using the telephone. Surveys by phone affected the sample size of surveys and the indicators utilized. The organizations reduced the number of surveys, indicators, and questions because phone interviews restricted the number of questions that could be asked to the interviewee. The costs of conducting in-person assessments also increased due to COVID-19 protocols and the high fuel prices for transporting vehicles.

What went well – At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of assessments reduced. However, growing vaccination coverage encouraged the NGOs to go back to the field, as they took the role as the forefront research parties of the field assessment.

In 2020, most of the assessments were conducted using remote methods, e.g. via phone calls. By 2021, thing were returning to pre-COVID norms due to the wider vaccination coverage and strict follow-up of COVID-19 protocols.

Challenges – One of the biggest issues in Colombia was that there was no information on Food Security within all population groups across the country, except the migrant population. Data was not available for certain vulnerable demographics including IDPs, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.

Secondary Data Findings – Amongst secondary data sources (DEEP, iMMAP) 33 humanitarian assessments for the FSC assessments were identified which account for 26% of the total number of humanitarian assessments conducted across the country or around 6 oper quarter. 7 of the 33 food security assessments were coordinated interagency assessmentss and 26 uncoordinated (single agency) assessments. The number of stakeholders collaborating on the assessments was 30. Of the 33 assessments, 4 were present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange. The overall FSC data points available was 305, and data availability on cluster pages was last updated in 2019.

2.1.4. DRC

Overall situation – The data availability for the DRC was considered *medium*. The IPC process, which was previously based on secondary data collected using F2F data collection, sifted towards a remote data collection modality. As a consequence, responses and data analysis were negatively affected. The thematic coverage of the assessments declined; e.g., less data on the market price monitoring that WFP commonly conducts on a regular basis.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of interviewees indicated that in the DRC, the data availability before COVID-19 was not that good. It was reportedly difficult to gather information from the area due to access issues, e.g., challenging road conditions, limited availability of infrastructure, and the wide area of the country itself.

Assessment Sources – Most of the data was generated by NGOs or UN agencies, and most of the financial contributions towards those activities were dependent on international funding. The census and population data became a prevalent problem in the country for thirty years. No party could explain whether the case was caused by the public policy of the country.

What went well – The improvement of global access and the inclusion of stakeholders from all over the world.

Challenges – The requirement to collect the data remotely greatly affected the assessments; the research staff were not able to mobilize freely. It took time for stakeholders to acquire and then adap and develop capacity to be able to effectively utilize the tools required for remote data collection. The challenge also came from the short budget of the government allocated to support data collection measures; the case created a dependency on international funding whose sustainability was compromised. The size of the population within the country also did not help the cause; a more effective approach to handle the large country area was definitely needed.

Secondary Data Findings – All the secondary data sources including (DEEP, iMMAP) shows that there were 97 FSC assessments, representing 63% of the total number of humanitarian assessments conducted across the country. There were 16 assessments per quarter; 30 interagency coordinated assessments, and 67 uncoordinated (single agency) assessments. The number of stakeholders collaborating on the assessments was 159. Five of the 97 assessments were present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange. The overall FSC data points available were 358, and Data availability on cluster pages was quite good and updated on regular basis.

2.1.5. Nigeria

Overall situation – The data availability in Nigeria during the COVID-19 period was *good*. Much of the data collection was conducted virtually at the beginning period of the pandemic, but it changed over the course of time when more vaccinations were administered and the staff felt comfortable to go out to work, still by following strict COVID-19 protocols.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of interviewees indicated that in Nigeria, the data availability before COVID-19 was *very good*. However, there was a slight imbalance amongst indicators utilized. Most of the available data and information related to food consumption scores and other response indicators whilst data on agriculture responses and needs had limited data. The Government along with its partners, strived to build up richer agricultural data through various agriculture surveys and IPC.

Assessment Sources – Many key stakeholders were engaged in key assessments and data collection activities such as WFP mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM), REACH, FAO, FEWSNET, Save the Children etc.,.

What went well – At the beginning of the pandemic, the FSC was delayed in their activities due to the large-scale COVID-19 restrictions and the lack of PPE. However, over time and with the support of the funding, sufficient PPE was made available, enabling people to follow strict health protocols and allowing the FSC to do large-scale assessments and data collection activities using face to face data collection modalities.

Challenges – One of the negative factors that affected data availability in Nigeria was the reduced field presence. However, the positive side was that the FSC partners were able to better prepare themselves and had more time on hand, therefore they were able to make more informed decisions. Mobile modality was the go-to method, which allowed the sector to collect good data.

