

Livelihood Coping Strategies Indicator for Essential Needs

Guidance Note



World Food
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1. About this guidance

This document note was created to guide the design of questionnaires, training of enumerators, analysis, and reporting on Livelihood Coping Strategies for Essential Needs (LCS-EN) indicator. Other useful resources about this indicator, including the standard modules, the full list of coping strategies and syntax files can be found on the [VAM Resource Centre](#) page.

2. Introduction to Livelihood Coping Strategies

The Livelihood Coping Strategies (LCS) indicators are household-level indicators that are relatively simple, quick to use, straightforward to understand and correlate with other measures of food security and vulnerability. The LCS indicator is defined as the share of the population who adopted coping strategies of different severity levels in the past 30 days or exhausted them within the past 12 months. They are based on a series of questions about how households manage to cope with shocks that stress their livelihoods.

Households are exposed to various shocks, including climatic, economic, environmental, and conflict-related stressors. These shocks can affect livelihoods and physical, human, and social capital to varying degrees. Shocks are associated with possible disruptions in production, supply, markets, and household income generation, which affect households' ability to meet their needs. Households tend to adapt and cope in a variety of ways to ensure access to basic food and other essential needs. Coping can be defined as a series of behavioural changes taken to manage specific external or internal demands or shocks that exceed the existing resources or capacity of an individual or household. The coping behaviours applied by households can vary from shorter-term consumption-based related strategies (or reduced coping strategies) to longer-term livelihood-based coping strategies, to overcome food shortages and/or meet their essential needs.

At an early onset of an emergency, households tend to resort to shorter-term consumption-based coping strategies to overcome immediate challenges in food shortages. If the situation persists, households begin seeking other outlets to meet their basic food or other essential needs. The livelihood coping strategies applied can damage households' productivity, wealth, and well-being - in the medium and long term - as some of these coping strategies could be difficult or nearly impossible to reverse. The livelihood coping strategies can be applied to cope specifically with food shortages (coping strategies for food security) or because of a more general issue in meeting essential needs (coping strategies for essential needs).

It is important to consider that strategies adopted by households vary according to the causes of the crisis, types of crises, and household characteristics. The characteristics of households include the number of income sources and access stability, household ownership of assets, and the education level of the household head. The selection of livelihood-coping strategies made by the analysts from the master list must also consider the local context, with the differentiation made for rural and urban areas; note that there are some suggested coping strategies which are only applicable in rural settings. The set of possible strategies asked to households should be adequately adapted to the local situation.

This guidance describes the tool and walks the reader through a step-by-step process to build the Livelihood Coping Strategies for Essential Needs (LCS-EN) data collection module. It guides the reader on how to adapt the tool to the local context, train enumerators on the tool, ensure data quality, and analyse information using standard analysis scripts. For guidance on LCS-FS visit this [link](#).

The LCS-EN module is used to better understand the medium and longer-term coping capacity of households. For instance, the sale of productive assets is likely to affect the sustainability of a household's livelihoods and may therefore translate into reduced physical and/or economic access to essential needs in the medium- to long-term.

Livelihood Coping Strategies for Essential Needs (LCS-EN) vs Livelihood Coping Strategies for Food Security (LCS-FS)

The livelihood coping strategies indicator thus exists in two versions, one for essential needs (LCS-EN) and another food security (LCS-FS). The food security version is to be used when the objective of a data collection exercise has a specific focus on food security¹. LCS-FS is recommended to be used in contexts where the prevalence of food insecurity is high, and food needs are on top of unmet needs in the communities. The version for essential needs should be used in essential needs assessments, or whenever the objective of an assessment is broader than food security and tackles other essential needs (shelter, health, etc).

The LCS indicators are based on a series of questions asking households about their engagement in certain coping strategies in a given period. In the LCS-EN version, households are asked about their engagement in coping strategies "due to a lack of resources to access essential needs (e.g., food, shelter, education services, health services, etc.". However, in the LCS-FS version, households are asked if they engaged in coping strategies "due to a lack of food or money to buy it".

In circumstances where the LCS-EN module is used in an essential needs or other multisectoral assessment, but food security needs to be calculated using the Consolidated Approach for Reporting on food Insecurity (CARI), then the LCS-FS indicator can be calculated through the LCS-EN data (see Section 11).

3. What is the LCS-EN used for?

The LCS-EN indicator is used in Essential Needs Assessments (ENA) to understand how people cope in times of crisis. Coping behaviour shows how households prioritize when resources are insufficient, revealing the trade-offs households are forced to make. The LCS-EN provides an indication of the sustainability of a population's capacities for meeting their essential needs, whereas a high proportion of households engaging in crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies shows that households are depleting their assets or damaging their future productivity in order to meet their immediate essential needs.

¹ If the assessment is expected to feed into the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)/ Cadre Harmonisé (CH) analysis exercises, then it is highly recommended to use the LCS-FS module.

The LCS-EN indicator can be used as a standalone indicator for measuring long-term capacity to meet needs, or in combination with other essential needs indicators such as ECMEN, MDDI and debt indicators, it can give insight into the underlying factors constraining households' ability to meet essential needs.

The LCS-EN is used to classify households into vulnerability categories, in combination with the Food Consumption Score (FCS) and Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs (ECMEN) indicators. For more details, see Chapter 6 of the [Essential Needs Assessment \(ENA\) Guidance Note](#).

The LCS-EN is also used to monitor WFP programme implementation and it is one of the indicators in the [WFP Corporate Results Framework](#).

