



Learning from the 2017 Guatemala City Urban Food Security Needs Assessment Exercise

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ADAPTING TO AN URBAN WORLD

Introduction

From 2014-2018, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Global Food Security Cluster (gFSC) and a number of partners, led an initiative called 'Adapting to an Urban World', which sought to better understand the nature of vulnerability and food insecurity in urban environments. The initiative also allowed for the piloting of new questions, tools and approaches to better understand food security needs in times of crisis, in recognition that many of the tools and methods for understanding food security were developed with rural contexts in mind.

In 2016-2017, WFP Guatemala with assistance from the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean led one of several exercises which came under the 'Adapting to an Urban World' project. This brief report shares key learning identified through discussion with colleagues involved in the Guatemala exercise. It was prepared by Leah Campbell with research support from Jonathan Jones. Thanks go to Byron Ponce-Segura, Veronica Tobar, Marina Angeloni and all of those involved with the exercise.

Background to the Guatemala Exercise

The Adapting to an Urban World initiative involved a range of exercises including literature review, case studies and pilots of new tools. Each built on learning from previous exercises, and each was shaped to be relevant both to the overall learning aims of the initiative and the specific context and situation of those carrying it out.

In Guatemala, WFP had a particular goal – to urbanise the CARI.

CARI (Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security) is the WFP methodology for analysing and reporting the level of food insecurity at the household level. The algorithm behind CARI combines two sets of indicators: (1) a household's current status of food consumption and calorific intake and (2) its economic vulnerability and coping capacity. Each dimension is then calculated and classified into the Food Security Index, which indicates the degree of food security/insecurity for that household.

As the CARI methodology was developed for use in rural areas, the Guatemala exercise sought to adapt the CARI into a methodology appropriate for use given the multifaceted challenges relating to food security in urban contexts.

The Guatemala City Context

Between 1954 -1996, Guatemala experienced a decades-long civil conflict, one of the lasting impacts of which was significant rural to urban migration. This displacement was further intensified by natural disasters such as the 1976 earthquake and a number of tropical storms and hurricanes. Many of those who moved to Guatemala City in this period now live in densely populated informal settlements.

An estimated 369,000 people inhabit a number of precarious settlements in and around Guatemala City, with approximately 20% of the city's population living under the poverty line (Cabrera and Haase, 2018). Informal settlements have expanded along a system of ravines crossing the capital city, as well as past the administrative limits of the city, merging into 'conurban' areas – areas that transcend municipal political boundaries. This situation has created serious challenges to the well-being and livelihoods of the populations living there as well as the ability of local government and civil society organisations to assist those in need.

Such spaces are the object of profound functional, demographic, social and political transformations. With urbanization, there is an increasing lack of housing, an increase in the price and exhaustion of urban land and a supply-demand imbalance between the number of job opportunities and number of people in need of work.

Key Learning Points About Process

The Guatemala exercise was carried out in three phases:

- Phase One involved qualitative research to better understand the factors affecting insecurity in Guatemala City
- Phase Two involved the design and testing of tools including questions and indicators
- Phase Three involved data analysis and reflection on lessons learned. This report is part of the third phase and focuses on key learning points from phases one and two.

Phase 1: Qualitative research using focus groups

Between October-December 2016, WFP Guatemala conducted a number of qualitative steps in order to better understand food insecurity in the city. This included focus groups and interviews with community members and leaders in the target population. Qualitative methods were chosen in recognition that these approaches would provide an indispensable insight into vulnerability and coping mechanisms of the population (Phase1doc).

Focus groups

Ten focus groups (1-2 in each area) were held with heads of households (those in charge of the household budget), typically women. Each focus group involved 6-15 individuals.