Secondary Data Findings – Secondary data sources including (DEEP, iMMAP) show that the number of FSC assessments was 48, representing 33% of the total number of humanitarian assessments conducted across the country. There were 8 assessments per quarter, 45 interagency coordinated assessments, and 3 uncoordinated (single agency) assessments. The number of stakeholders collaborating on the assessments was 122 and 8 of the 48 assessments are present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange. The overall FSC data points available was 355, and data availability on cluster pages was quite good and updated on regular basis.

2.1.6. Syria

Overall situation – The data availability in Syria was considered *between medium and good* during the pandemic.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of interviewees indicated that Syria had *good* availability of data before the pandemic, as well as a good level of access to field assessments and data collections, comprising those from   (FSA: Food Security Assessment) and FSLA (food security livelihood assessment).

Assessment Sources – Most of the assessments were conducted by the the FSS third party partner for FSLA and UN partner for the FSAas well as UN and NGO community for other assessments.

What went well – Due to the prevailing emergency in Syria, the personnel on the ground had the ability to be flexible in terms of working modality. Long-distance coordination was not new in the field, therefore the shift to remote coordination for research went relatively well.

Challenges – Access is one of the issues that impacted data collection. Since all FSS partners were affected by COVID-19, the accuracy of data was slightly compromised as the data collection activities were mostly conducted remotely, while verifying and corroborating results was difficult. Sometimes the FSS maintain data recollection to ensure an accurate understanding food security at the household level and the impact of assistance. Access issues occured in the context of different actors controlled different areas within the country, and there were existing issues of security and displacement of people; COVID-19 was an additional factor coming into the complications.

Any assistance provided to the country is required to undergo a full security assessment. However, conducting such assessments was negatively impacted by COVID-19, which resulted in delayed response activities. After advocacy and a series of trainings, and these security assessments were able to be conducted virtually. COVID-19 also delayed some of the activities and assessments, producing a great domino effect on all the interrelated and dependant activities. On the other hand, due to the prevailing war, many related staff and locals were stuck in different areas, which was an added hindering factor.

The data collection method utilized for assessments was mostly remote; the budget for the research appeared to be an issue since the partners were unable to secure more funding to cover the higher cost of activities. The increase in the costs of data collection-related activities and the time required to conduct the activities were too much to handle. In addition, the accuracy of remote assessments became a greater issue to consider; verification of research finding with the help of secondary data analysis was required to address the issue, which was adding even more time burden to the process.

Secondary Data Findings –Secondary data sources including (DEEP, iMMAP) identify that 46 FSC assessments were conducted, which represent 22% of the total number of assessments conducted across the country. There were 7 assessments per quarter, 3 interagency coordinated assessments, and 43 uncoordinated (single agency) assessments. The number of stakeholders collaborating on the assessments was 47, and 6 assessments were present on the Humanitarian Data Exchange. The overall FSC data points available was 387, and the data availability on cluster pages was quite good and updated on regular basis.

2.1.7. Summary of Data Availability

Figure 1 – Food Security Data Availability (08/2020-08/2021 - DEEP Platform)
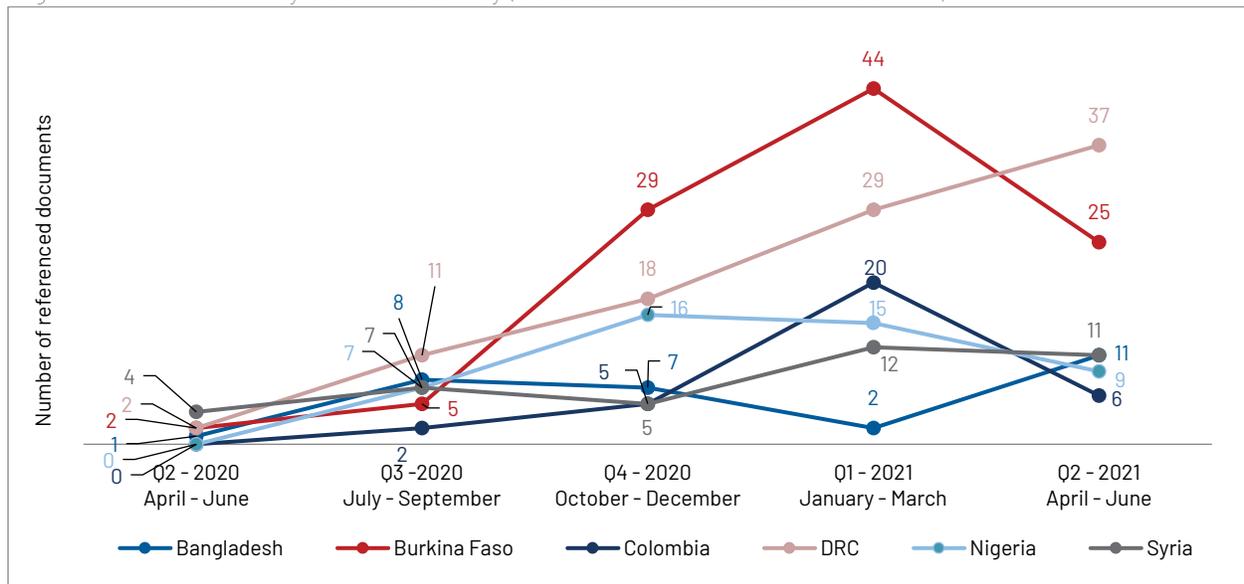