4. Master list of available coping strategies

Coping strategies are categorized by how they influence household access to essential needs. To facilitate the understanding of the livelihood coping strategies and the potential impacts that they may have on the households affected, they can be grouped into one of the following four categories regardless of the severity level of the strategy:

- Strategies that **increase household resources to access essential needs** and have a **medium or long-term negative impact on the livelihoods** of the household.
- Strategies that **increase household resources to access essential needs** and have a **long-term negative impact** on the **human capital, dignity, or well-being** of the household.
- Strategies that **decrease the number of people that require resources** in the household in the **medium or longer-term**; or
- Strategies that **manage available resources** to sustain consumption of essential goods and services and support livelihoods.

Over various applications of the LCS indicators, several coping behaviours have been adopted in each of these categories (see Table 1 – listed in no particular order within these categories). It is important to note that the master list includes as many as possible coping strategies. However, context and situation-specific coping strategies can be developed, when required. This categorisation of the strategies can thus be useful in guiding the FGDs (See Annex I for more info).

Table 1: Categories of Coping Strategies for Essential Needs

Strategies that increase household resources to access essential needs and have medium or long-term negative impacts on the assets and livelihood of the household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sold the last female animal due to a lack of resources to access essential needs • Sold items that were provided as in-kind assistance due to a lack of resources to access essential needs • Borrowed money to cover essential needs • Pawned household items due to a lack of resources to access essential needs • Sold productive assets or means of transport (sewing machine, wheelbarrow, bicycle, car, etc.) due to a lack of resources to access essential needs • Mortgaged/sold the house where the household was permanently living or land due to a lack of resources to access essential needs
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sold more animals than usual due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Consumed seed stocks that were to be saved for the next season due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Decreased expenditures on fertilizer, pesticide, fodder, animal feed, veterinary care, etc. due to a lack of resources to access essential needs
Strategies that increase household resources to access essential needs and have a long-term negative impact on human capital, dignity or wellbeing of the household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrew children from school due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Moved children to less expensive school due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Reduced expenses on education due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Reduced expenses on health (including medications) due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Reduced or ceased payments on essential utilities and bills due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Moved to less expensive accommodation due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Children (under 15 years old) worked to contribute to household income (e.g., maid, casual labour) due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Marriage of a female child (under 15) due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Mortgaged/sold the house where the household was permanently living or land due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Begged (i.e., ask strangers for money or food) and/or scavenged due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Engaged in socially degrading, high-risk, exploitive or life-threatening jobs, or income-generating activities (e.g., smuggling, theft, joining armed groups, prostitution) due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Bartered/exchanged clothing for food due to a lack of resources to access essential needs
Strategies that decrease the number of people that require resources in the household in the medium or longer-terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A minor (under age 15) household member migrated informally due to a lack of resources to access essential needs A household member migrated informally due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Sent one or more household members to live elsewhere due to a lack of resources to access essential needs
Strategies that manage available resources to sustain consumption of essential goods and services and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritized consumption of essential goods of active household members² due to a lack of resources to access essential needs Sold, shared or exchanged in-kind assistance due to a lack of resources to access essential needs

² Active members are defined as household members who work. This means they are engaged in income-generating activities, including production for own consumption of the household.

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If the master list of suggested standard strategies does not fit the context, or if the analysts are aware of other strategies used by the community to cope with food shortages through secondary data or anecdotal evidence, country offices (COs) can develop context-specific strategies. However, newly formulated coping strategies must be appropriate and **must be communicated with the Needs Assessment and Targeting Unit of the Research Assessment and Monitoring Division of WFP's HQ for review and inclusion both in the standard Codebook and Survey Designer platform.**

5. Severity levels of livelihood coping strategies

The master list presents many potential strategies for the LCS-EN module. Strategies are then classified into three severity groups - stress, crisis, and emergency. The stress strategies indicate a decrease in the household's capacity to manage future shocks, while crisis and emergency mechanisms reduce the households' future productivity with an increasing intensity passing from the former (i.e., crisis) to the latter (i.e., emergency).

Stress	Crisis	Emergency
indicates a reduced ability to deal with future shocks due to a current reduction in resources or increase in debts.	directly reduces future productivity, including human capital formation.	affects future productivity but are extremely difficult to reverse or more dramatic in nature.

The [Master list of available coping strategies](#) also provides the recommended severity levels for each livelihood coping strategy (including those specific to rural settings). However, COs are given the flexibility to **slightly** adjust the severity of some strategies after assessing whether the recommended severities are suitable and, if not, adapting them to their local context after community consultations (refer to [Section 7](#)).

Some strategies may have a different level of severity depending on how these coping strategies damage the productivity and well-being of households in different contexts. For example, consuming seed stocks set aside for the next planting season undoubtedly constitutes severe coping behaviours in nearly any culture, however, other strategies would be considered perfectly normal behaviour in some places – such as borrowing money to cover food needs, while in other places can be seen as a great source of shame (and therefore to be practised in the most extreme circumstances). Hence, the applicability and relevance of such strategies and their severity would require validation through contextual knowledge and qualitative information (refer to [Section 7](#)).

The severity levels of some livelihood coping strategies may differ from one region to another, or across countries in a single region. Therefore, the severity of certain strategies must be explored and determined in consultation with the affected populations (residents, refugees, IDPs, returnees, and migrants) through focus group discussions (FGDs). The most accurate procedure for validating severities is to ask FGD respondents for their own experiences and perception of selected coping behaviours. When the severity levels are

determined for the entire target population of interest, then it must be the same across the population and not differ from household to household. See **Step 3: Focus group discussions to determine the severity of strategies** in **Section 7**.