The following points emerged as key learning areas around the focus groups:

- Having an experienced team from multidisciplinary backgrounds leading the groups
- Adequate infrastructure to ensure the well-being and satisfaction of staff and participants
- Tolerance and respect for diversity and opinions expressed
- Collective analysis of focal group experiences backed up with real-time visualization of shared experiences
- Alternation of facilitators and topics to keep the discussions fresh and engaging
- Provision of food and transportation expenses for focus group participants. Particularly with mothers making up the majority of participants, time away from home is a large sacrifice for already vulnerable households. This was felt to be an important lesson for both obligation and incentivising future cooperation. Each participant was given \$12 to pay for transportation along with free lunch and a certificate for their participation.

Story-telling Approach to introducing concepts of stress, crisis and emergency coping behaviour

WFP Guatemala used a short story to introduce the groups to the concepts of crisis and coping behaviour in a relatable way. The story used describes a village with diverse livelihoods – some people fish, others keep poultry, others have shops. Then, trouble arises, and people have to start adjusting. As the situation deteriorates, people start selling their possessions and leaving the village. The story is used to introduce the idea of coping mechanisms, and how these measures change throughout the severity of a crisis. The story is read aloud in sections by different group participants. Following the story, the facilitator asks the group about their own experiences and context with coping mechanisms under similar circumstances.

Community interviews

53 individuals were interviewed from four different communities. They included community leaders, younger and older people, religious leaders, teachers and pizza delivery boys – selected for their ability to describe access to different sectors of the neighbourhoods. Many were interviewed outside of the community (at restaurants or workplaces) in order to reduce the risk of security concerns for the individuals participating.

Phase 2: Carrying out FS assessment

Having carried out the focus groups and interviews, WFP Guatemala used this information to design a household questionnaire – “SAN-Urbana”. The questionnaire was piloted in order to identify the usefulness of this revised tool as a modified-for-urban version of the original CARI methodology. It was also reviewed with community leaders, to ensure that questions would be understood by the respondents. Phase Two involved the same team members and communities as in Phase One, and was carried out between February and April 2017.

The qualitative information identified in Phase One was fundamental. It highlighted how existing survey questions for collecting data for the CARI was insufficient for the urban environment; for example, questions on income and expenditure could be problematic for participants to answer, as the target population was the extreme poor and vulnerable, who struggle day to day to get food and have little means of tracking their average income or expenditure on food for the previous weeks and months. Defining economic vulnerability, therefore, needed to be reconsidered and more effective questions based on the preliminary research were formulated to get the best data.

The focus groups and interviews also informed the development of three context-specific levels of vulnerability defined based on information provided by these qualitative sources and tested with the survey.

The survey included eight areas:

- Identification information
- Neighbourhood
- Household composition (ages, education level, income/livelihoods)
- Energy sources (propane, wood, plastic, etc)
- Social organisation of the community
- Security and safety
- Food consumption
- Household budget & expenses
- Coping mechanisms

At the end of the survey, a household could be grouped into one of the three socioeconomic levels: low, medium and high (see box below)

Once drafted, the survey was piloted with 33 households in three communities. Small adjustments to the survey were made following the pilot. This exercise also helped WFP to understand the amount of time needed to complete each household survey.

WFP aimed to collect a minimum 480 surveys – 120 in each of four different neighbourhoods. The areas chosen included a range of households representing all three socioeconomic levels identified in the earlier phase.

In total, WFP completed 503 surveys, and found that households were often willing to answer questions. Overall, 10 people declined to participate, usually because the timing was inconvenient as they were busy with other responsibilities, were about to go to work or prepare a meal. Similar limitations were found in Zimbabwe (Gachoud et al., 2014) and Jordan/Lebanon (Twose et al., 2015).

Area selection

The areas used in the study were chosen based on purposive sampling. Though heterogeneous, each of the selected areas experienced high-levels of poverty, violence and food insecurity. WFP aimed to include a range of different urban contexts found within Guatemala City in order to test the methodology across different settings. For example, one type of context of interest was “dormitory cities” or “bedroom communities” – so-called due to the large numbers of the population who commute to work outside of the area. WFP also prioritized areas where it had previous institutional or personal contacts which would facilitate access and areas which were possible candidates for future WFP food assistance in order for the findings to inform WFP programming. Some areas were deemed infeasible due to security concerns and lack of access, despite meeting other criteria. Seven areas were used in the qualitative activities of phase one, and four areas were chosen for testing the questionnaire in phase two.

