



**UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON**  
**NUTRITION**

*Task Force on Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation*

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*Fact sheets on Food and Nutrition Security Indicators/Measures:*

*Household food insecurity access scale (HFIAS),  
- as developed by Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) Project -*

Characteristics	Explanation
<b>1. What does the indicator/measure evaluate?</b>	<p><i>What is the meaning of the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>The HFIAS is a tool to assess whether households have experienced problems in food access in the preceding 30 days. The tool is composed of nine questions that ask about modifications households made in their diet or food consumption patterns due to limited resources to acquire food. It measures the severity of food insecurity in the past 30 days, as reported by the households themselves.</p>
<b>2. Which are the target population groups for the indicator/measure?</b>	<p><i>For which population group(s) is the indicator/measure relevant?</i></p> <p>Households, no specific target group.</p>
<b>3. For which purpose is the indicator (or measure) collected (or used)?</b>	<p><i>What use is made of the indicator/measure at different levels (individual, household, community, district, national, regional, global)?</i></p> <p>HFIAS allows the extent and severity of food insecurity at household level to be assessed and is a useful measure for comparing food access across different population groups. It can be used for monitoring and, if interpreted with other indicators, also for evaluation of the impact of policies or programmes and can be integrated in a food security information system to monitor trends on a long term basis.</p> <p>The information arising from HFIAS can be interpreted at community, district and national level. It is not appropriate for interpretation at individual or household level, in the sense that it cannot be used for targeting of specific households/individuals (see 11. for explanation).</p> <p>Use of the tool at global level for cross-country comparisons is theoretically possible as the questions it asks are based on universal behaviors. However more studies are currently underway on this specific aspect.</p>

<b>4. What is the relevance of the indicator/measure for nutrition and food security AME?</b>	<p><i>To what extent does the indicator/measure reflect nutritional status, food security, the health and care situation and their evolution?</i></p> <p>HFIAS reflects the household experience of food access problems during the previous month. Increasing prevalence of food insecurity as measured with HFIAS can identify seasonal food insecurity or an impending food crisis, and can be used to monitor changes in food security over time.</p> <p>Compared to indicators of nutritional status (eg. anthropometry) HFIAS is specific to food consumption aspects; it is not influenced by health and care aspects, as it refers to modifications of the diet pattern specifically due to lack of resources to access food. Therefore a change in the diet due to lack of health and/or care should not be captured by the scale.</p> <p>The HFIAS does not provide information on nutritional status of household members but in the UNICEF framework of causes of malnutrition, it is used to document one of the underlying causes of malnutrition at household level (lack of access to food).</p>
<b>5. What is the relevance of the indicator/measure for poverty AME?</b>	<p><i>To what extent does the indicator/measure reflect the socio-economic situation and its evolution?</i></p> <p>Food insecurity measured by the HFIAS is linked to poverty levels in all surveys where it has been used (the higher the score, the lower the socio-economic status). It is usually inversely correlated with Household Dietary diversity, i.e. households with low dietary diversity score are high for food insecurity. HFIAS allows assessment of food poverty - the inability to obtain healthy affordable food.</p>
<b>6. What is the relevance of the indicator/measure for MDGs AME?</b>	<p><i>To what extent does the indicator/measure reflect progress made towards the achievement of the MDGs?</i></p> <p>As a measure of households' ability to access food of sufficient quality and quantity, HFIAS data complement national indicators such as prevalence of undernourishment and as such is relevant to MDG1. It is especially relevant at sub-national level (eg. comparison between different districts).</p>
<b>7. How is the indicator/measure constructed?</b>	<p><i>Which data are required for the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>HFIAS is derived from a 9 item questionnaire. The respondent is the person in charge of food preparation, or the head of households. S/he answers on behalf of all household members.</p> <p>For each question, the respondent has 4 possible responses depending on the frequency of occurrence of the experience described. The level of food insecurity is established based on a score (sum of responses) and a classification of severity of food insecurity. The current classification scheme is currently being reviewed by FANTA and FAO.</p> <p>The questionnaire can be found at: <a href="http://www.foodsec.org/tr/nut/hfias.pdf">http://www.foodsec.org/tr/nut/hfias.pdf</a>.</p>
<b>8. Which reference(s) is (are) used to interpret the indicator/measure?</b>	<p><i>Against which reference, standard or threshold is the indicator/measure compared in order to interpret it at individual and at population levels?</i></p> <p>There is no gold standard against which HFIAS is compared but comparisons can be</p>

