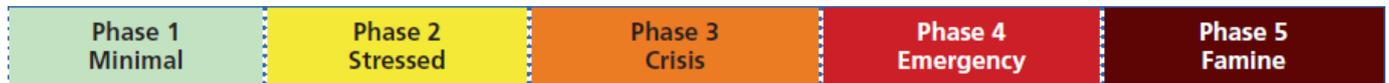




IPC and Famine: Using the Appropriate Terminology and Scientific Thresholds

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a **set of protocols to classify the severity and causes of food insecurity** and provide evidence-based, actionable knowledge to decision makers. The IPC is also a process for building technical consensus among key stakeholders from national governments, UN, NGO, and technical agencies.

The IPC standardized scale categorizes **the severity of acute food insecurity**. According to the latest **IPC Manual V.2.0, the five phases are:**



Phases 1 and 5 have different titles depending on whether an area or a household socio-spatial unit of analysis is applied. When an area unit of analysis is applied the overall population in a given area is classified according to the key criterion that at least 20% of the population must be in that phase or worse. If the unit of analysis is relatively homogenous groups of households that is determined by a range of factors such as wealth groups, social affiliations and location, then classification is based on the food security outcomes of the household group.

As by definition famine applies to a population, the **Phase 5 Famine is used for the Area classification only** whereas for the classification of a household group Phase 5 is Catastrophe.

The description of **Phase 5 Famine** for area classification is: ***Even with any humanitarian assistance at least one in five HHs in the area have an extreme lack of food and other basic needs where starvation, death, and destitution are evident.*** For the rare and extreme case of classifying Phase 5 (Famine), **there must be evidence of all three outcomes** of mortality (in particular CDR > 2/10,000/day), wasting (GAM > 30%) and food consumption (near complete Food Consumption gap for >20% of the population) according to the IPC Reference Table for Area classification.

The IPC uses the following definition of Famine: *the absolute inaccessibility of food to an entire population or sub-group of a population, potentially causing death in the short term (ACF, Introduction to Food Security Intervention Principles, 2008).*

There can be many degrees of “famine”. Various researchers have identified different thresholds for key indicators such as Crude Death Rate (CDR) indicating famine, ranging from 1/10,000/day for “minor famine” (Howe and Devereux, 2004) to >5/10,000/day (Hakewill and Moren, 1991). **The purpose of the IPC, however, is not to classify various degrees of famine**, nor is it to categorize the “worst famine”. Rather, in order to inform real-time decision-making, the IPC thresholds for famine (and) are set to signify the beginning of famine stages. The IPC does not preclude a postfacto analysis of a famine event that may further categorize and compare a famine with other historical famines.

From the IPC perspective, ‘famine’ is not a rhetorical, emotive term. Rather it is a **scientific classification based on standards, evidence, and technical consensus**. It is up to the analysts working in the national governments, NGOs, UN, and technical agencies such as FEWSNET to make such a declaration using the IPC process, as it was done to declare a famine in Somalia in July 2011.

- For reference to the IPC guidance, see the IPC Technical Manual Version 2.0: http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC-Manual-2-Interactive.pdf
- For a discussion of the use of the IPC in declaring the 2011-2012 Famine in Somalia, see “3. Thresholds for declaring a famine” in “Global implications of Somalia 2011 for famine prevention, mitigation and response”, Global Food Security (Elsevier, 2013) <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211912412000156>.