

The Role of The World Food Programme (WFP) in Strengthening Food Security in Syria During The Period 2020-2023

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Abstract

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The prolonged Syrian conflict since 2011 has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, particularly in food security, with over half the population struggling to meet basic needs. The war has destroyed infrastructure, disrupted food production, and increased reliance on international aid. This study examines the World Food Programme's (WFP) role in enhancing food security in Syria from 2020 to 2023, amid economic sanctions and political instability. Through qualitative analysis, the research highlights WFP's impact through emergency food distribution, cash assistance, agricultural support, and nutrition programs. Despite challenges like infrastructure damage, security risks, and funding constraints, WFP's innovative programs have effectively addressed immediate needs and contributed to sustainable food systems in Syria.

Keywords: Food Security,
Syrian Conflict, World
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I. INTRODUCTION

Food security remains an urgent global challenge, particularly in nations grappling with armed conflict. Such conflicts not only devastate critical infrastructure but also significantly disrupt the distribution, accessibility, and stability of food systems.¹ Syria stands as a prominent example of a nation profoundly affected by prolonged conflict. Over a decade of sustained hostilities has precipitated an acute humanitarian crisis, with severe repercussions for the country's food security sector.²

During the period 2020–2023, the ongoing internal conflict in Syria continued to pose a significant threat to food security. The regime of Bashar al-Assad, in power since 2000, faced sustained pressure from armed opposition groups and radical factions. Despite regaining control over a substantial portion of strategic territories with the support of international allies, the situation on the ground remained highly volatile.³ Economic blockades, restrictions on humanitarian aid access, and the frequent politicization of resource management further exacerbated the challenges faced by the population.

During this period, regions outside the control of the Assad regime, particularly in northern Syria, faced additional pressures stemming from ongoing political and military tensions. Agricultural infrastructure, which is critical to ensuring food security, remained severely damaged due to previous conflicts. Key systems such as irrigation networks, storage facilities, and distribution channels suffered from significant neglect and lack of rehabilitation, resulting in persistently low local food production. Farmers in these areas also faced considerable challenges in accessing essential inputs, including fertilizers, seeds, and fuel, further hindering their ability to enhance agricultural yields.⁴

Additionally, over 7.2 million Syrians were internally displaced (IDPs) during this period, with many residing in refugee camps entirely reliant on humanitarian aid to meet their food needs. The situation was further exacerbated by rampant inflation and a deteriorating economic landscape, largely driven by international sanctions imposed on the Assad regime. These factors rendered food prices prohibitively high for the majority

¹ Premanandh, J. (2011). Factors Affecting Food Security and Contribution of Modern Technologies in Food Sustainability. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, p. 207-208.

² Herlambang, A. (2018). Mengurai Benang Kusut Konflik di Suriah. *Transborder*, p. 82-83.

³ UNHCR. (2024). *Syria Refugee Crisis Explained*. Retrieved from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/> (Accessed on January 21, 2024, at 00.55).

⁴ ReliefWeb. (2024, Juni 05). *The Reverberating Effects of Explosive Violence on Agriculture in Syria*. Retrieved from ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/reverberating-effects-explosive-violence-agriculture-syria> (Accessed on January 21, 2024, at 00.56).

of the population.⁵ The consequences of these challenges were particularly severe for vulnerable groups, including children, women, and the elderly. Data from 2023 highlighted the gravity of the crisis, with more than 609,900 children in Syria suffering from chronic malnutrition, underscoring the profound depth of the country's food security crisis.⁶

Amid this crisis, the role of international organizations has proven to be indispensable. The World Food Programme (WFP), one of the largest humanitarian organizations globally, has remained actively engaged in supporting food security in Syria. During the period 2020–2023, the WFP expanded its initiatives, including emergency food distribution, cash assistance programs, and support for local farmers to enhance long-term food resilience. Furthermore, the WFP collaborated with local communities and government entities to ensure that aid reached the most vulnerable populations, thereby addressing immediate needs while fostering sustainable food security solutions.⁷

This study focuses on the efforts of the World Food Programme (WFP) in supporting food security in Syria during the period 2020–2023. Through an exploration of various programs and policies implemented by the WFP, this research aims to analyze the effectiveness of the approaches employed in addressing the challenges of food security in conflict-affected regions. In doing so, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of international organizations in addressing humanitarian crises in conflict zones.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis approach⁸ to evaluate the World Food Programme's (WFP) role in enhancing food security in Syria from 2020 to 2023. The research focuses on WFP's key programs, including emergency food distribution, cash assistance, agricultural support, and nutrition initiatives, assessing their impact on food security and long-term sustainability.