6. How to design the module?

Over time, several possible livelihood-coping strategies have been formulated to describe various mechanisms used by distressed populations to overcome their lack of food and other essential needs (see **Section 5**). Ten livelihood coping strategies must be included in the questionnaire module, to allow for the calculation of the LCS-EN indicator. When deciding on strategies to be included in the LCS-EN module, the analysts must select a combination comprised of four stress, three crisis and three emergency strategies.

Choosing a particular set of coping strategies depends on several factors, including the types of crises households face and the strategies available. For example, in areas of ongoing conflict, such as Ukraine, it does not make sense to include a strategy on migration as it could be confused with high levels of displacement. Additionally, in the context of Tajikistan, labor migration to countries like Russia is a significant and regulated activity, supported by the Tajik government.

It is important to consider the context and livelihood activities of the targeted group (urban/rural, agriculturalists/pastoralists) when determining the relevance of asset-related strategies. Ideally, strategies are selected based on key informant interviews or focus group discussions (FGDs) with the affected population, especially if the analyst is not very familiar with the context or if it is a new emergency.

While it is generally recommended to select 10 relevant strategies from the master list including coping strategies of different severities (four stress, three crisis and three emergency strategies), the module can also be expanded beyond the 10 mandatory strategies. Analysts may choose to include more than 10 strategies for explorative purposes, if qualitative exercises to inform the design of the module are not feasible and uncertain about strategies applied by households in a given context. More than 10 strategies may also be needed when the survey should cover populations residing in different areas (i.e., urban and rural settings).

The questions must also follow the model and the standard answer options across all asked strategies (i.e., no, yes, exhausted or N/A). The first answer option: *“no because we didn’t need to”* demonstrates two different scenarios: 1) a household did not need to rely on a coping strategy because they did not face a lack of resources to access essential needs, or 2) a household relied on a different livelihood coping strategy to overcome the lack of resources to access essential needs. The second answer option is *“yes, applied within the last 30 days”* indicates that a strategy was applied due to a lack of resources to access essential needs. Thirdly, a household may not be able to apply a strategy as it was applied before within the past 12 months, and thus has already been exhausted; a relevant answer option is available; *“no because we already sold those assets or have engaged in this activity within the last 12 months and cannot continue to do it”*. Finally, a household may also not be able to rely on a strategy as it does not apply to them, *“Not applicable (don’t have access to this strategy)”*.

It is important to review the adapted LCS-EN module to ensure that there is no overlap in the selected strategies. For example, there is a clear overlap between the coping strategies “reducing expenses on education” and “moving children to a less expensive school”. These strategies should not be included in the same module. In addition, there is overlap of selling/pawning of jewellery mentioned in “spend savings,” “sell household assets/goods (radio, furniture, television, jewellery, etc.),” and “pawn household items.” Thus, it is important to distinguish between these strategies and avoid using them in the same module.

Finally, at the end of the LCS-EN module a follow-up question asks the main reasons for having adopted/exhausted the strategies. The purpose of this question is firstly to provide insights into the main gaps that households face and that are driving the adoption of negative coping behaviours. Additionally, the follow-up question is used to “convert” the LCS-EN indicators into the LCS-FS one when this is needed (See Section 11).

Please refer to the [LCS-EN page in the VAM Resource Centre](#) for the modules in XLS form and for the full explanation of strategies, their use and verification examples.

Table 2. Example of a livelihood-based coping strategies module for essential needs

During the past 30 days , did anyone in your household have to engage in any of the following activities due to a lack of resources to access essential needs (e.g., food, shelter, education, health services, etc.) ?	10 = No, because we did not need to 20 = No, because we already sold those assets or have engaged in this activity within the last 12 months and cannot continue to do it 30 = Yes 9999 = Not applicable (don't have access to this strategy)	Indicative severity of the strategy (Country office to attribute the relevant severity, the following is just an example)	Variable names
1.1 Sold household assets/goods (radio, furniture, television, jewellery, etc.) <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Stress	LcsEN_stress_DomAsset
1.2 Borrow money <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Stress	LcsEN_stress_Borrow-Cash
1.3 Spent savings <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Stress	LcsEN_stress_Saving
1.4 Sold, shared or exchanged in-kind assistance (e.g. food rations or non-food items) <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Stress	LcsEN_stress_SellRation
1.5 Sold productive assets or means of transport (sewing machine, wheelbarrow, bicycle, car, etc.) <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Crisis	LcsEN_crisis_ProdAssets
1.6 Reduced expenses on health (including medicines) <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Crisis	LcsEN_crisis_Health

1.7 Withdrew children from school <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Crisis	LcsEN_crisis_OutSchool
1.8 Mortgaged/sold the house where the household was permanently living or land <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Emergency	LcsEN_em_ResAsset
1.9 Begged (asked strangers for money/food) or scavenged <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Emergency	LcsEN_em_Begged
1.10 Engaged in socially degrading, high-risk, exploitive or life-threatening jobs or income-generating activities (e.g., smuggling, theft, joining armed groups, prostitution) <i>due to a lack of resources to access essential needs</i>	_	Emergency	Lcs_em_IllegalAct
2. What are the main reasons - i.e. to access which essential needs – that you or other members in your household applied these coping strategies? <i>Note to enumerator: do not list the below as options to the respondent. Instead, mark all those that apply based on the answer provided.</i>			LhCSIEAccess
			1 To buy food 2 To pay for rent 3 To pay school, education costs 4 To cover health expenses 5 To buy non-food items (clothes, small furniture...) 6 To access water/sanitation facilities 7 To access essential dwelling services (electricity, energy, waste disposal...) 8 To pay for existing debts 999 Other specify

7. Procedures for developing context-specific coping strategies.

It is vital to select the most appropriate strategies for the country's context with consideration to the target populations (e.g., residents, IDPs, migrants, urban, rural, etc.). If necessary, the number of strategies in the module can go beyond the mandatory 10 strategies to allow

for comparisons of the same population's coping capacity across the data collection activities.