Figure 2 - Food Security Data Sources (08/2020-08/2021 - DEEP Platform)
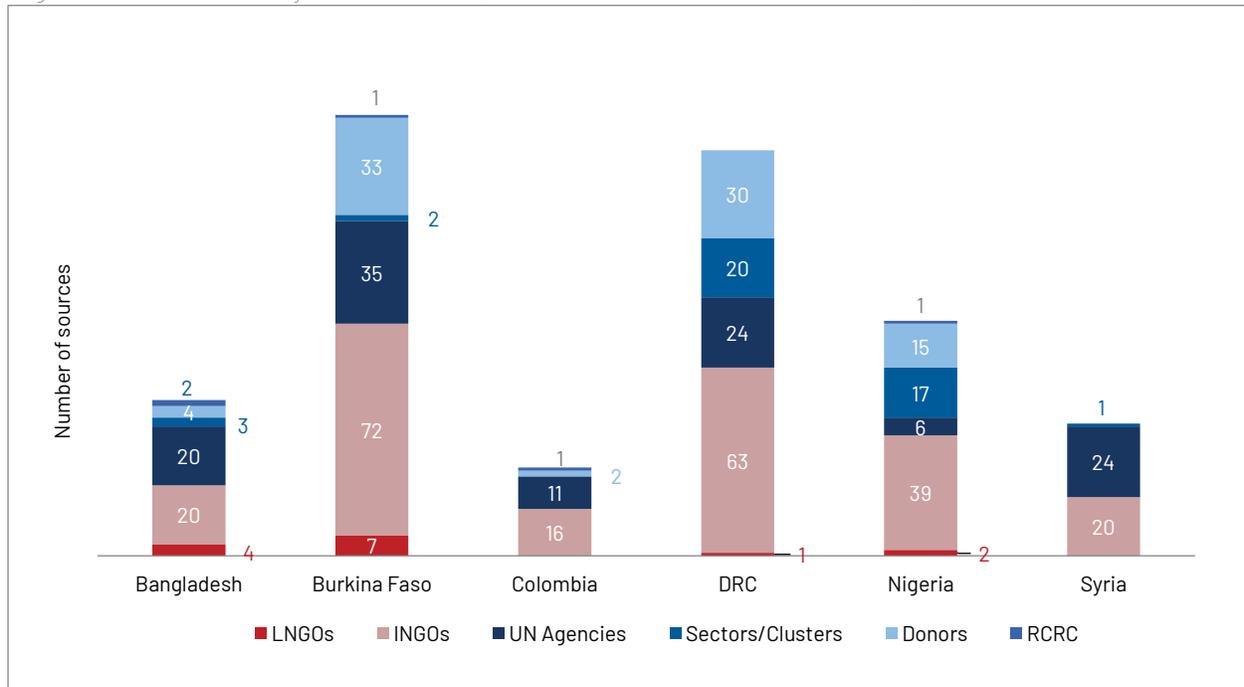
The research on data availability in the six countries revealed the following:

- The data availability before COVID-19 was quite good in most of the research countries. However, available data were good mostly for the food indicators but were lacking for agriculture and host communities. There were also various issues with accessibility in certain areas before COVID-19.

- Data availability for the FSC during COVID-19 was considered as medium-good and most of the data were collected remotely. This method comes with a compromised number of variables and indicators, due to time limitations imposed by the phone interviews.
- Most of the assessments before COVID-19 were conducted by the UN and INGOs in coordination with REACH, ACAPS, etc. FSC was well placed due to the VAM unit of WFP which was doing good assessments, and also the IPC conducted by the Government. Desegregation of data was happening in some regions but was not common. Coverage of assessments was reduced due to the large-scale COVID-19 restrictions. In some places, more assessments were conducted in 2020 than in 2021, with less dedicated analysis from major players.
- The COVID-19 measures affected data collection methods:
- at the beginning of the pandemic, some countries adopted the mobile data collection systems, but returned to F2F assessments with strict COVID-19 protocols after the situation improved;
- In some areas the assessments were postponed.
- Most of the countries were not able to mobilize their staff for assessments due to the large-scale strict COVID-19 restrictions, only a few were able to take advantage of it to do proper assessments with advocacy and following strict COVID-19 protocols.
- Most countries were doing remote data collection at the beginning of the pandemic, but after some time and with the increased availability of vaccination, staff felt more comfortable doing assessments on the ground, complying with proper COVID-19 procedures.
- Remote working was mostly perceived as negative at the beginning due to the restrictions of movement and limited internet connectivity, but it changed when the staff had found more time to prepare and were able to use the technological tools to their advantage, such as doing more trainings and reaching wider audiences.
- With the COVID-19 restrictions, assessment indicators and variables became more focused and prioritized to cater to the needs of the most-in-need people.