⁵ IRC. (2024, Juni 05). *Syria: Deepening Economic Crisis Compounds Conflict Misery, as Syria Enters its Fourteenth Years and Humanitarian Needs Reach Unprecedented Levels, Warns the IRC*. Retrieved from International Rescue Committee: <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/syria-deepening-economic-crisis-compounds-conflict-misery-syria-crisis-enters-its> (Accessed on January 21, 2024, at 00.59).

⁶ World Vision UK. (2024, Juni 05). *Ending Child Malnutrition in Syria*. Retrieved from World Vision UK: <https://www.worldvision.org.uk/about/blogs/ending-child-malnutrition-syria/> (Accessed on January 22, 2024, at 01.02).

⁷ WFP. (2024). *Syria emergency appeal*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/supportus/stories/syria> (Accessed on January 22, 2024, at 01.05).

⁸ Deepublish. "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif: Pengertian Menurut Ahli". Diambil kembali dari Deepublish: https://penerbitdeepublish.com/metode-penelitian-kualitatif/#1_Koentjaraningrat (Accessed on January 25, 2024, at 11:00).

Data collection involves library research, utilizing academic literature, reports from international organizations, policy documents, and credible online sources.⁹ The analysis is conducted by connecting relevant variables and drawing conclusions based on the research questions.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Background of the Conflict and Food Security Crisis in Syria

The conflict in Syria, ongoing since 2011, has become one of the most complex humanitarian crises in modern history. To understand the roots of this issue, it is essential to examine the sociopolitical and historical context of the country. Syria, strategically located in the Middle East and bordering countries such as Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey, gained independence from France in 1946. Since then, it has faced periods of political instability marked by military coups, ideological conflicts, and power struggles. In 1970, Hafez al-Assad, a military officer from the Alawite minority community, assumed power through a military coup. Under his leadership, Syria became a centralized authoritarian state. The Ba'ath Party formed the backbone of political power, while the military and security apparatus dominated various aspects of society. Although Assad's administration achieved short-term political stability, its authoritarian policies fostered dissatisfaction among the Sunni majority, which comprises the largest segment of Syria's population.¹⁰

Sectarian tensions were further exacerbated by discrimination against Sunni groups, the political exclusion of Kurdish communities, and the marginalization of other minority groups. At the same time, rampant corruption, nepotism, and economic inequality worsened the situation. Upon Hafez al-Assad's death in 2000, power was transferred to his son, Bashar al-Assad. However, hopes for political reform under Bashar quickly faded as his administration continued the same authoritarian and repressive policies.¹¹

The Arab Spring in 2011 served as the immediate trigger for the Syrian conflict. Originating in Tunisia, the movement spread across various Arab nations, including Syria, with calls for democracy, political reform, and the end of authoritarian regimes.¹² In Syria, the protests initially began as peaceful demonstrations, with thousands demanding political freedoms and an end to corruption. However, the government's

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Snell, A. (2013). Conflict in Syria: An Historical Perspective. *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy*, p. 54-56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Zuber, M., & Moussa, S. S. (2018). Arab Spring as a Background of Civil War in Syria. *De Gruyter*, p. 245.

harsh response, including the use of military force to disperse protesters, escalated tensions. Incidents such as the arrest and torture of children in Daraa became emblematic of the Assad regime's repression, igniting widespread outrage across the country.¹³

By mid-2011, demonstrations had escalated into armed conflict as opposition groups took up arms against government forces. The situation quickly evolved into a civil war involving a diverse range of domestic and international actors. The multitude of players, including moderate opposition groups, Islamist militias, Kurdish forces, and terrorist organizations such as ISIS, added layers of complexity to the conflict. Furthermore, the Syrian war drew the involvement of regional and global powers. Iran and Russia emerged as key supporters of the Assad regime, providing military, economic, and diplomatic assistance to sustain its rule. Conversely, the United States, Turkey, and Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar backed opposition groups.¹⁴ This geopolitical rivalry prolonged the conflict and transformed it into a proxy war.