When formulating a new context-specific coping strategy, a clear distinction must be made between risk-management (ex-ante) strategies, and risk-coping strategies (ex-post) coping strategies. Risk-management strategies help to reduce a household's exposure to shocks such as having more than one job, or more than one household member contributing to income, before the occurrence of any event to increase household resilience to shocks.

However, these (ex-ante) strategies are not considered part of the LCS indicator. The LCS-EN indicator includes only risk-coping (ex-post) strategies to offset the effects of shocks after they occur. Therefore, the context-specific indicators should consider only behavioural changes made to cope with shocks, not those made to increase household resilience to adverse situations or shocks.

A list of coping behaviours can be established through focus group interviews with members of the local community **only** when the strategies provided in the available master list do not suffice or when the phrasing of the strategies needs to be slightly re-phrased for the context. The following principles can be used to identify context-specific coping behaviours (Box 1).

Box 1: Principles for including livelihood coping behaviours in the LCS-EN

While there are many kinds of coping behaviours, only certain kinds of livelihood-related behaviours belong to the LCS. Ask each of the following questions about each identified behaviour:

LCS	Not LCS
Is this behaviour used to cope with an existing shock (ex-post)?	...or is it meant to build resilience (ex-ante)?
Does it influence households in the medium or long-term in terms of livelihood, human capital, or dignity?	... or does the strategy involve changing short-term consumption behaviours?
Is the strategy adopted as a coping mechanism to shocks?	... or is it part of the usual culture in the community?

Step 1: Desk Review

- Start with the list of strategies offered in the master table and select the strategies most applicable to the targeted population based on a clear understanding of the context. If you already have a list from previous data collection exercises, then consider the existing list of strategies (if still relevant and if there no major changes in the context have occurred) and expand from there.
- Through primary or secondary qualitative/quantitative data, determine which livelihood coping strategies households rely on when faced with a lack of resources to access essential needs. This can be done in different (complementary) ways:

- If you already have datasets with livelihood coping strategies, compute the share of households that use each of the strategies to understand their prevalence.
- Look into secondary data sources and anecdotal information about the applied coping strategies in the community.
- If some of the strategies in your initial list do not apply to the target population, omit them. The remaining strategies should be scrutinized through FGDs as described in the next step.

Step 2: Focus group discussions to refine the list of strategies

- Conduct FGDs with the relevant community(ies), where the four general categories of coping strategies (see Table 1) would be presented, and the list of coping strategies would be discussed.
- Discuss the current shocks as well as the historical shocks and how households and communities used to adapt to and cope with them.
- Probe to find out if any other relevant local strategies are not included in the list. If this is the case, then add them to the list.
- Reminder: Be sure that you only include (ex-post) livelihood coping strategies for essential needs. Ex-ante livelihood coping strategies and consumption-based strategies should not be included (See Box 1).
- Be sure to clarify and probe to understand if the suggested coping strategy is an actual coping strategy to a shock or part of normal customs in the community.
- You should repeat the exercise for several FGDs to ensure that the list reflects the broad consensus. Make sure that FGDs are conducted with different age groups (adults and youth) and genders (men and women), to understand the differences in their behaviours. It is also important to conduct FGDs with persons with disabilities in the presence of and with the support of their guardians, if needed.
- Although there is no hard rule on how many FGDs are “enough,” a minimum of six to eight is recommended for each culture or location, or until saturation is reached; the main different social groups and minorities should be represented.

Box 2: Developing a long list of coping strategies through focus group discussions

Questions to be asked during FGDs:

- How does your household cope with shocks (e.g., flood, drought, conflict etc.)?
- How does your household cope to increase household resources to access essential needs?
- How does your household cope to reduce the demand for essential needs?
- How does your household cope to distribute resources needed to meet essential needs within the household?
- Probe to get all the relevant livelihood coping strategies, at the end use the principles in Box 1 to exclude the strategies that are not relevant to the LCS-EN module (ex-ante,

short-term food-based, or part of cultural norms).

Step 3: Focus group discussions to determine the severity of strategies

- After developing the full list of coping strategies, and excluding the non-relevant ones, FGD participants will be asked to determine the severity of all the strategies in the list (least severe, most severe, and moderate-severe).
- It is possible to ask the same focus groups to first brainstorm the list (see Step 2), and then discuss severity. It is recommended to have separate discussion sessions within the same FGD so that the list of coping strategies or behaviours is established and agreed upon first, and then the severity is discussed.
- It is advisable to ask each FGD participant to individually assign a level of severity to each strategy, from lowest (least severe) to highest (most severe). A range of severity from one to three usually works well. The final determined severities of coping strategies are, to some extent based on a combination of perceptions by households (FGDs' consensus), and the expected medium or long-term impact on households foreseen by participants.
- It is always easiest to establish the extreme types of coping strategy, thus ask the group to select the most severe and least severe individual strategies first.
- Next, group the strategies identified under each severity into one sheet, then ask if the individual strategies under the same level are equivalent to how severe they are perceived to be. When those two extreme categories are established, it is easier to group the remaining behaviours into the moderate category.
- This must be done with enough groups representative of diversity within the population to ensure that a reasonable consensus emerges. Weighting the individual strategies on an insufficient number of FGDs can lead to errors in the analysis.

Box 3: probing to guide the severity discussion during the focus group discussion:

- Is it reversible, or can be reversed when it is no longer needed?
- Is it dramatic in nature, or includes protection risk (e.g., illegal, high risk, exploitive activities)?
- Can the behaviour be used continuously or is it a one-off strategy?