2.2.   Data Quality
2.2.1. Bangladesh

Overall situation –   During the pandemic the data quality remained *good*. Many primary and secondary data collection activities were conducted by the UN and INGO community who readily guaranteed the quality of the data. There were also AdHoc assessments conducted by partners that also help to complement the data.

Before COVID-19 – The majority of interviewees indicated that in Bangladesh the data quality was considered *good* before the pandemic. The data was timely delivered and relevant to the needs.

What went well – In terms of data quality the team in Bangladesh did very well by:

- ensuring data was timely and relevant to the situation;
- using both online and F2F to ensure coordination meetings; starting in March 2020 all meetings were online, however as restrictions decreased in 2021, the teams moved to mixed modality; and
- ensuring increased participation, which rose tremendously as compared to before the pandemic.

Challenges – In terms of data quality challenges, the teams in Bangladesh faced difficulty in keeping participants attention on virtual calls; this meant that participants were available and present on the call but they were not paying full attention to the meeting. The exhaustion caused by demanding and lengthy virtual meetings became a challenge for the team to keep up with their desired agenda, while at the same time maintaining the quality of their discussion.

Secondary Data Findings – Analysis on the findings of secondary data sources revealed:

- a medium data quality; this was due to the fact that more F2F assessments than virtual assessments occurred in the process;
- interestingly, the findings also showed that more KIIs and HH interviews happened despite the COVID-19 restrictions. This showed that the attempts to adjust the modality of interviews to conform with the field situation worked relatively well, and there was a higher chance to gather more diverse data contributing to added information regarding food security.
- The overall assessment score was considered medium as 4.51 out of 10.

2.2.2. Burkina Faso

Unfortunately, in Burkina Faso, the primary data collection through the Key Informants Interview was not able to be conducted due to time restrictions and the absence of Food Security experts in the area.

Overall situation – During the pandemic, according to the secondary data findings, the data quality in Burkina Faso was rated as medium.

Secondary Data Findings – If we look at the secondary data sources, the quality score was considered *very good*, with more F2F assessments than virtual assessments happening. Yet, at the

same time, more KII and HH interviews happened regardless of COVID-19 restrictions. The overall assessment score was considered medium as 4.92 out of 10.

2.2.3. Colombia

Overall situation – During the pandemic data quality was considered as *good*. The reason for the this was because Colombia preserved complete, consistent, relevant, and reliable data. However, there was an issue with the time it was taking to finish, due to the remote modalities of the data collection.

Some of the information came through national surveys, but some of the information still required an F2F assessment conducted by the UN and the INGO sector. Mostly, it was primary data collection. Food consumption data were as old as 2016 and mostly migrant-focused.

Before COVID – The majority of interviewees indicated that in Colombia the data quality was considered to be *very good*.

What went well – Various organizations had trained their staff to collect data in the proper way using the appropriate technological tools, such as Kobo toolbox, etc.

Challenges – With the COVID-19 related measures, people's workload was increased and they lost interest in cluster activities, and information sharing became a challenge. Meanwhile, there were a lot of works that happened in the area of capacity building. The virtual meetings encouraged more participation in the remote discussions, but with time the attention graph dropped significantly due to long hours of remote meetings and being at home with various distractions.

Secondary Data Findings – The secondary data sources shows that, the quality of data was considered *medium,* with more F2F assessments than virtual assessments happening. Yet, at the same time, more KII and HH interviews happened regardless of COVID-19 restrictions. The overall assessment score was considered as medium 5.56 out of 10.

2.2.4. DRC

Overall situation – During the pandemic the data quality in the DRC was reported to drop to *medium*. The different approaches towards data collection and the COVID-19 protocols during the pandemic resulted in lower data quality.

Before COVID – The majority of interviewees indicated that in DRC, the data quality before the pandemic was considered *good*.