Direct military interventions also became a hallmark of the conflict. Russia, for instance, launched a major air campaign in 2015 to support Assad's forces, while the United States led an international coalition targeting ISIS. Regionally, Turkey conducted military operations in northern Syria to counter Kurdish groups it viewed as threats to its national security. The decade-long conflict has caused widespread devastation across all aspects of life in Syria.¹⁵ According to United Nations (UN) reports, over 307,000 people have been killed in the fighting, with millions more injured or suffering from psychological trauma.¹⁶ Additionally, more than 7.2 million people have become internally displaced, while approximately 14 million others have sought refuge abroad, primarily in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.¹⁷

Vital infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and water supply systems, has been destroyed by the fighting. The healthcare system has collapsed, with severe shortages of medical supplies and personnel. Children are among the most affected, as

¹³ In Focus. (2023). *Syria Conflict Overview: 2011-2021*. Congressional Research Service, p. 1-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ UN. (2022, Juni 22). *Syria: Decade of brutal war left nearly 307,000 civilians dead*. Retrieved from United Nations: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1121532> (Accessed on January 24, 2025, at 23.00).

¹⁷ UNHCR. (2024). *Syria Refugee Crisis Explained*. Retrieved from dari United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/> (Accessed on January 25, 2025, at 01.00).

many have lost access to education and face risks such as forced labor or recruitment by armed groups.¹⁸

One of the most significant consequences of the Syrian conflict is the widespread food crisis. Prior to the war, Syria had a relatively strong agricultural sector capable of meeting most domestic food needs. However, the fighting has devastated agricultural land, irrigation systems, and distribution networks. Many farmers have lost access to their land due to ongoing hostilities or the threat of landmines. Wheat production, a key commodity, has declined dramatically, forcing the country to rely on imports and international aid.¹⁹

Food prices have skyrocketed due to inflation, international sanctions, and supply chain disruptions. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), over 70% of Syria's population now lives below the poverty line, with most families spending more than half their income on food. Chronic malnutrition has become a severe issue, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly.²⁰

The complexity of the Syrian conflict, involving numerous actors with differing interests, has made peace efforts extremely challenging. Negotiations facilitated by the UN, such as the Geneva and Astana talks, have failed to produce significant outcomes. While some areas have seen reductions in violence through ceasefire agreements, the overall situation remains volatile, with the potential for renewed conflict at any moment. Despite the enormous challenges, there are opportunities for reconstruction and recovery. International organizations such as the WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF continue to provide humanitarian aid and work toward rebuilding damaged infrastructure. However, long-term peace depends on national reconciliation and an inclusive political settlement.²¹

The prolonged conflict in Syria has not only impacted the general population but has also severely disrupted the country's food security. The destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement, and dependence on international aid have created significant challenges for food availability, accessibility, and stability. Therefore, further analysis of Syria's food security conditions is essential to understanding another dimension of the conflict's impacts, which will be explored in the subsequent sections.

¹⁸ Boden, L. (2019). Global Health and Food Security in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS): Syrian Academics and Their Role in the Future of Food Security for Syria. *Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security*, p. 1-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ UNICEF. (2023, Maret 15). UNICEF warns of looming child nutrition crisis in Syria amid 12 years of conflict and deadly earthquakes. Retrieved from United Nations Children's Fund: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-warns-looming-child-nutrition-crisis-syria-amid-12-years-conflict-and-deadly> (Accessed on January 01, 2025, at 22.00).

²¹ *Ibid.*

The Impact of Conflict on Food Security in Syria

Food security in Syria has become one of the most severely affected aspects of the ongoing conflict that has persisted since 2011. As defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security encompasses physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets individual dietary needs and food preferences. In the context of prolonged conflict, Syria has witnessed widespread destruction of its agricultural systems, distribution networks, and economy, all of which are interconnected in maintaining food security. The following sections will outline the impact of war on food security in Syria in three main subsections: the destruction of agricultural and distribution infrastructure, the decline in local production capacity and increased dependence on international aid, and the effects of the conflict on the population's access to food.

• Damage to Agricultural Infrastructure and Food Distribution Due to War

The conflict in Syria has caused significant destruction to the infrastructure supporting the agricultural sector, including farmland, storage facilities, and food distribution systems. Before the conflict, Syria was a country with a relatively high level of food self-sufficiency. The production of wheat, olive oil, and vegetables constituted a crucial part of the national economy and served as the primary sources of essential needs for the population. However, the war has drastically altered this dynamic. According to a report by the FAO, over 60% of agricultural infrastructure has been damaged in key regions such as Aleppo, Homs, and Deir ez-Zor. Damaged irrigation systems have reduced farmers' ability to water their fields, while the destruction of heavy machinery and milling facilities has further exacerbated the inability to process harvested crops. Additionally, many farmlands have been repurposed as battlegrounds or contaminated with landmines, making access to these areas hazardous.