Criteria for the three levels of household vulnerability

Based on the findings in phase one, WFP identified three levels of vulnerability and aimed to conduct household surveys with all three levels. Below are the criteria used to identify each level

Criteria	Level One/Low	Level Two/Medium	Level Three/High
Housing	Precarious settlements (wood, cardboard), without land tenure, in borrowed/ unlawful space, informal drainage	Live in housing block, renting rooms, formal drainage	Living in housing block or terraced house, 1-2 levels, formal drainage. 1-2 families in one house. Have vehicle, internet, cable.
Family Structure	Female-headed households, 5-6 children. Children working & not in school	Female or dual headed household, 3-4 children in education and chores/light employment during non-school hours	Dual headed household, 2-4 children in school. Children not in any employment.
Cooking Method	Cook with firewood or debris on the street, in front of the house	Gas stove or coal	Cook with gas inside the house
Education	Average level of education in household is primary	Varying levels in the family	Some household members have intermediate level/ professional skills.
Health	Households include chronically ill, elderly, special needs	No serious illnesses. Some sickness may put stress n household.	No serious illnesses, have private health care provision or possibility of using debt
Household Economy	Involved in informal economy, day to day	Some household members have fixed income and/ or involved in both fixed & informal employment to supplement income	Adults employed with fixed jobs or have local businesses, or those who receive remittances



Key Learning Points About Assessing Urban Food Security

Throughout both phase one and phase two, the team carrying out the Guatemala City exercise identified a number of points relating to the assessment of food security in urban areas. These are each discussed below.

Consumption of street food

As in many urban settings, many of the urban poor in Guatemala eat outside the home. One person involved in the exercise explained, “what happens...is that part of the people leave home early in the morning, 4 or 5am, because they have to go to work. They do not have any food [before leaving] the house. They come late at night. What’s the point of running food consumption score if probably half of the people in the household...what they eat will not be recorded?”

The consumption of street food has been noted in other case studies in this project including Zimbabwe (Gachoud et al., 2014) and Haiti, where 57% of households consumed street food at some point during the week – most commonly due to working outside the home (Twose et al., 2016).

Food purchased and consumed outside of the home is one the main challenges for accurately assessing food consumption in urban settings (Nyemah et al., 2015). WFP found it very difficult to account for food purchased and consumed outside the home (for instance, lunch purchased at a snack stand while working) in the assessment tool. Their approach was to focus on food consumed inside the home (and on other metrics) rather than to attempt to estimate food consumed outside the home – an approach other case studies in the Adapting to an Urban World project appear to have used as well (Loven, 2016; Twose et al., 2015). One WFP colleague explained that it would be ‘too risky’ to make such an estimation.

Consumption of junk food

Another issue which came up in Guatemala was the high rates of consumption of unhealthy or ‘junk’ foods. A report following the household surveys explained that, although many individuals recognised the lack of nutritional value in these foods, they continued to consume them because “they are cheap foods that satisfy the hunger” (Ponce-Segura and Touchette, 2017). Those carrying out the surveys also noted that many participants were not aware that junk food (such as french fries, pork rinds and fried chicken) was not healthy, suggesting the need for more education about healthy diet and potentially interventions which support access to healthier food options.

Diverse livelihoods

Another key issue specific to the urban environment is the diversity of livelihoods represented in one household. Households surveyed in Guatemala City were engaged in both formal and informal economies. One of the main challenges of assessing income and expenditure in urban settings is due to the inconsistency of income generating and spending activities (Nyemah et al., 2015). Focus groups conducted as part of the exercise

found that many urban poor found work on a day to day basis rather than having fixed employment (Ponce-Segura and Gomez-Sanches, 2017). These particularities make it difficult to understand the income of the households as it may fluctuate day to day and is often conducted off the record. Similar challenges were observed in Lebanon (Twose et al., 2015), Somalia (Loven, 2016) and Zimbabwe (Gachoud et al., 2014).