What went well – Most of the assessments were conducted by the NGOs and the UN; some secondary data sources such as IPC were available. Apart from the COVID-19 theme, there was not much capacity on the ground to do assessments and analysis activities on the other topic. Most of the analysis was conducted by the NGOs and the cluster was compiling all the analysis to show an overall picture of the situation.

Challenges – Remote working had significantly affected the quality of data. The virtual or non-F2F meeting was already challenging to coordinate activities, and the absence of physical trainings and guidance for stakeholders became another issue. Movement restrictions and COVID-19 testing

were the other hurdles for coordination activities. Technology was put to test, but the internet connection problem was affecting the quality of the work.

Secondary Data Findings – All the secondary data sources shows that, the data quality was considered *medium* with more virtual assessments than F2F. However, at the same time, more KII happened due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The overall assessment score was considered as medium 4.99 out of 10.

2.2.5. Nigeria

Overall situation – During the pandemic, the data was considered to be *good*, reliable, timely, complete and relevant. However, obtaining data from hard to reach areas became more of a challenge; the only way to interview people living in such areas was by getting them out of those places. Primary and secondary data were both available, e.g. price monitoring, household dietary diversity. Unfortunately, at the same time, the analysis was not sufficiently drawn up due to the movement restrictions that disabled the analysts to gather and discuss the findings. Despite the situation, it did not necessarily mean that the quality of the data/analysis was not good; it merely required more effort to improve the analysis.

Before COVID – The majority of interviewees indicated that in Nigeria the quality of the data was considered *good* before the pandemic. However, even there were issues with data on mortality in some inaccessible areas.

What went well – The FSC adapted into the online modalities very quickly. Various trainings were also conducted on it to ensure that the members were familiar with the technologies, which would produce better-quality meetings.

Challenges – Most of the meetings were conducted virtually. However, along with the increased attendance, there was declining in attention from the participants.

Secondary Data Findings – Looking at the secondary data sources, the quality of the data was considered *medium* with more virtual assessments than F2F. However, at the same time, more KII happened due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The overall assessment score was considered as medium 4.59 out of 10.

2.2.6. Syria

Overall situation – The data quality in Syria was considered *good* even during the pandemic. The primary data collection in Syria was verified with the help of secondary data sources, which improved the quality of data. The FSA FSLA, outcome monitoring initiative price monitoring, joint monitoring framework, MSNA (including 2 key FSS indicaters only), were all done by the FSS third party partner, UN and NGO community.

Before COVID – The majority of interviewees indicated that the data quality in Syria was considered *good* before the pandemic.

What went well – Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining the same quality as before the pandemic was challenging because it was more time-consuming to conduct remote assessments as well as added more process to validate the dataincluding follow up with data validation and traingulation.

Challenges – Whilst the COVID-19 related measures affected the activities of the FSS, some of the prominant Food Security Assessments launched every year in September were able to go ahead. By that time, there were enough measures in place to do the assessments properly and get good analysis. Security and COVID-19 restrictions were still however problems in some areas.

The impact on coordination activities was not that high as across the Whole of Syria, as even before the pandemic most of the meetings were happening virtually. Although with COVID-19 the frequency of the meeting increased, it was still manageable.

Secondary Data Findings – Secondary data sources (DEEP, iMMAP) reveal that, the data quality considered *medium,* with more F2F assessments than virtual assessments happening. However, at the same time, more KII and HH interviews happened regardless of the COVID-19 restrictions. The overall assessment score was considered as medium 4.19 out of 10.