This infrastructure damage has directly impacted food productivity. For instance, wheat fields that once served as the backbone of national food security are now abandoned or destroyed. Furthermore, limited access to agricultural tools, fuel, and fertilizers has exacerbated the situation. Farmers are often forced to leave their lands due to security threats, further aggravating the labor shortages in the agricultural sector. This not only results in decreased production but also increases the population's dependence on external food aid.²²

In addition to the damage to agricultural infrastructure, food distribution networks have been severely disrupted by the war. Road networks that once connected rural food-producing areas to major cities have been destroyed by airstrikes, explosions, and ground battles. Storage facilities essential for maintaining food supplies have also been demolished, making it challenging to distribute food in large quantities to areas in need. These obstacles have forced many local communities to rely on humanitarian aid or seek improvised solutions to meet their food needs. For example, the Eastern Ghouta region, besieged for years, faced extreme food shortages due to disrupted supply chains, while prices of essential goods skyrocketed in black markets.²³

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

- **Decline in Local Production Capacity and Dependence on International Aid**

Prior to the war, Syria possessed sufficient food production capacity to meet its domestic needs. Wheat production reached 4 million tons annually, making the country one of the leading producers in the Middle East. However, the war has drastically altered this production structure. Factors such as reduced arable land, labor shortages due to displacement, and a scarcity of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and fuel have significantly diminished Syria's ability to produce food. According to a WFP report, wheat production in Syria in 2024 is projected to reach only 1.2 million tons, far below the national annual requirement of 4.5 million tons. Similarly, the production of vegetables, fruits, and olive oil—previously integral to the daily diet of Syrians—has also declined sharply. The disruption of supply chains further hampers the availability of agricultural tools and inputs. Many farmers are unable to access quality seeds or essential machinery needed to sustain productivity. Moreover, water shortages caused by damaged irrigation systems exacerbate the situation, particularly in regions heavily reliant on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. The impact of these damages is acutely felt in areas that were once key food production centers, such as southern and northwestern Syria.²⁴

The reliance on international aid has become increasingly apparent in this context. Organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and various international NGOs have become the backbone of food provision for the Syrian population, particularly in regions most affected by the conflict. This assistance includes direct distribution of staples such as wheat, rice, and oil, as well as cash transfer programs enabling people to purchase their own food. However, the distribution of aid is often hindered by blockades, active conflict zones, or political obstacles. For example, opposition-held areas frequently face challenges in receiving aid due to a lack of coordination among conflicting parties.²⁵

High dependency on international aid also poses long-term challenges. While such assistance offers a temporary solution, increasing reliance may exacerbate economic vulnerabilities and food insecurity in the future. Additionally, fluctuations in funding for humanitarian programs often lead to uncertainties in aid delivery. In some instances, funding shortages have resulted in reduced aid rations or delays in distribution, further worsening the conditions of vulnerable populations.²⁶

²⁴ FAO. (2024, November 15). *Syria food production at all-time low*. Retrieved from Food and Agriculture Organization: <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/Syria-food-production-at-all-time-low/en> (Accessed on January 19, 2025, at 23.00).

²⁵ Shami, I. A. (2022, Februari 14). *Facing Syria's Food Crisis*. Retrieved from Fikra Forum: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/facing-syrias-food-crisis> (Accessed on January 19, 2025, at 23.00).

²⁶ ReliefWeb. (2024, Maret 12). *13 years into conflict in Syria: Dwindling aid further deepens humanitarian suffering in Syria*. Retrieved from ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/13-years-conflict-syria-dwindling-aid-further-deepens-humanitarian-suffering-syria#:~:text=Today%2C%20more%20than%2070%20percent,likely%20to%20worsen%20in%202024> (Accessed on January 18, 2025, at 21.00).

