



Conflict-induced acute food crises: potential policy responses in light of current emergencies

High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition

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Cover photograph: 12 March 2024, Gaza. Woman having an Iftar meal during Ramadan on the rubbles of her family's destroyed home. © WFP/Ali Jadallah

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HLPE-FSN

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The HLPE-FSN is the science-policy interface of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and provides independent, comprehensive and evidence-based analysis and advice at the request of CFS. It elaborates its studies through a scientific, transparent and inclusive process.

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1. THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT-INDUCED ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY IN THE WORLD TODAY

The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has a mandate and a responsibility to identify critical, emerging and enduring issues and assist the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and its Members to prioritize policies¹ and actions so that it may provide immediate responses when necessary, based on existing scientific evidence on the short-, medium- and long-term consequences of conflict on food security and nutrition. **The purpose of this brief is to explore how the international community can respond effectively to conflict-induced acute food crises, by providing a series of action-oriented policy recommendations.** In this regard, **the HLPE-FSN urges institutional cooperation, and – most importantly – encourages political cooperation** in response to conflict-induced acute food crises, wherever such crises might occur.

Today, **we face the tragic consequences of multiple conflict-induced starvation and acute food insecurity crises.** Almost 282 million people in 59 countries are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity that threaten their lives and livelihoods, thus requiring emergency action as a matter of life and death. These crises are due to **interlinked and superimposed structural vulnerabilities** such as state fragility and pre-existing tensions that are often associated with conflicts, extreme weather, climate change, and economic shocks (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2024). Conflict-related disruptions to supply chains for cereals and agricultural inputs (such as those originating in the Russia-Ukraine conflict) are having adverse impacts around the world and especially on food-insecure countries in Africa, the Near East and Asia (HLPE, 2022; FAO, 2022; UNCTAD, 2022). **Food crises escalated alarmingly in 2023**, as nearly 24 million more people faced high levels of acute food insecurity compared to the previous year. This includes **20 countries where 135 million people are in a food crisis because of war and protracted conflicts** including Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Gaza and the Sudan, the last two of which this report focuses on.

The Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC) system categorizes food insecurity on a 1 to 5-point scale. Situations of acute food insecurity are classified in Phase 3 defined as Crisis, Phase 4 as Emergency, and Phase 5 as Catastrophe/Famine (see Box 1).²

¹ Rule XXIII of the rules of procedure of the Committee on World Food security, Section D, paragraph 12.

² This report uses Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) guidelines defining Acute Food Insecurity (AFI), Chronic Food Insecurity (CFI), and Acute Malnutrition (AMN). Available at: https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/communication_tools/brochures/IPC_Brochure_Understanding_the_IPC_Scales.pdf.

Box 1. IPC definition of acute food insecurity

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) global initiative, a partnership of various organizations at global, regional and country levels, defines a common global scale for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition. The IPC analysis is validated by the Famine Review Committee (FRC), which assesses the quality of the data and the projections.

Acute food insecurity refers to a situation at one point in time, as opposed to chronic food insecurity, which refers to a persisting situation. The IPC distinguishes **five phases** of acute food insecurity:

IPC Phase 1 None/Minimal	IPC Phase 2 Stressed	IPC Phase 3 Crisis	IPC Phase 4 Emergency	IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine
Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households either: Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either: Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households experience an extreme lack of food and/or cannot meet other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. For Famine Classification, area needs to have extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.

The above scale of acute food insecurity is complemented by acute malnutrition, expressed by the thinness of children (measured by their arm circumference or the ratio of weight for height) or the presence of oedema.

For the IPC, famine exists in areas which have or likely have outcomes at or above the following thresholds:

- 20 percent of households with highly inadequate food consumption;
- 30 percent of children 6–59 months acutely malnourished; and
- crude death rate (CDR): > 2 deaths per 10 000 people per day.

The IPC states that acute food insecurity starts at Phase 3. Emergency (Phase 4) is an extremely severe situation where urgent action is needed to save lives. Individual households can be in Catastrophe/Famine (Phase 5), and experience famine conditions, even if the area where they live is not classified as Phase 5. This can occur due to the time-lag between food insecurity, malnutrition and mortality and the difficulty of assigning the causes of mortality.

Note: Deaths are counted if they are due to lack of food consumption or the interaction between inadequate food consumption and disease, but not if they are related to trauma, which makes it difficult to assess famine in conflict situations.