For more details on the FGD tools see Annex I: Example for Deriving Context-Specific Coping Strategies)

Step 4: Final Module

- The final list should form the main set of coping strategies; this set of coping strategies or individual behaviours represent the consensus of diverse groups in the community, location, or culture, which people rely on when faced with a lack of resources to access essential needs.
- The final list does not need to include every single strategy mentioned (some are very rare) but should represent the consensus view of all the groups interviewed. Try to keep the list down to a feasible number (maximum 15 strategies).

- The list should not include any similar or overlapping coping strategies (i.e., different ways of describing the same behaviour).
- The list must contain strategies of different severity at least (4 stress, 3 crisis, 3 emergency).
- After taking the list of individual strategies developed for your questionnaire, the main question is how to interpret each of the answer options. What does *“exhausted in the past 12 months”* mean for each of the selected strategies? What does *“not applicable”* mean? What does *“no because we didn’t need to”* mean; and what does *“yes, applied within the last 30 days”* mean? The newly developed strategies should be accompanied by a rationale and explanation of what each answer option means ([see the list of strategies in the VAM resource centre](#)).
- When deciding on a final list of strategies for this indicator, it is important to ensure that the same strategies are included and applied across different data collection exercises (food security assessments, mVAM/hunger monitoring, and outcome monitoring) to allow for comparability at the target population level.

Step 5: Communicate the new coping strategies to HQ RAM - Needs Assessments and Targeting Unit

The newly developed strategies should be communicated to the HQ RAM-N Unit (Global.ResearchAssessmentMonitoring@wfp.org):

1. The strategy statement
2. The rationale behind the strategy
3. Suggested severity
4. Explanations of each answer option (exhausted, No, N/A, Yes)

8. Training on LCS-EN data collection

During the enumerator training:

1. Discuss the objectives of the questionnaire, i.e., to gain information on the livelihood coping strategies (for essential needs) applied by households in the targeted population. This includes the households’ capacity to deal with recent shocks and ability to overcome future shocks. Explain the role of this indicator, internally and externally. This gives the enumerators a clear understanding of the importance of the data they would be soon collecting.
2. Note how the main question is worded. Ask the enumerators to repeat the main question for each behaviour, to remind the respondent that
 - a. The question is referring to times when they did not have enough resources to access essential needs (e.g., food, shelter, education, health services, etc.).
 - b. Be sure the question includes the recall period (i.e., 30 days).
 - c. If the questionnaire is not written in the local dialect, discuss with the enumerators the translation of the question in the local dialect, to ensure that the meaning remains equal to the original wording.

3. Discuss the meaning of “essential needs”. Although the main question provides examples of what these are in most places (“food, shelter, education, health services, etc.”), what constitutes essential needs is contextual and subjective to some degree. In general terms, essential needs are considered as “the goods and services required on a regular or seasonal basis by households to ensure survival and minimum living standards, without resorting to negative coping mechanisms or compromising their health, dignity and essential livelihood assets”³. Discuss this concept during the training and try to get to a common understanding of what is considered “essential needs” in your context.
4. Discuss the concept of “lack of resources to access essential needs”. Lack of resources includes both when households do not have direct access to essential goods and services (e.g. own-produced food and fuels; free public health services), or when they do not have the money to buy these essential goods and services.
5. Note that they should always be asking about the same period beginning from yesterday and counting backwards (i.e., “the last 30 days” not “the past month,” or “last month”). Interviewees could get confused if the timeframe is not specific.
6. Carefully read the rationale of each strategy and explain the answer options to have a common agreement among enumerators on why we ask about each strategy, how we ask about it and how to interpret the answer options (see Table 1 of the standard strategies). When discussing the strategies and their response options, listen to the enumerators’ examples (given their field experience) and provide clear guidance on the most appropriate LCS-EN answer options.

For training materials on the LCS-EN, refer to the available materials on the [VAM Resource Centre](#).

9. Data Collection

Before the implementation of the LCS-EN module in a specific context, it is vital to pilot or field test it along with all other modules in the designed questionnaire. The pilot and field testing must generate feedback through both submitted quantitative data and qualitative notes to the analyst(s).

When enumerators collect data for LCS modules, they must stress the drivers that led to engaging in these livelihood coping strategies. The focus must be related **“to lack of resources to access essential needs”**. If households indicate that these strategies are normal ongoing activities during interviews, then the answer option *“10=No, because I did not need to”* must be selected. When households don’t have, for example, children or assets such as land, then enumerators are to select *“9999= Not applicable (don’t have access to this strategy)”*.

³ See the [Essential Needs Assessment Guidance Note](#) for a broader discussion.

10. Quality assurance

Logic-based checks among modules cannot always be standardised as food security assessments and monitoring questionnaires differ from one country to another, depending on information needs, which extend beyond the standard corporate modules. However, in all surveys, visibility, and validation constraints (i.e., skip logic) must be set before the start of the data collection exercise and adjusted during the testing and piloting phases. As some logic-based rules could be missed in the design and piloting of the questionnaires, this can be implemented while the data collection exercise is in progress. If this opportunity is missed, the data analyst must ensure data quality through the triangulation of responses during the data cleaning phase. For example, the validity of answers to the LCS-EN module can be checked against responses to questions in the household demographics, income, expenditure, and wealth-asset modules. Some examples of logic-based validation rules for the LCS-EN are listed below:

- When the interviewee reports not having any school-aged children (6-18 years of age) in their household (under the HH composition section), then coping strategies such as 'withdrew children from school' or 'moved children to a less expensive school' must have an answer of N/A.
- The household assets section could be used to verify some of the answers to LCS-EN. For example, if a household reports current ownership of productive assets, then a coping strategy related to those assets cannot be recorded as "exhausted".