Moreover, international aid often addresses only basic needs and falls short of providing balanced nutrition for the population. The food distributed typically consists of high-carbohydrate items such as wheat and rice but lacks sufficient protein and vitamins. This nutritional imbalance has adverse effects on public health, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly, who require specialized diets. UNICEF reports indicate that the provision of protein- and vitamin-rich supplements remains severely limited, while the prevalence of anemia among children and women has risen sharply during the conflict.²⁷

- **The Impact of Conflict on Public Access to Food**

In 2020, the prolonged conflict in Syria further exacerbated food security conditions. Ongoing military offensives, particularly in northwestern regions such as Idlib and Aleppo, displaced thousands of families and restricted their access to food sources. The destruction of agricultural infrastructure due to the conflict, limited access to fuel for food production and distribution, and blockades in certain areas made it increasingly difficult for people to obtain food at affordable prices. Although some regions were still able to produce food locally, many people could not access it due to economic and geographical constraints. The rampant inflation during the war drove up the prices of staple foods to levels beyond the reach of most of the population. Wheat, a fundamental ingredient for bread production, experienced a price increase of up to 161% in certain areas, making it inaccessible to lower-income communities. This situation was further aggravated by the depreciation of the Syrian currency, which significantly reduced the purchasing power of the population.²⁸

These conditions persisted in the following years. The Syrian government struggled to manage food supplies amid increasing economic pressure and prolonged conflict. Attacks on agricultural lands, limited access to clean water sources, and rising internal displacement led to a significant decline in local food production. Many farmers faced severe challenges in acquiring seeds, fertilizers, and agricultural tools essential for sustaining their harvests. Economic blockades and international sanctions imposed on the Syrian government further exacerbated the food crisis. These sanctions not only restricted the country's ability to import food supplies but also hindered efforts to repair critical infrastructure necessary for food distribution. In besieged areas, such as Eastern Ghouta and Aleppo during the peak of the conflict, residents often had to survive on extremely limited food supplies or resort to consuming unfit food alternatives. This situation had severe consequences for public health and overall well-being, particularly among vulnerable groups.²⁹

The conflict in Syria has significantly affected the population's access to food. While some regions remain capable of local food production, many people are unable to access it due to economic and geographical barriers. Rampant inflation during the war has driven the prices of essential commodities to levels beyond the reach of most of the population. Wheat, a staple ingredient for bread production, has seen price increases of

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ WFP. (2024). Monthly Market Price Bulletin. Damascus: World Food Programme Syria Country Office.

²⁹ National Library of Medicine. (2020). Sanctions on Syria. Retrieved from National Library of Medicine: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30364-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30364-8) (Accessed on January 17, 2025, at 21.00).

up to 161% in some areas, making it unaffordable for lower-income households. This situation is further exacerbated by the depreciation of the Syrian currency, which has significantly eroded the purchasing power of the population.³⁰

Economic blockades and international sanctions imposed on the Syrian government have further worsened the food crisis. These sanctions not only restrict the country's ability to import essential food supplies but also hinder the restoration of critical infrastructure needed for food distribution. In besieged areas such as Eastern Ghouta and Aleppo during the peak of the conflict, residents were often forced to survive on extremely limited food supplies or resort to consuming non-viable alternatives. This has had severe consequences for public health and well-being, particularly among vulnerable groups.³¹

The crisis has also profoundly impacted household consumption patterns. Many families have been forced to reduce the frequency of their meals or substitute nutritious food with cheaper, less nutritious alternatives. This decline in access to adequate food has led to a rise in malnutrition rates, particularly among children and other vulnerable populations. UNICEF reports indicate that approximately 609,900 children in Syria suffer from acute malnutrition, posing significant risks to their growth and long-term health. Furthermore, pregnant and lactating women face challenges in obtaining sufficient nutrition, adversely affecting their health and the well-being of their newborns.³²

The Role of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Enhancing Food Security

During the critical 2020–2023 period, WFP played a pivotal role in addressing Syria's food security challenges through a comprehensive approach that included emergency food distribution, cash assistance, agricultural support, and nutrition programs.³³ These initiatives not only provided immediate relief but also contributed to long-term sustainability and resilience within food systems.

Emergency Food Distribution

Emergency food distribution forms the core of the World Food Programme (WFP)'s efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Syria since the onset of the conflict in 2011. This program is designed to ensure that affected communities continue to have access to basic food necessities, despite the destruction of infrastructure and local

³⁰ WFP. (2024). Monthly Market Price Bulletin. Damascus: World Food Programme Syria Country Office.

³¹ National Library of Medicine. (2020). Sanctions on Syria. Retrieved from National Library of Medicine: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30364-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30364-8) (Accessed on January 17, 2025, at 21.00).