Sources: IPC Global Partners. 2021. *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Technical Manual Version 3.1. Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions*. Rome.

https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf; IPC n.d. *Guidance note: famine classification*. Rome. https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC-Guidance-Note-on-Famine.pdf

Major concerns about conflict-induced acute food crises have been raised recently in many regions, notably Gaza and the Sudan, where people are increasingly suffering from acute hunger and are at risk of famine (UN, 2024c). The United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres underscored that:

The Gaza Strip has the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded by the Global Report on Food Crises, even as blocked aid trucks line up at the border. Conflict in the Sudan has created the world's largest internal displacement crisis, with atrocious impacts on hunger and malnutrition, particularly for women and children (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2024, p. vii).

In **Gaza**, almost the entire population (2.15 million people, 96 percent of the population) are facing a high level of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition. The whole territory is classified as Emergency (IPC Phase 4). About 677 000 people are in Catastrophic/Famine condition (IPC Phase 5), where they are starving and have exhausted their coping capacities (IPC, 2024a). Over 1 million people – half of the population – is expected to face death and starvation (IPC Phase 5) by mid-July (IPC, 2024a; WFP and FAO, 2024a). It is important to remember that both Gaza and the Sudan were already suffering from protracted conflict and food crises prior to the current escalations.

In the **Sudan** 25.6 million people – half of the population – are in food crisis (IPC Phase 3 or above): twice the number compared to one year ago. Among them, 8.5 million people (18 percent of the population) are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), and 755 000 people are in Catastrophe/Famine (IPC Phase 5) (IPC, 2024b). In the coming months (June to September 2024) coinciding with the annual “lean season”, there is a risk of Catastrophe/Famine (Phase 5). The Sudan crisis also has serious regional consequences as it may cause conflict and hardship in neighbouring countries.

When famine is declared by the IPC,³ it is already too late and too many preventable deaths have already occurred. Famines have been declared only twice previously, in Somalia in 2011 and in South Sudan in 2017. By the time famine was declared, there had already been many deaths and irreversible damage to the population. **The international community needs to act, and donors need to finance assistance, even if Phase 5 Catastrophe/Famine has not yet been declared by the IPC.**

³ Although IPC experts conduct and review the analysis necessary to classify a famine, only governments and top UN officials can make an official declaration, which is a complex bureaucratic process. In many cases, countries have hesitated to do so (Gupta, 2024). Since the IPC was developed in 2004, it has been used to identify only two famines: in two regions of Somalia in 2011, and in South Sudan in 2017. In Somalia, more than 100 000 people died before famine was officially declared. In Yemen and Ethiopia, however, IPC analysts expressed grave concern about food insecurity related to the civil wars, but not enough information was available from governments to issue a formal assessment.

Every food crisis is distinctive, based on local factors including the nature of the conflict, geography, and the size of the impacted population. Yet, food crises due to conflicts are human-created tragedies, and as such, they are preventable (Webb, 2021).

In many cases, political, financial, logistical and security conditions make it impossible for humanitarian agencies to address starvation quickly enough. This is especially the case in conflict zones. In recent years, simultaneous multiple humanitarian crises, decreasing humanitarian funding, and increasing costs pose further threats to many food-insecure populations and exacerbate food insecurity, prompting the use of coping strategies that compromise livelihoods in the medium and longer term. This increases the risk of malnutrition, especially among women, children, and people in situations of vulnerability. It is well documented by scientific research that children affected by food insecurity even over short periods of time experience long-lasting and severe health consequences (Martin-Shields and Stojetz, 2019).

Food crises are by nature public health crises, as well as nutritional crises. Alleviating such events requires intersectional holistic responses. Therefore, food crises should be tackled in a comprehensive manner, rather than with a narrow focus on the provision of food and immediate remedies. Considering that the “proportion of undernourished people living in countries in conflict and protracted crisis is almost three times higher than those in other developing countries”, it is urgent that the international community and United Nations (UN) institutions address conflict-induced acute food insecurity (FAO, 2016a, p. 4).