In addition to logic-based checks, it is also important to track the frequency of responses per enumerator to detect possible outliers. This could be done through cross-tabulation of the individual strategies and the LCS-EN indicators by enumerator. If some enumerators tend to classify households very differently than the average, this could be due to a lack of understanding of the LCS-EN question, and then enumerators can be detected and re-trained. This could be checked only when enumerators have conducted several interviews.

11. Analysis of the LCS-EN Data

Using data analysis software, the analyst must build a new dichotomous variable for each coping severity level, representing if a household adopted any strategy with that level of severity. Three **dichotomous variables** need to be created:

- stress_coping
- crisis_coping
- emergency_coping

As a reminder, the final module must have 4 stress, 3 crisis, and 3 emergency strategies for the analysis. If more than 10 have been included, then use the most frequently applied strategies within each severity level. To determine which should be included in the LCS indicator, the analyst must run frequencies on each strategy to understand the percentage of N/A responses. If there are 50% or more N/A responses, it is recommended that these strategies are not included in the calculation. This may indicate that they are not likely to be relevant as they may indicate a protracted crisis where these strategies have been exhausted, or they

might not be the relevant coping strategies. It may also be helpful to consider any previously conducted assessments on this population group, if available.

In the example module (Table 2), four 'stress' level strategies are included: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. In this example, if a household responds 'yes' to any of these strategies, they would be assigned a '1' for the dichotomous variable 'stress_coping'. Similarly, if the household reports being unable to employ any of the strategies because they had already exhausted it (e.g., they've already spent all their savings to cope), they are also considered to have experienced that strategy, and thus are assigned a '1' for the dichotomous variable 'stress_coping'.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, if a household responds *"No, because we already sold those assets or have engaged in this activity within the last 12 months and cannot continue to"* to, that household is considered to have experienced that strategy. In such cases, the household's response would be converted to a 'yes' response at the analysis stage, because the recently exhausted coping strategy could still enable the household to 'survive'. In other words, households are still coping from having applied a strategy at an earlier time (within the past 12 months). Thus, if a household reported *'No, because we already sold these assets....'*, the household would be assigned a '1' for the variable 'stress_coping'.

Conversely, if a household responds with *"No because we did not need to"* or *"Not applicable (don't have access to this strategy)"*, then the household is considered to not have experienced that strategy. It is important to distinguish between the two responses, as one indicates that the household could count on a strategy if needed, while the other answer option reveals that a household does not have access to a particular strategy, thus wouldn't be able to rely on it to cope with a resources to meet essential needs. However, both responses are converted into 'no_coping' at the analysis stage.

Finally, a **categorical variable** is built, representing the severity level of the most severe strategy that a household adopted. The categorical variable ranges from 1 to 4 and reflect one of four groups in which households are allocated:

- no use of stress, crisis, or emergency strategies
- use of stress strategies
- use of crisis strategies
- use of emergency strategies

If a household used an emergency coping strategy, it will be assigned a 4 "use of emergency strategies". If a household used a crisis coping strategy, but not an emergency coping strategy, it will be assigned a 3 for "use of crisis strategies". The relevant syntax can be found at the [LCS-EN page in the VAM Resource Centre](#).

If an assessment used the LCS-EN module but food security needs to be calculated using the Consolidated Approach for Reporting on food Insecurity (CARI), then the LCS-FS indicator can be calculated through the LCS-EN at the analysis stage⁴. This is done using the follow-up question at the end of the module. If a household indicated "food" among the main reasons

⁴ However, if the primary objective of the assessment is estimating food insecurity, the assessment should include the LCS-FS, not the LCS-EN.

for adopting the strategies, then, for the sake of computing the LCS-FS, it is considered that any strategy that the household applied “due to a lack of resources to access essential needs” was also adopted “due to a lack of food or money to buy it”. Conversely, households that did not indicate “food” among the main reasons for adopting the strategies, are considered as they had not applied any strategy for the computation of LCS-FS. The relevant syntax can be found at the [LCS-EN page on the VAM Resource Centre](#).

12. Convergence

The LCS-EN results do not necessarily provide an overall picture of the ability of a population to meet its essential needs. Hence, where possible, the use of more than one indicator (for example ECMEN, FCS, MDDI, and Perceived Needs) is needed. This not only permits “triangulation” of findings but also deliberately uses indicators that capture different elements of the complex notion of households’ ability to meet essential needs. Refer to the [Essential Needs Assessment Guidance Note](#) for more information on the convergence of indicators.

13. Limitations

The LCS-EN indicator does not capture the number of times each strategy was applied by a household but only whether it was applied at least once within the last 30 days or whether it was exhausted within the last 12 months. Furthermore, the calculation of the indicator does not distinguish between households that may have applied more than one strategy under each of the severity categories (dichotomous variables). For example, a household may have relied on all four stress strategies, meanwhile, another household may have only relied on one stress strategy, and both would be classified the same under this indicator (i.e., stress coping). Therefore, a descriptive presentation of the prevalence of individual coping strategies is important to complement the analysis.

This indicator has some limitations in capturing the weakened coping capacities of households in protracted crisis settings, as households have been facing reoccurring and/or multiple shocks for prolonged periods (e.g., Yemen, Somalia, Syria, etc.). Thus, many households in such contexts may have already exhausted certain capacities to respond to shocks through certain livelihood coping strategies prior to the 12 months preceding the interview. Therefore, contextualization of the list of coping strategies is needed and should be updated whenever there is a context change.