³² UNICEF. (2023, Maret 15). UNICEF warns of looming child nutrition crisis in Syria amid 12 years of conflict and deadly earthquakes. Retrieved from United Nations Children's Fund: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-warns-looming-child-nutrition-crisis-syria-amid-12-years-conflict-and-deadly> (Accessed on January 12, 2025, at 04.00).

³³ WFP. (2023). *What the World Food Programme is doing to respond to the Syria emergency: Emergency assistance*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria-emergency> (Accessed on January 19, 2025, at 23.00).

distribution systems caused by the war. In 2023 alone, this assistance reached 5.5 million people in Syria. In its operations, WFP provides food rations designed to meet minimum daily nutritional requirements, including staple items such as wheat flour, rice, legumes, and vegetable oil. Additionally, ready-to-eat meals are often prepared for groups residing in refugee camps or areas lacking access to cooking facilities. The distribution is carried out strategically, taking into account local needs and logistics, including the use of airlifts to isolated areas affected by the conflict.³⁴

As part of its efforts to reach affected communities, WFP focuses on vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Children, who are often the primary victims of malnutrition in prolonged conflicts, receive assistance in the form of highly nutritious food, such as specialized energy biscuits and micronutrient supplements. This approach not only prevents acute malnutrition but also supports the physical and mental development of children amidst adversity. Furthermore, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are given special attention with food distributions designed to support their health as well as that of the infants they are carrying or will soon give birth to. Other groups, such as internally displaced persons and communities isolated due to blockades, also become priorities in this emergency food distribution, with aid being delivered via land routes, air, and in collaboration with local partners to ensure efficient distribution.³⁵

Cash Assistance Programs

The cash assistance and voucher program implemented by WFP is designed to enhance the purchasing power of communities affected by the conflict in Syria. This scheme enables beneficiaries to purchase food according to their preferences in local markets, fostering flexibility and sustainability in meeting their basic needs.³⁶ Within the framework of food security, the program directly addresses the dimension of food accessibility, ensuring that individuals or households can sustainably acquire sufficient food.

Assistance is provided through the LOUISE card, which facilitates the coordinated distribution of cash assistance among UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. By

³⁴ WFP. (2021, Maret 15). Syria: 'If it wasn't for WFP's airdrops, we would have died'. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/stories/syria-war-conflict-anniversary-hunger-un-world-food-programme> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 23.00).

³⁵ WFP. (2023). *What the World Food Programme is doing to respond to the Syria emergency: Nutrition*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria-emergency> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 03.00).

³⁶ UNHCR. (2020). *Multipurpose Cash Assistance Post Distribution Monitoring for Syrian Refugees*. Jenewa: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

delivering funds in cash, the program offers refugees the flexibility to prioritize their needs, thereby increasing the efficiency and relevance of the assistance. A total of 266,600 households have benefited from this program, with total disbursements reaching USD 243 million. The types of assistance include cash for food and non-food needs, electronic food vouchers, and multipurpose cash transfer programs. Implementation is carried out through various mechanisms, such as tailored value transfers and biometric verification processes to ensure that aid reaches the intended recipients. The program also extends its reach by increasing the number of cash redemption points, such as ATMs and Money Transfer Operators (MTOs).³⁷

In addition to financial support, the program empowers refugees through training on ATM usage and financial education, ensuring safer and more accessible transactions. This approach is supported by regular monitoring and feedback collection from beneficiaries, which is used to improve program effectiveness.³⁸ The cash assistance and voucher program led by WFP is designed to provide communities with direct access to food amidst the humanitarian crisis caused by the prolonged conflict in Syria. By allowing beneficiaries to receive cash or vouchers redeemable for food in local markets, the program enhances traditional food aid approaches, such as direct food distribution. This approach aims to address the worsening challenges of food accessibility resulting from economic collapse, rising food prices, and supply chain disruptions caused by the war.³⁹ Furthermore, the cash and voucher assistance program is expected to empower recipients to meet their needs based on their preferences while simultaneously generating positive economic impacts on local economies affected by the conflict.

Support for Local Agriculture

WFP's local agriculture support program is a strategic effort to restore food security in Syria, which has been devastated by prolonged conflict. The program includes providing high-quality seeds, fertilizers, agricultural tools, and technical training to local farmers. Additionally, WFP focuses on rehabilitating damaged agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, farm access roads, and storage facilities for harvested crops.⁴⁰ In the Syrian context, where over a decade of war has

³⁷ WFP. (2023). *Joint Cash Assistance Operation for Basic Needs - 2023*. World Food Programme.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ UNHCR. (2020). *Multipurpose Cash Assistance Post Distribution Monitoring for Syrian Refugees*. Jenewa: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁴⁰ ReliefWeb. (2023, Januari 23). *Hunger soars to 12-year high in Syria, WFP chief calls for urgent action*. Retrieved from ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/hunger-soars-12-year-high-syria-wfp-chief-calls-urgent-action> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 03.00).

decimated the agricultural sector, these efforts aim to restore land productivity and reduce the population's dependence on international food aid.