2.2.7. Summary of Data Quality
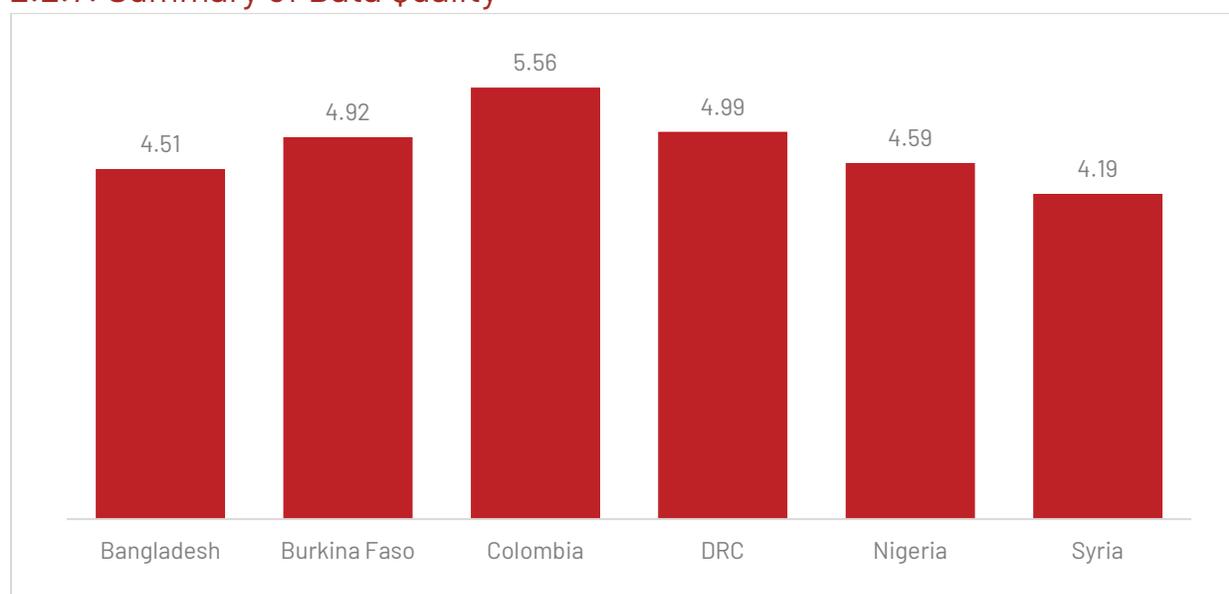
The summary of data quality based on the research in the six countries is listed as follow:

- Quality of data was considered to be good in most of the countries, but in some countries, the data on population and the issue of mortality in inaccessible areas became a grave problem.
- Overall the data quality pre-COVID-19 was medium to good. The reason for this was due to the timeliness, reliability, relevance, and completeness of the data. However, in some cases, the different approaches and COVID-19 protocols affected the data quality.
- Some of the main data sources were primary such as market price monitoring, household dietary diversity, food security assessments, and national surveys. And one of the main secondary data sources was IPC. Food consumption scores in some places were as old as of 2016.
- The analysis in most of the countries was not considered as rich due to the large-scale movement restrictions and the inability to work together at the same place on the analysis and consensus-building, especially in the IPC processes.

- Most of the meetings were organized online, which increased the participation levels to record high, but at the same time, the interest was waiting with reports of loss of attention during meetings and meetings fatigue. It was the case for trainings and any other online activities.
- Even though most of the work was done virtually, still, some of the works were happening on the ground with proper COVID-19 protocols followed. The virtual work imposed the challenge of attentiveness, which was addressed by making the meetings and different activities more precise and interesting.

The COVID-19 measures affected data collection method:
- some countries reduced the number of surveys and sample sizes, which were also affected by the increasing prices of fuel and other commodities, which hiked the costs of such surveys enormously;
- it was reported that the quality of data collection and analyses of IPC and the other agriculture assessments suffered due to the remote work and less consensus, which generated criticism of the results;

2.3. Adaptations and Mitigations

The Food Security sector was very well prepared during the pandemic indicated by, among others, its readiness to comply with the COVID-19 protocols, such as wearing masks, using sanitizers, and social distancing. Such readiness greatly helped sector officials address the call to assess the needs of the population and respond accordingly. At the beginning of the pandemic, many organizations had to reduce their field presence. However, with the passage of time and with the availability of more funding and personal protective equipment (PPE), the government allowed the FSC to conduct more direct data collection activities and to respond to the most-in-need people.

With the COVID-19 measures in place, most countries shifted to remote data collection activities, focusing more on the data most needed for response. There were also attempts to collect data on fewer and more specific variables in order to avoid long assessments and interviews. The teams worked to be selective and using only the most effective measures in order to generate the best possible outcome during the tough circumstances.

COVID-19 has created new challenges for countries and communities regarding data collection on food security. One of those challenges was the reduced capacity to meet their own food needs, whereby there were more needs of multi-sectoral assessments to acquire this information. Another challenge faced by some countries that had accessibility issues was to gather data from their native affected populations (as opposed to the migrant population). The other challenge was collecting responses from the responders; it was a challenge to organize the crowds by splitting them into multiple groups for distribution and to conduct other activities to avoid the spread of viruses or infections.

Most of the assessment, data collection, and analysis activities were conducted virtually, which delayed some of the outcomes and affected analytical robustness. However, it does not necessarily mean that the quality was compromised. Some activities were taking more time than normal and demanding extra efforts; this was precisely why the endeavor had to generate more successful outcomes.

The remote team coordination encompassed various challenges, such as connectivity issues which made the meetings taking longer than usual. However, at the same time, the participation of such online meetings was higher than usual. Unfortunately, the higher attendance rate came with the lower attention of the participants. That was the consequence of working from home situation, which gave more elements of distractions for the participants. There were various online trainings and capacity-building activities initiated by FSC, which generated stronger and more attentive participation from the sector.