14. Interpreting the LCS-EN

To analyse the LCS-EN, it is common practice to report the share of households within each coping strategies group (no coping, stress, crisis or emergency) and then describe which are the most common strategies used like in the below example:

“Analysis results of the LCS-EN indicator have shown that 47 percent of interviewed households reported having relied on livelihood coping strategies in the previous month or having exhausted them within the last 12 months due to a lack of resources to access essential needs.

Comparisons between households headed by females and males have shown a higher proportion of those headed by females relying on stress coping strategies. This may be explained by the limited work opportunities for women. “

Figure 1 - Proportion of households relying on livelihood coping strategies for essential needs

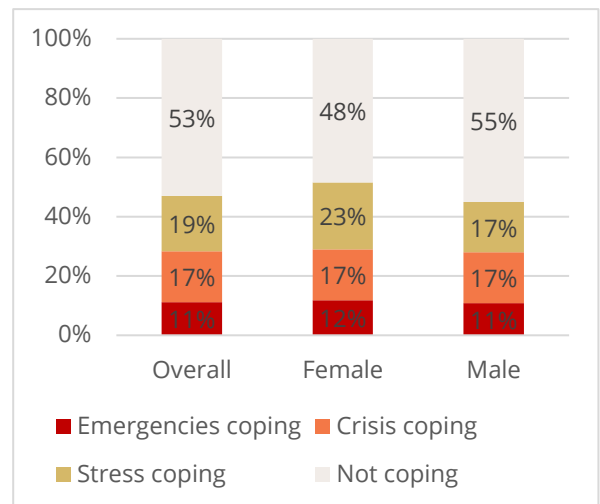
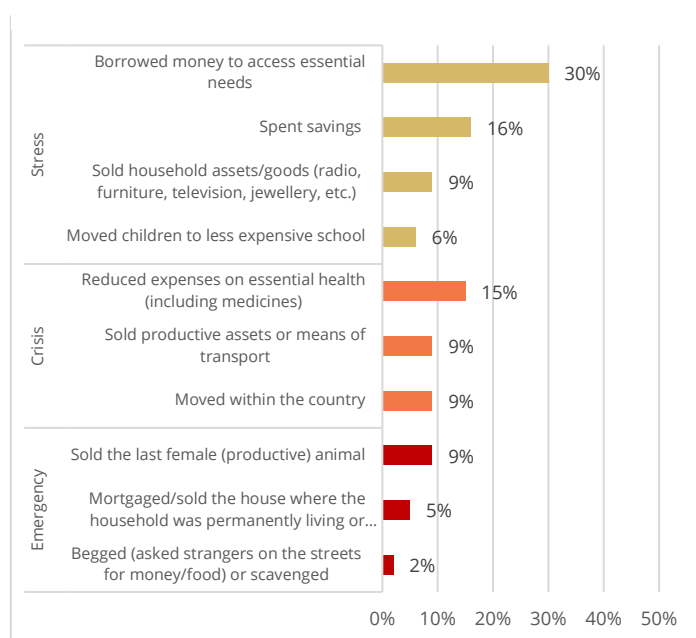


Figure 2 - Proportion of households relying on each of the livelihood coping strategies for essential needs



“When looking at the analysis results by the individual coping strategies, it becomes apparent that borrowing money to cover essential needs (30%), spending of savings (16%), as well as the reduction of expenditures on essential health (15%), are the strategies most applied by households.

In addition, a relatively high proportion of households (9%) resorted to selling their last female animal. Resorting to this strategy may come with negative long-term consequences on the livelihoods of the affected households as it may be difficult to reverse this strategy; female animals are the reproductive assets for livestock owners, that provide their households with milk and more animals for income generation.”

The above graphs illustrate how to present the summary of the LCS-EN indicator and present the results of each of the collected individual coping strategies in the applied LCS-EN module. It is advisable to examine each strategy individually to better understand the summary indicator and allow for clear and accurate interpretation.

When visualizing or reporting on results, it is vital to make a clear differentiation between indicative and statistically representative results. To learn more about statistical representativeness, please refer to the [Data Stratification and Disaggregation Paper](#).

When analysing and reporting disaggregated results, the sample sizes (unweighted counts) must be considered to check the frequency of respondents reporting these behaviours.

Colour coding for the prevalence of livelihood coping strategies

A standard colour pallet has been set for visualising the LCS-EN results. The colour codes in RGB and HEX in the column order of visualisation are indicated in the below table.

Coping Classification	Colour Code (RGB)	HEX
No coping	241, 236, 232	#F1ECE8
Stress coping	213, 184, 104	#D5B868
Crisis coping	243,120, 71	#F37847
Emergency coping	192, 0, 0	#C00000

Annex I: Example for Deriving Context-Specific Coping Strategies

Step 1: Qualitative Research Questions and Themes

In order to understand how local populations cope with the lack of food or money to buy food, qualitative data collection should be carried out through FGDs. The research question “What do people do when they do not have enough resources to access their essential needs?” must be answered. For each identified strategy, the following themes should be discussed to determine the severity of each strategy:

1. Discuss how each strategy would influence the **households’ capacity to manage future shocks**.
2. Discuss how each strategy would influence the **households’ future productivity, including human capital formation**.
3. Discuss how each strategy would influence the **households’ future productivity, keeping in mind the lack of possibility of reversing the situation**.

After finishing the discussion on all possible coping strategies applied by the community (the first 4 columns of Table 3), take a break and then ask participants to agree on the severity of each strategy (the fifth column of Table 3). Start with the most severe, then the less severe, and then the moderate category will follow.

See Table 3 for an Example of derived livelihood-based coping strategies for essential needs.