As a result of this urgency, various institutions and international legal norms are in place to prevent, respond to, and help countries recover from conflict-induced acute food insecurity. In 2018, **as a response to growing hunger and the threat of famine that armed conflict posed to millions of people, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 2417 on the link between armed conflict and food insecurity.** The UNSCR 2417 defines starvation as a war crime if intentionally used against civilians as a method of warfare. This position has been reaffirmed in a series of international legal commitments to prevent famine in conflicts and ensure accountability for egregious crimes. The resolution also requires UN Institutions, such as FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP), to periodically inform the UNSC of growing hunger and the threat of famine by monitoring food security in countries in conflict situations experiencing food crises, in order to determine preventive measures (FAO and WFP, 2023a).⁴

⁴ So far, thirteen updates have been published. The most recent one, Issue No. 13, is about Palestine and the Sudan.

2. IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Conflict endangers the right to adequate food in various ways, through destruction, displacement, control and using “hunger as a weapon” (Kemmerling, Schetter, Wirkus, 2022). It can trigger food insecurity through the loss of assets, the undermining of communities’ coping capacities, and the breakdown of social support systems. Conflict can also endanger the right to adequate food in various ways, including through the disruption of agricultural activities and supply chains, the deterioration of food-related economies, and the deliberate undermining of access to food and humanitarian assistance by parties to the conflict. Overall, conflict weakens resilience to absorb or recover from other shocks and stressors, such as climate change, natural disasters, or volatile food prices.

Conflict can also severely affect household income and purchasing power. Mass unemployment and the breakdown of social services limit the ability to gain access to food, while currency devaluation, price inflation, market disruptions and distortions, as well as reliance on food imports owing to shortages may render basic food items prohibitively expensive. Conflict, therefore, exacerbates existing inequalities, leaving already vulnerable segments of society exposed to food insecurity. Conflict can also cause massive internal and external displacement.

Famine is a process by which food systems and government services collapse, creating a state of impoverishment, an increasingly poor state of health, the spread of communicable diseases and increased mortality. Therefore, it is vitally important to ensure the cross functional response of health, shelter, protection and food, and not one without the other.

Disruption of food systems

Food systems play an extremely important role in resilience and survival in times of crisis (Thorne-Lyman *et al.* 2018; UNICEF, WFP, Standing Together for Nutrition [ST4N] and Micronutrient Forum [MNF], 2024). Some 2.5 billion people worldwide depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods, and it is the main source of income for the populations of many of the countries currently suffering from conflict, such as the Sudan and Afghanistan.

Conflict tends to disrupt food production and deplete seed reserves by limiting agricultural activities. As most battles take place in rural areas, conflicts destroy or contaminate agricultural land (through land mines or chemical weapons) and infrastructure such as irrigation canals, roads, bridges and storage or processing facilities (Kemmerling, Schetter and Wirkus, 2022). Farmers, fisherfolks and other food producers may be unable to work

owing to restrictions on their movement or because they have fled or have been forcibly recruited into armed forces or militias. Crops are often plundered or destroyed, serious damage may be inflicted on farming and fishing infrastructure, and vital agricultural input may be difficult to come by. Seed reserves may be depleted, endangering the next harvest. Pastoralists and herders are particularly vulnerable to the loss of livelihood, being either forced to abandon their livestock or face the challenges of gaining access to feed and water. Conflicts also disrupt livestock markets and veterinary services, block livestock migration routes, and may lead to the killing of animals (FAO, 2016b).

Interaction of food insecurity, health and care

As food insecurity spreads, the underlying causes of malnutrition evolve and interact with each other: when food insecurity worsens, it impacts the social and care environment (caregiving behaviours, family, and broader social networks) as well as access to health care and health services. During a humanitarian emergency, food security is significantly affected by severe social changes – especially where forced migration (or restricted mobility and access due to conflict) compromises household integrity. At the height of a humanitarian catastrophe, all underlying causes of malnutrition are greatly intensified due to the combined (multiplicative) effects of a complete collapse in all three dimensions (availability and access to food, health and care). This leads to a likely exponential increase in malnutrition and mortality rates, due to the synergistic relationship between these causes (Young and Jaspars, 2009).

Deliberate attacks on food security and humanitarian assistance

In many situations, parties to armed conflict are unwilling to fulfil their responsibility to ensure access to basic services and goods, including food. Those actively involved in conflict may even deliberately undermine the food security of civilians for political or military reasons by intentionally targeting markets and ports and looting or besieging communities with the aim of causing hardship and starvation (Kemmerling, Schetter and Wirkus, 2022).