Urban coping mechanisms

The focus groups and household surveys identified a number of coping strategies used by the urban vulnerable households. These include:

- Eating food found in the garbage/dumpsites
- Reducing meal sizes and frequency (also noted in Haiti & Zimbabwe (Twose et al., 2016; Gachoud et al., 2014))
- Finding alternative energy sources to cook including plastic, old furniture, old clothes and branches collected from ravines
- Getting food/water from neighbours (also noted in Haiti (Twose et al., 2016))
- Prostitution and child exploitation

Hidden vulnerability

During the exercise, WFP found that some vulnerability was hidden, often due to households of varying levels of vulnerability living in close proximity. In one neighbourhood, those conducting the household survey recall thinking “the houses were very pretty” and assuming that they would find a ‘level three’ household inside, but instead ‘when they got in, there were four or five families living in there...it was a pretty house, a good construction, but there was a whole family living in each room.’ In Guatemala, this arrangement is common enough to have its own name - ‘palomares’ which is translated as ‘dove nests’. In these circumstances, families often have to share bathrooms and other common areas. Similar conditions were found in both the Haiti and Zimbabwe case studies (see Twose et al., 2016; and Gachoud et al., 2014).

Key Learning Points About Navigating the Security Context

The security context of Guatemala City

Guatemala City has a high concentration of gangs and violent crime that undermine the foundations of economic and social development in areas of rapid uncontrolled urbanisation. One critical concern resulting from the increased urbanisation and growth of informal settlements is violence and security risk. In some cases, parts of the city have become “no-go zones”. These areas pose a number of challenges for the local population: they are difficult to govern, are linked with a cycle of poverty for those living there, and small businesses and residents are often caught up in gang violence, particularly extortion. Violence often transcends specific areas, with many acts of violence occurring on public transport.

The security risks in navigating these areas has also made it extremely challenging for aid organizations as physical access is often restricted. Contacting residents living in these 'no-go' or 'red zone' areas are a security concern for organisations. Activities such as data collection or interviews are potentially dangerous for both organisations and residents.

How the pilot assessment navigated the security context

When selecting the neighbourhoods for the pilot assessment, it became clear that many of the areas important to include from a food insecurity perspective were 'no go' areas. Initially, there was concern from United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), responsible for safety and security for any UN-led assessment activities in the region. WFP had not previously worked in Guatemala City, and UNDSS were also unfamiliar with the areas being proposed.

Despite initial concerns, the positive working relationship between WFP and UNDSS eventually resulted in UNDSS conducting situational risk assessments in the chosen areas, which allowed for a number of procedures and protective measures to be identified before data collection was carried out.

The most important strategy identified for managing security risks was to collaborate with community leaders and local partner organisations. Community leaders could facilitate safe entry points, use their authority to offer protection to WFP staff from petty and organized crime and monitor the local security situation.

WFP's field team for the exercise were also selected specifically for their knowledge of the context and their existing relationships with community leaders and organisations, which contributed significantly to the success of the study.

Identifying appropriate leaders is a common challenge for humanitarians around the world (Campbell, 2017). Transparency, trustworthiness, and reliability can be suspect when working with informal representatives of communities. Equally, elected representatives are sometimes distrusted by the local community, seen as aligning with other political or economic interests. The often dense and diverse character of urban demographics means that horizontal representation is a challenge with points of leadership prone to privileging certain groups over others (ibid.).

The way these challenges were mitigated during field work was to establish relations little by little; gradually expanding the network of contacts. Partner organisations operating in the study areas (already known to the project team) provided information on other local institutions, prominent actors, sources for interviews and focus group participants. From these referrals, further connections were made, and community-trusted leaders were identified. Community leaders included: leaders of women groups, leaders of youth groups, leaders of the church, midwives, police services, fire services, leaders of local organisations and NGOs, and representatives of elective committees known as COCODES.