Table 3. Example of derived livelihood-based coping strategies for essential needs

No.	List of coping strategies [What do people do when they do not have enough resources to access essential needs?]	Strategies that would influence a household's capacity to manage future shocks .	Strategies that would influence a household's future productivity, including human capital formation .	Strategies that would influence a household's future productivity, with the unlikelihood of reversing the situation .	Focus group participants agree on the severity of each strategy. Severity scale: 1-3 (three being most severe) <i>Note: this agreement could be done after individual rating or collectively in the group</i>
1	Slaughter more animals than usual	x	x		1
2	Sell/mortgage their house	x			3
3	Reduce expenses on health and education		x		2
4	Exchange household items or clothes for food and other essential goods	x			1
5	Sell productive assets or means of transport	x	x		2
6	Move to cheaper accommodation	x	x		2
7	Marriage of a female child under the age of 15		x	x	3
8	Members migrate informally		x		2
9	Spend savings (not income)	x			1
10	Borrow money	x			1

11	Children (under 15 years old) work to contribute to household income (e.g., maid, casual labour)	x	x		2
12	Send household members to live elsewhere	x			2
13	Farmland lease out		x	x	3
14	Sale of assets (e.g., jewellery)	x	x		1

If the FGD moderators observe that the participants have difficulties in rating the strategies by severity, it is possible to take the process of rating severities in a different direction. The FGD participants can be asked to order the relevant coping strategies through discussion in the form of a timeline starting from the main or the most recent shock that affected the community. Participants should indicate which strategies were applied first, next, and last. This can give an indication of the severity level perceived by households.

For example, the first action a household would take when faced with a shock is to attempt to minimize risks and manage their food consumption and essential needs. The second strategy(ies) employed by the household in distress is the gradual disposal of resources - for example, spending savings, selling simple assets, or borrowing money. If the situation persists or worsens, then they would resort to crisis coping strategies, and when, for example, productive assets are sold or essential healthcare/medication expenditures are reduced, it becomes more difficult for the person or household to return to a pre-crisis state. Finally, the household may resort to selling their only house/land, which is a sign of failure to cope with the crisis.

The adoption of stress, crisis and emergency livelihood coping strategies typically occurs in a sequence form, rather than simultaneously. Thus, relevant strategies being discussed can be presented in a timeline by the FGD participants in order to determine the severities.

Step 2: Aggregation of Strategies by Severity per FGD

Group the strategies with similar severity and discuss them with each of the discussion groups, one at a time. Start with severity 1 and 3, then severity 2. Discuss with the group whether it makes sense that the strategies under each category have the same level of severity. Apply changes if there is an agreement to move strategies between different severity groups.

See Table 4 for an Example of grouping livelihood-based coping strategies by severity.

Table 4. Example of grouping livelihood-based coping strategies by severity

Severity groups	Livelihood coping strategies reported by FGD participants
Severity 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slaughter more animals than usual 2. Exchange household items or clothes for food and other essential goods 3. Spend savings (not income) 4. Borrow money 5. Sale of assets (e.g., jewellery)
Severity 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Sale/mortgage of house 7. Marriage of a female child under the age of 15 8. Farmland lease out
Severity 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Reduce non-food expenses on health and education 10. Sell productive assets or means of transport 11. Move to cheaper accommodation 12. Members migrate informally 13. Children (under 15 years old) work to contribute to household income (e.g., maid, casual labour) 14. Send household members to live elsewhere

Step 3: Consensus on the Final Severities

Collect the final inputs from all FGDs and decide on the final severity.

After rating and discussing the perceived severities of the coping strategies with each of the FGDs, include the ratings in a matrix (see Table 5) and take the most frequent response (the mode value) for each strategy. If there are two values of the same frequency, consider taking the highest as the final severity for this strategy.

In the example below (Table 5):

- Eight different focus groups were conducted to gather perceptions of the severity of the various individual strategies.
- Overall, the severities were determined based on the highest prevalence for each strategy across the eight FGDs and later grouped into three categories, where severity 1 indicates stress, severity 3 indicates an emergency, and severity 2 is a crisis.

Table 5. Example of aggregation of severities for each of the derived livelihood coping strategy across all group discussions

Reported strategies	Focus group discussions								Overall Severity
	FGD #1	FGD #2	FGD #3	FGD #4	FGD #5	FGD #6	FGD #7	FGD #8	
1. Slaughter more animals than usual	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	Severity 1
2. Sale of house	3	3	3	1	3	3	2	3	Severity 3
3. Reduce non-food expenses on health and education	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	Severity 2
4. Exchange household items or clothes for food	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	Severity 1
5. Sell productive assets or means of transport	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	Severity 2
6. Move to cheaper accommodation	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	Severity 2
7. Marriage of a female child under (15)	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	1	Severity 3
8. Members migrate informally	3	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	Severity 2
9. Spend savings (not income)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Severity 1
10. Borrow money	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	Severity 1
11. Children (under 15 years old) work to contribute to household income (e.g., maid, casual labour)	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	Severity 2
12. Send household members to live elsewhere	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	Severity 2
13. Farmland lease out	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	Severity 3
14. Sale of assets (e.g. jewellery)	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	Severity 1

For additional guidance related to qualitative research, refer to WFP's [Qualitative Research Methods](#) page for information. For examples on qualitative data collection tool please visit [the VAM resource centre](#).

Acronyms

CARI	Consolidated Approach for Reporting on Food Insecurity
CH	Cadre Harmonisé
CO	Country Office
ECMEN	Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs
FES	Food Expenditure Share
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FCS	Food Consumption Score
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
LCS	Livelihood Coping Strategies
LCS-FS	Livelihood Coping Strategies for Food Security
LCS-EN	Livelihood Coping Strategies for Essential Needs

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