Humanitarian food assistance can provide a critical lifeline of support. Yet, food assistance often faces serious political, security and infrastructure-related impediments to its effective delivery. Humanitarian assistance is also subject to fragmented attempts to control aid (Mercy Corps, 2023a).

Countries suffering from long-standing conflict tend to be particularly fragile and have poor governance and weak infrastructure, which hamper the effective coordination and delivery of food assistance. Interference by political forces, cumbersome negotiations on aid inflow, and sometimes donor countries' regulations against dealing with groups classified as terrorists such as the Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Taliban in Afghanistan or ISIS in Syria, can also slow down the humanitarian response (Devereux, Sida and Nelis, 2017). The delivery of

humanitarian assistance may also be seriously hampered by fighting (UN, 2024a). Humanitarian agencies have, nevertheless, continued their efforts to deliver lifesaving assistance through various modalities, for example, using air drops or building temporary harbours through sea routes where roads are too unsafe. Nevertheless, such alternatives are costly and often ineffective at reaching the target population (Amnesty International, 2024). Therefore, measures such as air drops should only be used in places that cannot be reached otherwise, and only if they are necessary to save human lives.

Civilians most at risk

As food insecurity intensifies, affected populations are increasingly exposed to physical threats, family separation, further marginalization, gender-based violence and attacks as they search for food and medical care. Extreme food insecurity often forces people to turn to negative coping mechanisms, including rationing or skipping meals, eating animal feed, begging, early marriage, child labour, child recruitment in fighting, and transactional sex in exchange for food. Access to information on the availability and accessibility of food assistance is also limited, putting vulnerable groups at increased risk of exploitation and abuse (Global Protection Cluster, 2017).

In times of conflict, **disadvantaged groups** (such as children under 5 years of age, orphans, pregnant and breastfeeding women, female-headed households, refugees and internally displaced peoples, older people, people with disabilities, minorities and already marginalized communities suffering from social exclusion and discrimination) **tend to have the least resources and the lowest coping capacities, leaving them vulnerable to food insecurity**. Pastoralists, Nomadic peoples and Indigenous communities are also vulnerable, with conflict having an impact on their access to land, fishing and hunting resources. Lastly, women and girls worldwide in times of peace already face structural vulnerabilities and inequalities that are embedded in traditional practices and laws. In conflict situations, these further constrain their access to resources and affect their food security and nutrition (FAO and Asian Development Bank, 2013).

Refugees and internally displaced people

One of the primary effects of conflict is displacement, both internal and across borders. Displacement levels – at their highest since records began – demonstrate 71 million people as of 2023 (IDMC, 2023). A study conducted by WFP found that countries with the highest level of food insecurity, together with armed conflict, had the highest outward migration of refugees (WFP, 2017).

Conflict-induced displacement creates further food security challenges, as camps of displaced peoples who often have poor sanitation and limited or no access to food, housing, water and energy, are prone to contagion and diseases. De Waal (1997), therefore, argues that food crises are also health crises, where most deaths result

from waterborne and communicable diseases such as diarrhoea. Also, because of the poor hygiene conditions and the spreading of disease, vaccines are as useful as food aid (Devereux, Sida and Nelis 2017). Those fleeing conflict are often forced to leave behind their assets, and their economic independence may be hampered by the costs of transit, fewer income opportunities and limited rights in the host state. Host communities may also experience strains on their food supplies, especially if they are already facing economic instability. Conflict situations often create mass displacement, making it extremely difficult for humanitarian agencies to reach displaced and on-the-move populations, which are often in dire situations without access to food and/or clean water and/or adequate cooking facilities. Meeting these needs requires more funding, innovative responses and greater flexibility for aid agencies who must often create cross-border supply chains.

The long-term impact of starvation and famine

Conflict-induced **acute food insecurity and malnutrition have long-term and irreversible negative impacts** on health, productivity, well-being and social cohesion. These negative impacts can affect entire populations over many years and sometimes throughout generations, irrespective of whether a “famine” has been declared.

The effects of food crises fall disproportionately on **women, girls and children**. A general consensus in the literature suggests that hunger exacerbates gender inequality (Papastavrou, 2023; OXFAM, 2013; FAO and UN Women, 2022; UNOCHA, no date).

