WFP leads the fight against hunger on many different fronts. Sometimes the front line is an emergency such as a war or a natural disaster. However, it is often less dramatic but equally urgent: grinding poverty or recurring drought.

To provide an appropriate humanitarian and longer-term response to complex food crises or chronic hunger triggered by poverty, WFP monitors the food security situation of populations and assesses their vulnerability to events that could plunge them into the vicious cycle of hunger.

This is the work of VAM, WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Unit.

VAM enables WFP and its partners to draw a full picture of who is at risk of hunger and malnutrition and to provide solutions, whether through food or other forms of assistance.

What does VAM do?

VAM undertakes in-depth assessments to understand the nature of food insecurity and the risks to livelihoods and monitors emerging food security problems.

VAM’s analyses support WFP decision-making in designing and managing emergency and development programmes. The information is crucial for targeting the poorest and most food-insecure people.

VAM uses a wide array of technological sources and analytical methods: satellite imagery and spatial analysis, monitoring of food prices in local markets, exhaustive household surveys and discussions with members of poor and food-insecure households.

VAM works in close collaboration with many partners worldwide. All activities are implemented jointly with governments, UN agencies such as FAO, UNICEF and WHO, local and international NGOs, universities and the private sector. These partnerships ensure a shared understanding of food security and common priorities for action.

The VAM network

VAM is a network of more than 120 experienced specialists in food security, nutrition, economics or data collection, deployed in more than 50 countries around the world. For example, in Africa, VAM has staff in more than 20 countries where WFP is operating, as well as in the four Regional Bureaux: Cairo, Dakar, Kampala and Johannesburg.

Strengths of WFP Vulnerability Analysis Mapping

Given WFP’s extensive field presence, VAM has the unique capacity and experience of collecting data at household and village level in more than 80 countries. VAM is presently providing baseline information in more than 40 priority countries prone to natural disaster and conflict.

VAM analyses contribute to the work of the broader humanitarian community in these areas.
Key VAM Activities

1. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analyses (CFSVA) provide in-depth studies to answer:
   - who are the people at risk of food insecurity?
   - how many are they?
   - where do they live?
   - why are they food insecure?
   - how can food assistance and other interventions make a difference in reducing poverty, hunger and supporting livelihoods?

CFSVAs have been prepared in 27 priority WFP countries providing the baseline for structural food insecurity and vulnerability issues at household, community and national level in a given country.

In Liberia, for example, the 2005 survey was the first synopsis of the food security situation in 20 years and is currently the main information source for decision-making among government, UN and donor agencies.

2. Food Security Monitoring Systems (FSMS) monitor threats and risks to current and future food security. They:
   - identify potential threats to household food security;
   - provide timely information to initiate contingency plans and trigger emergency food security assessments;
   - facilitate resource mobilization efforts; and
   - adjust ongoing food security interventions.

For example, in Afghanistan the FSMS provides information on 2,600 households every four months related to food consumption, food sources, food expenditure, food aid, cereal availability, coping mechanisms, emergencies, migration and rain/snowfall.

3. Geographical Information Systems:
VAM uses the most advanced technology, including Geographical Information Systems (GIS), innovative satellite applications, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) to collect data in the field.

GIS is an organized collection of computer hardware and software designed to capture, store, update, analyse and display all forms of geographically referenced information. It allows the combination of numerical data (for example on child weight, productive assets of a household, etc.) with location data (an address, province, school catchment area, flood zone, etc.). Through GIS, WFP can link geographical factors to socio-economic and political factors to improve understanding of the root causes of hunger.

For example, VAM and WFP’s School Feeding Service have developed a geo-referenced database and a Food for Education Global Atlas based on a broad range of indicators focusing on WFP interventions and beneficiaries as well as educational, economic, nutritional and health indicators (enrolment rates in primary schools, prevalence of malnutrition, etc.). This information improves WFP’s prioritisation of countries for school feeding programmes.

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