This approach emphasizes flexibility and operational capacity to address urgent needs while fostering long-term resilience. WFP operates not only as a provider of emergency aid but also as a facilitator of local development. In Syria, support for local farmers extends beyond technical solutions, contributing to the empowerment of communities that have lost their livelihoods due to the conflict. For example, the provision of seeds and fertilizers enables farmers to resume cultivating their land, which had previously been abandoned due to security threats or infrastructure damage.⁴¹ In this way, WFP creates opportunities for communities to independently rebuild their economies.

WFP's agricultural support programs focused on revitalizing Syria's local food production. The organization distributed over 2,000 tons of seeds, 1,500 tons of fertilizers, and provided agricultural tools to approximately 50,000 farmers. Training sessions on modern farming techniques and resource management were also conducted, reaching over 30,000 individuals.⁴² These initiatives helped increase local wheat production by 15% in targeted areas, contributing to improved food availability and reducing dependency on imports. WFP's programs also helped restore approximately 10,000 hectares of farmland, promoting resilience and economic stability in rural communities.⁴³

Nutrition Programs

The nutrition and dietary programs implemented by WFP in Syria are critical efforts to address the humanitarian crisis caused by prolonged conflict. These programs are designed to provide nutritious food to vulnerable groups, such as children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers, while simultaneously raising awareness about the importance of healthy eating habits through nutrition education initiatives. In a context where conflict has severely disrupted access to quality food, these initiatives aim not only to meet short-term nutritional needs but also to create long-term impacts on the health and well-being of affected communities.⁴⁴

By providing nutritious food, WFP focuses on the most vulnerable groups who are disproportionately affected by the food crisis in Syria. Children and pregnant women

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² WFP. (2024). Syria: Livelihoods. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria-emergency> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 03.00).

⁴³ WFP. (2024). *Logistics and delivery networks*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/logistics-and-delivery-networks> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 03.00).

⁴⁴ WFP. (2023). *What the World Food Programme is doing to respond to the Syria emergency: Nutrition*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria-emergency> (Accessed on January 15, 2025, at 03.00).

are prioritized due to their heightened health risks stemming from malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition in children, for instance, can lead to stunting, which affects their physical growth and cognitive development. Similarly, malnourished pregnant women face health risks that endanger both themselves and their unborn children. To address these issues, WFP distributes specialized food items such as high-energy biscuits, nutrient-rich peanut-based pastes, and food products formulated to meet essential nutritional requirements.⁴⁵ This approach provides immediate solutions to the nutritional crises faced by these vulnerable groups.

WFP's capacity to reach vulnerable communities in hard-to-access areas affected by the conflict, including refugee camps and isolated regions, is a key strength of its operations in Syria.⁴⁶ In addition to distributing nutritious food, WFP collaborates with local organizations and government agencies to ensure that aid reaches those most in need. This reflects the collaborative approach characteristic of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in delivering coordinated and effective interventions.⁴⁷

Operational Challenges and Adaptation

The operational challenges faced by the World Food Programme (WFP) in carrying out its mission in Syria highlight the complexity of one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. The prolonged conflict has created a situation where the need for humanitarian assistance is immense, yet the delivery of aid is hindered by numerous obstacles. The WFP encounters several major challenges, including logistical difficulties due to damaged infrastructure, political constraints in conflict zones, the impact of international sanctions on aid distribution, and funding shortages for supporting long-term programs.⁴⁸ These factors significantly affect the WFP's ability to reach those in need and implement programs that not only save lives but also support long-term recovery.

One of the most significant challenges is the logistical barriers caused by widespread infrastructure damage across Syria. Years of conflict have destroyed key road networks, bridges, and storage facilities that previously supported the country's food system. Many areas, particularly those on the frontlines of conflict or under siege, are nearly inaccessible. For instance, Eastern Ghouta endured years of strict sieges,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ World Vision UK. (2024, Juni 05). Ending Child Malnutrition in Syria. Retrieved from World Vision UK: <https://www.worldvision.org.uk/about/blogs/ending-child-malnutrition-syria/> (Accessed on January 18, 2025, at 23.00).