Pregnant women suffering from poor diets and thus inadequate nutrition are subject to increased risk of pre-eclampsia, haemorrhage, anaemia and death. Stillbirths can occur more frequently, and children may be affected by low birth weight, wasting and developmental delays their entire life cycle (UNICEF, 2024b). Moreover, pregnant women who are exposed to conflict give birth to children of lower weight, thus transmitting the adverse effects of conflict across generations (Camacho, 2008; Akresh *et al.*, 2023).

Most studies from a large body of research emphasize the crucial importance of good nutrition in the first “1000-days”, generally defined as the time from conception to age two (Hoddinott *et al.*, 2013). This includes the first six months of life when most of an infant’s nutrients come from breastmilk, the production of which is directly tied to the mother’s nutrition (Likhar and Patil, 2022). Breastfeeding is negatively affected by conflict, depriving children of nutritive and protective breast milk (Andersson *et al.*, 2010). Early life environmental conditions can cause epigenetic changes that persist throughout life (Heijmans *et al.*, 2009).

There is also growing evidence that the impact of famine may be intergenerational, through the negative impact on health and ability to work and thus earn income (Chen and Zou, 2007). In addition to directly exposing families to violence and food insecurity, conflict can therefore tear families apart, interrupt schooling, cut off access to health care, and eliminate jobs. Children’s physical and mental health may suffer, constraining their future life prospects and food security and nutrition outcomes (Ramirez and Haas, 2022; Hoddinott *et al.*, 2013).

Environmental destruction

The impact of wars on the environment and natural resources such as soil, air, water, and the loss of biological diversity have been overlooked and undermined in many cases. Aerial bombings cause enormous negative impacts by damaging agricultural lands, destroying trees and exterminating wildlife. Soil erosion and pollution of water resources are the most common environmental impacts of warfare (Meaza *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, in times of conflict, natural hazards such as drought or heavy rains affect an already vulnerable population and increase their food insecurity and health for a long time.

Most of the time, **any real damage to the ecosystem cannot be investigated during war time**. Such destruction could be a side effect of war, deliberate harm to weaponize the environment against civilians, or done intentionally to create the long-term destruction of enemy land. Even though there is a long history of war's destruction to the ecosystem, the term "ecocide" has been used only recently, in relation to wars, and defined as deliberate acts committed to cause widespread or long-term damage to the environment (Stop Ecocide Foundation, 2021; Kostin, 2024; Ahmed, Gayle and Mousa, 2024). Humanitarian responses often consider environmental destruction to be a side effect of war, not a key part of policy. This must change. **There is an urgent need to build humanitarian responses that take into consideration the environmental damage caused by war.**⁵ When building emergency responses, humanitarian actors must take ecosystem destruction into account and urge good practices and recovery. Moreover, perpetrators must be held accountable for the environmental damage.

There is also a need for environmental considerations in post-war reconstruction. This could be an opportunity to create more environmentally friendly practices and promote more sustainable, regenerative agricultural production methods. Such early investments can pay off in the longer term. With the support of FAO and WFP, there are several examples of good farming practices being introduced that are better adapted to climate change in places formerly hit by crises.⁶

Overall, in addition to the immediate humanitarian suffering, conflict-induced famine creates decades-long public health burdens and major structural damages. Therefore, it demands a comprehensive, holistic, cross-sectoral, and swift response from the international community.

⁵ For instance, Rohingya camps on Bangladesh destroyed large tracks of the jungle and were littered with HEP biscuit wrappers.

⁶ See also: FAO Good Practices on Resilience web page, <https://www.fao.org/capacity-development/resources/good-practices/resilience/en/>; WFP Resilience building web page, <https://www.wfp.org/resilience-building>; FAO. 2021. The State of Food and Agriculture 2021. *Making agrifood systems more resilient to shocks and stresses*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4476en>

The next section of this brief will look at the current conflicts in Gaza and the Sudan and their impact on acute food insecurity, as well as a risks of starvation and famine. Even though the special circumstances in these two places are very different, the adverse impacts of conflict on food systems and human health are very similar.

3. GAZA STRIP

One of the most urgent, severe food crises of our time is in the Gaza Strip (also referred to as Gaza) where **the whole population (approximately 2.2 million) is facing high levels of acute food insecurity** and cannot meet even their most basic livelihood needs, including basic food needs.

Prior to the current crisis, the Gaza Strip was identified as a major food crisis hotspot and has been blockaded since 2007. Since then, per capita real GDP growth in Gaza has been declining (- 2.5 percent annually) due to high population growth, and limited trade and employment opportunities; per capita income has been four times smaller than in the West Bank and the unemployment rate has reached 45 percent (IMF, 2023). 53 percent of the population has been below the poverty line (IMF, 2023).

