

When the Trucks Stop, So Does the Food: Bogotá's Hidden Crisis

Food security is not a fringe concern; it is profoundly intertwined with infrastructure, government, and social fairness. Any serious discussion of urban resilience simply cannot ignore the question of whether people can always gain access to food, especially under stress. In Bogotá, Colombia's largest and most populous city, with nearly 8 million individuals, a [2023 World Food Programme report](#) named that about 13 percent of the city's population, or a million citizens, live with chronic food insecurity. These individuals mostly earn a daily wage, and lack or possess very little ability to stock or purchase food in large quantities. Thus, when crises arise—pandemics, protests, or supply chain breakages—their exposure to the food that they need immediately is diminished further. [National data](#) show that while the percentage of Colombian households that live with moderate or severe food insecurity fell from 28.1% in 2022 to 26.1% in 2023, the problem is far from solved. Severe food inflation, which in December of last year stood at 27.8%, tightened budgets further, especially among poor households, and still, prevalent high prices continue to limit access to adequate nutrition. Anything but a temporary problem, food insecurity in Bogotá has been plaguing the city for years, with little structural progress made toward enabling secure and [equitable food access](#). The root of the issue lies in Bogotá's extremely centralized and deficient food distribution system.

The city is dependent on several major roads and a single wholesale market, Corabastos, for all food. When mass protests erupted in 2021, [highways and transportation routes](#) were sometimes blocked for weeks, causing food and other

commodity shortages. In the rest of the [country, like in Cali](#), food incoming shipments declined by over 70%, and even Bogotá's biggest wholesale market, the Corabastos, saw food inflows decline by about 17.4% at the height of the strikes. With supplies disrupted, food prices spiked for certain items. Eggs and sugar prices jumped by double digits in a couple of days. Bogotá's current food distribution network is characterized by low redundancy. A huge landslide in 2019 cut off an important highway from the eastern plains to Bogotá, taking three times the transport time and expense. In addition, the centralized concentration of food distribution centers, such as Corabastos, led to jams during crisis moments.

If Bogotá's food logistics are vulnerable due to centralization, its social protection systems are equally strained, constrained by inequality. Income disparity in the city has translated into unequal resilience: wealthier residents turned to savings and delivery apps to weather the crisis, while low-income families, especially informal workers, had no safety net. When COVID-19 lockdowns began in 2020, with no savings and no ability to work remotely, many people [could not buy](#) groceries after just days of lost income, and [some vulnerable households](#) went weeks without receiving any support. A lack of reliable data on informal workers undermined the fair distribution of aid. In sprawling settlements like Soacha just outside Bogotá, thousands of desperate households expressed their desperation by displaying red flags on windows—a silent but powerful appeal for relief. [As one local mayor observed](#), low-income people faced a cruel choice: “More people here could end up dying of hunger than from the coronavirus.” These flags marked a governance system unprepared to support those outside the formal economy. Bogotá's vulnerabilities were uncomfortably evident.

This isn't just a logistical failure. It's a reflection of socio-economic inequality. Pandemic, natural disaster, and political disruption disproportionately [affected low-income](#) and unemployed Colombians. Wealthier residents used savings and delivery apps to ride out the crisis. Meanwhile, low-income communities had no buffer. According to [Colombia's national statistics agency](#), the country's poverty rate increased by nearly 7% in the previous year to 42.5%. Such a rise in poverty levels thereby

pointed to the systemic vulnerability of Bogotá's food system and the broader reality that political and social volatility can propagate through supply chains and erode access to food. The interconnectedness of governance, equity, and resilience is undeniable in such moments.

As a way of eradicating these weaknesses, Bogotá must deliberately integrate food security into urban resilience planning. Specific action involves offering that there is diversification of food chains in the city, having good decentralized systems of distribution, and investment in urban farming, e.g., making neighborhood programs and community gardens. Initiatives like [Bogotá es Mi Huerta](#), which has set up over 20,000 urban gardens in the city's 20 municipalities, make it possible for individuals to grow their own food and share tips through an online portal by families, schools, and communities. These local food sources reduce reliance on distant supply chains and create local safety nets. Similarly, [Bogotá's Banco de Alimentos](#), which supplied over 20 million kilograms of food to over 562,000 people in 2024 alone, shows how civil society can scale up to address food insecurity. By integrating such programs into urban planning and policymaking as an everyday infrastructure, Bogotá can do even more to address food crises and pump money into local economies as well.

Equally important is making sure that crisis management, capable of responding quickly and locating the city's most vulnerable residents, is enhanced. Incentives for local production, in-city food banks, and increased social protection, like quick response programs like pre-enrolled emergency food programs, are all possibilities for addressing short-term food crises. One notable success is the [Bogotá Sin Hambre: Bogotá Without Hunger initiative](#), which provides over 800,000 vulnerable residents with a daily meal through an interlocking network of food banks and community kitchens. The effort illustrates how innovative policy thinking is able to protect at-risk communities and improve the city's resilience as a whole.

Finally, the Bogotá city government should prioritize multi-sectoral coordination—bringing together transport companies, local producers, market officials, and civil society organizations—to establish integrated crisis response protocols. Advances in artificial intelligence, [already used in Colombia's palm oil sector](#) to monitor crop health and market shifts, demonstrate how digital tools can

help anticipate disruptions. Similar technology, combined with regular monitoring of price and supply flows, can allow for early interventions before shortages escalate. [Recent research](#) highlights how satellite data and real-time market analysis are increasingly used to predict food insecurity. Periodic simulation training and open information-sharing between sectors can further improve preparedness and response. By combining technological tools with coordinated planning, Bogotá can strengthen the long-term resilience of its urban food system.

Bogotá's own experiences graphically demonstrate that urban resilience exceeds simple physical infrastructure or technological innovation. True resilience encompasses the fundamental ability of a city to deliver all its citizens regular, equal access to food, even in the event of catastrophic interruptions. If Bogotá actually makes food security a part of its resilience planning, it will set an important precedent, shining the way for cities everywhere to actually safeguard their most vulnerable populations in the next crisis.