How violent crime affects food security

The pilot assessment in Guatemala City also sheds light on the link between food insecurity and violent crime. For example, the assessment revealed that, at times, muggings and robberies were so intense that residents could not access groceries because delivery drivers were unable to access their area. Some residents reported making multiple small-purchase trips to food markets due to the risk of having larger quantities of food stolen

from them as they return home. These findings are similar to those in the Adapting to an Urban World assessment in Somalia, where residents would sometimes avoid leaving the house in fear of attack (Loven, 2016). These coping strategies negatively impact food security by reducing access to food and time available for income generating activities.

Summary of Key Learning Points

Key learning points about process:

Carrying out qualitative research prior to data collection was an essential step in navigating the unique complexity of the urban landscape. Working with focus groups and key informants at this stage allowed for the design of a methodology that was adequate for telling the story of food insecurity in Guatemala City. One of the key ways in which it did this was by highlighting how the diversity of livelihoods in urban contexts renders traditional methods for assessing food security in rural settings inadequate.

When working with focus groups, WFP Guatemala found it particularly important to work alongside experienced team members, ensure tolerance and respect is maintained and use as many engaging visual and story-telling tools as possible. There is also an obligation for participants to be reimbursed in some way for giving up their valuable time for such an activity. These conditions create a favourable environment for getting the most out of the workshops. Working with community leaders was also found to be a way to further enrich the quality of the study by providing contacts and facilitation with participants of the survey.

The critical role of community leaders

Community leaders were instrumental to the pilot assessments for a number of reasons:

They helped to identify appropriate informants and generating their confidence in the study. Without this, it is likely that residents would not open their doors to strangers, as was found in the Jordan/Lebanon Adapting to an Urban World case study. (Global Food Security Cluster, 2014: 15).

By accompanying enumerators door to door, they further ensured security and better data. This was so successful that in one instance, enumerators were able to interview a local drug dealer.

They were able to generate interest in their local communities and therefore create a chain of contacts as interviewees would recommend the study to neighbours.

They were able to properly communicate the goals and expectations of the study further ensuring the reliability of the data collected.

They identified focus group participants as well as enumerators for the household survey. This meant that enumerators were people living in the areas, which was also critical to community acceptance.

Piloting the survey was also a very useful exercise and allowed adjustments to be made as well as the practicalities of completing the survey such as, length of time it takes to complete and the best times of day to collect data.

Key learning points about food security:

Around the world, food insecure residents in urban areas often consume food outside of the home due to cost and convenience. This makes measuring total food consumption a real challenge. Until a tool is developed to effectively measure food consumed outside the home, only food consumed inside the home can be reliably measured.

Related to this is the high-levels of junk food consumed in poor urban areas, also due to convenience. Interventions to introduce better education about healthy diets for urban communities facing food insecurity should be considered.

Another challenge that future food security assessments need to be aware of is the specificity of diverse livelihoods in urban settings. Measuring income, expenditure and day to day working patterns is much more inconsistent in urban environments. As mentioned, carrying out research prior to designing surveys was essential for working around these issues to the extent that it was possible.

Similar food-related coping strategies found in rural areas occur in urban areas as well. For example, skipping meals or reducing portion sizes is common. However, on the livelihoods coping behavior, actions such as child prostitution and eating from the garbage seem to be extreme options more available in urban environments. Urban food security assessments should be aware of the potential differences and extremities of adverse coping strategies. Assessments also need to be mindful of 'hidden' vulnerabilities due to the complex, close proximity of living spaces, particularly in informal settlements.

Key learning points about security:

In urban areas experiencing high levels of violence, assessments must be well-planned to take necessary safety precautions.

A good relationship between those carrying out the assessment and those responsible for security are critical, as is an open-minded commitment to solving problems. WFP Guatemala found that working with and through community leaders was critical to their ability to safely carry out a food security assessment in these vulnerable neighbourhoods.

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