In some areas, it was difficult to give responses in a timely manner for people in need, due to the large-scale restrictions. This condition called for more active advocacy from the sector to the local government, so that they were able to give prompt responses to those who needed assistance. A note should be taken that such responses should be provided by following the strict COVID-19 protocols. Funding in some countries was an issue, especially in the response of the agriculture sector.

3. Lessons learned

During the COVID-19 pandemic, to continue with service provision, more advocacy was conducted and more virtual trainings were organized and long-distance coordination gave people in the field more time to ensure the preparedness of their work. The virtual or online methodologies were profoundly utilized, as the consequence innovative analyses and dissemination initiatives were called for. Further, the roles of supporting partners in reaching out to donors had never been so important.

Moving forward, there will be a need for more preparedness for such disasters. Robust infrastructures to facilitate data sharing, ensuring contingency funding, improving harmonization, strengthening the areas of remote work, organizing virtual meetings, and conducting data collection and analysis should be prioritized.

There are some key lessons learned in the field of food security based on this analysis of the six targeted countries.

The support and endeavor of the local governments to cope with the pandemic in terms of information availability on Food Security are vital. Local government agencies should put a prompt strategy in dealing with the crisis in place so that they can communicate and utilize resources effectively in order to address the most-in-needs communities. In the DRC, funding was an issue for data collection, despite the needs and greater challenges of country population and landscape. Hence the data availability and quality in the country was *medium*. In Colombia, on the other hand, where strong coordination with the government exists, the quality of data was *good*. Enhanced cooperation between international organizations (UN, INGO, iMMAP, etc.) and local governments will be helpful to maintain the information flow and data quality to humanitarian actors during the pandemic.

Information technology and electronic systems became indispensible elements that can become a challenge or an asset for the dissemination of information during the pandemic. Mastering the use of technology to facilitate long-distance coordination in the midst of strict movement restrictions is the key to keep the data collection operation going. As with staff in Syria who have been used to remote working, field staff in any country should readily adapt to the fast-changing nature of

remote working. When capacities are lacking, more capacity building on online meeting facilitation shall be given consideration and budget, as is happening in the DRC, and Colombia. Moving forward, challenges like online meeting exhaustion resulting in lower attentiveness of participants (such as reported in Colombia and Bangladesh), despite the increase in attendance, should be properly addressed. More trainings on how to conduct innovative and attractive online meetings are probably needed.

In supporting the extraordinary efforts of collecting data during the pandemic, more robust infrastructure with strong methodologies and tools need to be ensured. The country government and international agencies should prepare contingency funding for such a disaster to build a more resilient system of disaster management in general, and food system preparedness in particular. An inclusive response that does not neglect the host communities in need, pandemic preparedness prerequisites should be in place. In DRC, where population size and country landscape are a challenge, an alternative strategy to ease people's movement and coordination would be helpful. In most countries, poor internet connectivity becomes a barrier during disasters, on which rapid remote coordination is direly needed. In this case, a contingency plan shall be in place to address the connectivity issues, which was an issue in all the interviewed countries.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the Food Security Cluster to learn a new way to do the coordination and has revealed that virtual working is actually possible. Internet connectivity has slightly affected the whole process in some areas, but it is not a major drawback.

In order to cope with the situation, some recommendations which can be drawn from the team's experiences include:

Training on innovative data and information collection – There has to be an attempt to move towards technology and electronic systems and to have indicators in terms of outcomes/results. It is also important to promote the importance of information sharing for interrelated stakeholders, so everybody is aware of the current situation.

In terms of the importance of working towards key questions ways – Using Kobo and other platforms, which are easier to access. The roles of IM organizations, like iMMAP, have been very important. Support from such partners is very much needed during challenging times. It will be beneficial for the integration of information from different sectors. iMMAP has improved the technical skills of many organizations, but more remains needs to be done.

Increase trainings and capacity building sessions – This needs to happen on data collection and analysis activities by specialized partners such as ACAPS, REACH, etc. With such activities, the sector will be able to conduct data collection and analysis activities faster and reach wider groups of people that will also help in cutting down the costs of such activities.

More advocacy and funding support initiatives – The initiative needs to happen with the support of international organizations, to help the local organizations in securing more funds in order to work properly and without fear of losing funds. All of these activities will help support the local partners to be stronger and more sustainable. The more robust local allies will be able to support the local governments, which in return will help the country as a whole to be stronger and better prepared, especially in giving rapid responses during such shocks in the future.