	<p>made across locations and over time to assess change in status. The HFIAS, as indicated earlier, consistently correlates with dietary diversity and wealth indicators.</p>
<p><b>9. Which type of analysis should be conducted with the indicator/measure?</b></p>	<p><i>Which cross-tabulations and other causal analyses are appropriate in conjunction with the indicator/measure to assist with its interpretation and use?</i></p> <p>For validation purposes, the HFIAS can be compared with other indicators of household food insecurity such as energy intake or food expenditures.</p> <p>Demographic information at household level (size, household composition, HIV/AIDS status, etc), and season are essential information for interpreting the HFIAS. Such information should therefore be collected within any survey using the HFIAS.</p> <p>For a comprehensive food security analysis, the indicator should also be analyzed in conjunction with information on food consumption, utilization (such as food storage, processing and preservation), availability of food, and any other relevant contextual information related to food security (political and economical environment, prices, stocks, nutritional and health situation, etc...).</p>
<p><b>10. What are the practical requirements to use the indicator/-measure?</b></p>	<p><i>Which equipment, staff, skills and other resources are required to collect the data and interpret the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>Adaptation to the local context through key informant interviews and focus groups is needed to obtain a tool that is relevant to the context (based on local language where possible).</p> <p>Local staff needs to be trained for adaptation (3-4 days). Enumerators need to be carefully trained on the meaning of the tool and how to ask the questions, to ensure accurate responses.</p> <p>Data analysis does not require sophisticated software.</p>
<p><b>11. What are the main limitations of the indicator/-measure?</b></p>	<p><i>What are the main weaknesses in and constraints to using the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>In populations where food assistance is frequent, there can be a respondent bias (i.e. the household may report food insecurity in the expectation of hand-outs).</p> <p>HFIAS should not be used for identifying beneficiaries of assistance. The data are relevant at community level, not for individual household targeting.</p>
<p><b>12. What are the main strengths of the indicator/-measure?</b></p>	<p><i>What are the main positive qualities of the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>Among the many indicators and methods that try to measure food insecurity, HFIAS is the only tool that measures a household's direct experience of food insecurity.</p> <p>If properly adapted to local context, the tool can be easily used and interpreted by local personnel.</p> <p>It is relatively easier to measure and results are more timely than child anthropometry.</p> <p>It is not time consuming (10 minutes per household) and not invasive.</p>

	<p>The HFIAS is a standardized tool that is based on universal behaviour in access to food.</p>
<p><b>13. In which context is the indicator/-measure most appropriate?</b></p>	<p><i>In which type of situation (sudden onset crisis, slow onset crisis, post-crisis, 'stable' situation) is the indicator/measure most suitable?</i></p> <p>It is relevant in slow-onset crises, protracted crises, chronic food insecurity and for monitoring at decentralized levels.</p> <p>Most of the research work on HFIAS has been done in stable situations and in rural settings; consequently, the relevance and usefulness in emergency situations and in urban settings need to be further explored.</p>
<p><b>14. Where can data and results on this indicator/measure be found?</b></p>	<p><i>From which sources, websites, reports etc. can data and results on the indicator/measure be found?</i></p> <p>HFIAS has been used in several surveys but there is no specific website where the data can be found.</p> <p>A report from a baseline survey conducted in Mozambique is available on the following website :  <a href="http://www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/indicfsnut/index.cfm?op=main&amp;cat_id=20943">www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/indicfsnut/index.cfm?op=main&amp;cat_id=20943</a></p>
<p><b>15. Which guidance can be consulted on the indicator/-measure?</b></p>	<p><i>Which reference documents exist on the collection, interpretation and use of the indicator/measure?</i></p> <p>Household food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) for measurement of food access: indicator guide. version 3. August 2007. Jennifer Coates, Anne Swindale and Paula Bilinsky. FANTA.</p> <p>Advances in measuring food insecurity in developing countries. Supplement of the J. of Nutrition, May 2006, Volume 136, Issue 5  <a href="http://www.fantaproject.org/publications/hfias2.shtml">http://www.fantaproject.org/publications/hfias2.shtml</a> (free download)</p> <p>Patrick Webb, Jennifer Coates, Edward A. Frongillo, Beatrice Lorge Rogers, Anne Swindale, and Paula Bilinsky  Measuring Household Food Insecurity: Why It's So Important and Yet So Difficult to Do. J. Nutr. 2006 136: 1404S-1408S.</p> <p>Anne Swindale and Paula Bilinsky  Development of a Universally Applicable Household Food Insecurity Measurement Tool: Process, Current Status, and Outstanding Issues  J. Nutr. 2006 136: 1449S-1452S.</p> <p>International workshop. Simple tools for measuring household access to food and dietary diversity. Nairobi 21-23 March 2007. FAO, EC/FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme, and FANTA.  <a href="http://www.foodsec.org/tr_nut_05.htm">http://www.foodsec.org/tr_nut_05.htm</a> (final report)</p> <p>1st Latin America &amp; Caribbean Conference on measurement of household food security. Antioquia, Colombia, 8-10 June 2007. Proceedings published in <i>Perspectivas en Nutrición Humana</i> (Separata Octubre 2007) Available at:  <a href="http://revinut.udea.edu.co">http://revinut.udea.edu.co</a></p>

*Literature on a related scale used in Brazil and other Latin American countries can be found at*

- Report on survey results in Brazil  
[http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/trabalhoerendimento/pnad2004/suplalimentar2004/supl\\_alimentar2004.pdf](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/trabalhoerendimento/pnad2004/suplalimentar2004/supl_alimentar2004.pdf)
- Insegurança alimentar medida a partir da percepção das pessoas. Ana Maria Segall Correa. <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ea/v21n60/a12v2160.pdf>
- 1st Latin America & Caribbean Conference on measurement of household food security. Antioquia, Colombia, 8-10 June 2007. Proceedings published in *Perspectivas en Nutrición Humana* (Separata Octubre 2007). Upcoming at: <http://revinut.udea.edu.co>

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