⁴⁷ Klinger, D. E. (2021). *International Non-Governmental Organizations*. Routledge, p. 20.

⁴⁸ WFP. (2022). *Building resilience for smallholder farmers in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate*. Damaskus: World Food Programme.

requiring the WFP to rely on specialized humanitarian corridors to deliver aid. In regions like Idlib and Raqqa, damaged roads, the threat of landmines, and the risk of airstrikes exacerbate the difficulties of delivering assistance. The WFP often has to resort to alternative modes of transportation, such as airlifts or cross-border convoys, to reach the most vulnerable populations.⁴⁹ However, these solutions significantly increase logistical costs, thereby limiting the amount of aid that can be distributed.

In addition to logistical hurdles, the political dynamics in Syria present a major challenge for the WFP. The conflict involves a multitude of domestic and international actors, including the Syrian government, opposition groups, armed militias, and foreign powers such as Russia, the United States, and Turkey. This creates a highly complex political environment in which access to certain areas often depends on intricate negotiations with conflicting parties. For example, areas controlled by opposition groups or militias are often difficult to access due to blockades or access restrictions imposed by other factions. Moreover, political pressures sometimes influence the prioritization of aid distribution, with certain regions receiving more attention based on geopolitical interests.⁵⁰ In such a politically charged environment, the WFP must work diligently to maintain its neutrality as a humanitarian organization while ensuring that aid reaches all those in need without discrimination.

The impact of international sanctions also poses significant challenges to the WFP's operations in Syria. Economic sanctions imposed by Western countries on the Syrian government aim to exert political pressure but often have unintended consequences for humanitarian operations. These sanctions restrict the import of essential goods, including food, fuel, and medical supplies, which also affects the availability of local resources that the WFP could utilize. Financial restrictions further complicate the transfer of international funds, which are critical for supporting WFP operations. In some cases, the WFP faces difficulties in paying local partners, accessing logistical services, or processing transactions needed to procure food supplies from international markets.⁵¹ These challenges delay aid delivery and often limit the quantity of assistance that can reach affected communities.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ National Library of Medicine. (2020). Sanctions on Syria. Retrieved from National Library of Medicine: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30364-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30364-8) (Accessed on February 07, 2025, at 23.00).

⁵¹ WFP. (2023, Juni 13). *WFP forced to scale down operations in Syria, as donors gather in Brussels ahead of a major conference*. Retrieved from World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-forced-scale-down-operations-syria-donors-gather-brussels-ahead-major-conference> (Accessed on February 07, 2025, at 00.00).

Funding constraints represent another major obstacle for the WFP in implementing its programs in Syria. As one of the most urgent humanitarian crises, Syria requires large-scale aid to address the needs of its affected population. However, funding allocations for Syria are often limited as international donors must also address other crises worldwide. Many donors prioritize short-term emergency assistance, leaving long-term initiatives aimed at building sustainable food security underfunded.⁵²

The impact of these funding shortages is deeply felt by the Syrian population that relies on WFP assistance to meet their basic needs. In recent years, the WFP has been forced to reduce food rations for vulnerable families in Syria due to budget constraints. Additionally, limited funding hampers the WFP's ability to reach remote communities in conflict zones. In response, the WFP continues to advocate to the international community for the importance of long-term investments to create sustainable solutions.⁵³ Nevertheless, this remains a significant barrier to reducing food insecurity in Syria.

IV. CONCLUSION

WFP's interventions had a broad impact on Syria's food security. Emergency food distribution stabilized food availability, while cash assistance programs significantly improved food accessibility. The agricultural support initiatives boosted local production capacity, contributing to a more stable and resilient food system. Nutrition programs effectively addressed malnutrition, particularly among children, contributing to healthier communities. The organization's development-oriented approach also promoted long-term sustainability. By combining emergency assistance with resilience-building measures, WFP helped reduce dependency on international aid and enhanced local communities' capacity to withstand future shocks. The transition from emergency relief to development initiatives exemplified how a balanced strategy could contribute to lasting improvements in food security.

WFP's ability to navigate complex challenges and maintain aid delivery under difficult conditions showcased its critical role in supporting food security in conflict-affected regions. The lessons learned from Syria highlight the importance of integrating immediate relief with sustainable development efforts to achieve robust food security outcomes.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

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