ANNEXES
Annex 1: Key Informant Interview Tool

A) Data Availability

1) What has been the availability of data to the Food Security Cluster pre-COVID-19?
2) How would you overall rate data availability for FS Cluster during pandemic compared to the pre-COVID-19 period?
3) How would you describe the data availability to the FS sector/cluster pre-COVID-19? (Data sources, types of data, disaggregation of data, etc.)
4) Has COVID-19 and related measures (movement restrictions, lockdowns, public health measures, and social distancing) affected data collection/availability by the FS sector?
5) How COVID-19 and related measures affected your cluster members' capacity to mobilize staff in conducting assessments?
6) How COVID-19 and related measures affected your cluster members' methodology of assessment?
7) In your opinion, what factors have influenced data availability—positively and negatively?

B) Data Quality

8) What was the data quality before the pandemic?
9) How would you overall rate the quality of Food Security data during pandemic compared to pre-COVID-19?
10) Reasons for your rating above?
    [Probe for timeliness; completeness, consistency, relevance, reliability]
11) What were the main data sources for the FS sector given the challenges of COVID-19?
    [Probe for primary data collection and assessments]
12) How have the COVID-19 and the related measures affected your cluster's analysis activities?
13) How have the COVID-19 and the related measures affected your capacity to facilitate coordination mechanisms and dissemination mechanisms and have they impacted the regular participation, number of attendees, modality of conducting meetings?

C) Adaptations and Mitigations

14) Have your cluster members or partners taken any specific measures to mitigate the barriers to data availability and quality, created by the COVID-19?
15) Have the COVID-19 and the related measures created any other challenges in understanding the context and the needs of the affected population?
16) What challenges (related to coordination, funding, response) has the FS Sector/ Cluster faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

D) Lessons Learned

17) How has the FS Sector/ Cluster adapted to continue to provide services and support during COVID-19?
18) How will COVID-19 affect ways of working moving forward?
19) What do you think are the key lessons learned for Food Security Sector? (Open-ended question)

Annex 2: Assessment Plan

The global lessons learned research focused on the Food Security sector and explored the data availability and data quality before and during COVID-19; Challenges, adaptations, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future.

1. Reviewed **secondary data** (lessons learned reports, Deep platform, etc.) and compared the **availability of data** to the humanitarian Sectors/ Clusters before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Reviewed the **secondary data** to determine the **impact** of the COVID-19 pandemic on the **quality of data** available to the humanitarian Sectors/ Clusters.
3. Conducted **key informant interviews** with Sector/ cluster leadership to document the **data challenges** they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Analyzed the secondary and primary data to understand how the Sectors/ Clusters adapted to and, managed to continue providing services and support during COVID-19.
5. Described the **Lessons Learned over the last 12 months** by the Sectors/ Clusters to inform future actions in the light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Annex 3: Focal Persons Interviewed

Name	Position	Organization	Contact	Country
Martina Iannizzotto	Food Security Coordinator	WFP	martina.iannizzotto@wfp.org	Bangladesh
Jimmy Tchang	Food Security Coordinator	FAO	jimmy.tchang@fao.org	Burkina Faso
Adriana Rozo	Food Security Coordinator	WFP	adriana.rozo@wfp.org	Colombia
Paul Busambo	Food Security Coordinator	FAO	paul.busambo@fao.org	DRC
Odongkara, Leslie	Food Security Coordinator	FAO	Leslie.Odongkara@fao.org	Nigeria
Mohie Wsh	FSL WoS Cluster Coordinator	WFP	mohie.alwahsh@wfp.org	Syria

Annex 4: List of documents reviewed.

The DEEP platform for assessments, and data points with food security cluster (FSC) specific datasets.

iMMAP COVID-19 monthly situation reports

Other sources such as Humanitarianresponse.info, Global cluster sites, and Humanitarian data exchange (HDX) for additional data, cluster meetings.

The outbreak of disease caused by the virus known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 started in China in December 2019. The virus quickly spread across the world, with the WHO Director-General declaring it as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020.

The virus' impact has been felt most acutely by countries facing humanitarian crises due to conflict and natural disasters. As humanitarian access to vulnerable communities has been restricted to basic movements only, monitoring and assessments have been interrupted.

To overcome these constraints and provide the wider humanitarian community with timely and comprehensive information on the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, iMMAP initiated the COVID-19 Situational Analysis project with the support of the USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID BHA), aiming to provide timely solutions to the growing global needs for assessment and analysis among humanitarian stakeholders.

iMMAP

BETTER DATA | BETTER DECISIONS | **BETTER OUTCOMES**

Contact

COVID-19 Technical Advisor

Jonathan Latham

jlatham@immap.org

Consultant

Fakhr-e-Alam Khan

alamkhan1@gmail.com

Website

Direct Link :
https://immap.org/

Scan to access the website