The Gaza strip used to be dependent on imports (which represented 54 percent of the GDP) mostly from Israel but increasingly from Egypt, with heavy restrictions and controls. The Gaza strip is extremely reliant on the cross-border movements of goods, water and electricity. Moreover, remittances sent by migrants provided a lifeline.

Over the past 17 years, before the most recent war, 35 percent of the Gaza Strip's agricultural land, and as much as 85 percent of its fishing waters, have been restricted due to a range of issues, including creating buffer zones at various points (UNESCO, 2017). The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are confined in one of the most densely populated spaces in the world (5 900 residents per square kilometer), in chronic conflict conditions, with inadequate access to clean water and lack of a proper sewage system, and electricity available only for half a day. In September 2022, 70 percent of the population in Gaza was food insecure, with half of the population relying on humanitarian assistance as their main source of income (IPC, 2024a).

The escalation of violence after 7 October 2023 led to Gaza experiencing the fastest decline in a population's nutrition status ever recorded. It has resulted in the **destruction or damage to 80 to 96 percent of agricultural assets**, including green houses and irrigation systems; 81 percent of the fishing sector; 57 percent of WASH facilities; and 62 percent of roads. **62 percent of housing is uninhabitable.** 80 percent of the population has been forcefully displaced, most of them several times, and **80 percent of the working population has lost its livelihood and access to income-generating activities** (Vos, Elouafi, Swinnen, 2024). Moreover, 84 percent of health equipment has been destroyed; waste management and electrical power facilities have been damaged or destroyed, and power has been cut or interrupted (FSIN [Food Security Information Network] and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2024). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that at least 100 000 cubic metres of sewage and wastewater are dumped daily onto land or into the Mediterranean Sea. Food prices have skyrocketed, and the banking system has collapsed.

Conflict's impact on civilians

Women, children and newborns in Gaza are disproportionately bearing the burden of the escalation of hostilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. As of now, **70 percent of the almost 35 000 of casualties are women and children**. More than 650 000 children are out of school (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2024). The collapse of the health services combined with starvation and the exponential increase of infectious diseases has caused significant casualties.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Population Fund Sexual & Reproductive Health Agency (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) have warned the international community about the dire condition Gaza will face even after the conflict is over. There are an estimated 50 000 pregnant women in Gaza, with more than 180 giving birth every day. 15 percent of these women are likely to experience pregnancy or birth-related complications and need additional medical care.

Prior to October 2023, malnutrition was already high among pregnant women, with impacts on childhood survival and development. Currently, some 90 percent of children under 2 years of age and 95 percent of pregnant and breastfeeding women face severe food insecurity and malnutrition, as they consume only two or fewer food groups per day. As access to food and water worsens, mothers are struggling to feed and care for their families, which increases risks of malnutrition, disease, and death.

More than **80 percent of households, if still they have a home, lack safe water**. Since the war started, people in Gaza have been forced to rely on only 1 litre of water per day (compared with the overall standard of 15 litres per person per day). These factors combine to mean that at least 90 percent of children under 5 years of age are affected by one or two infectious diseases, with 70 percent experiencing diarrhoea, a twenty-threefold increase in February compared with the 2022 baseline (WHO, 2024). Already in February 2024 UNICEF, WFP and WHO warned that children's nutrition would continue to plummet, causing preventable deaths and health issues which will affect Gaza children for the rest of their lives and potentially transfer to the next generation (UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2024).

After several months of war, Gazans have exhausted all coping strategies. They are consuming livestock fodder, begging, or selling off their belongings to purchase food. Devastation, besiegement, the destruction of infrastructure, and severely restricted humanitarian access have put as much as half the population into the threat of famine, categorized by the IPC as Phase 5.

As of 8 June 2024, famine was not yet formally declared in Gaza by the Famine Review Committee (FRC).⁷ In the most recent analysis on 25 June 2024, the FRC stated that the entire Gaza strip faces a “plausible” risk of famine in the coming months, driven by new evidence, stating that:

A high risk of Famine persists as long as conflict continues, and humanitarian access is restricted... The FRC encourages all stakeholders who use the IPC for high-level decision-making to understand that whether a Famine classification is confirmed or not does not in any manner change the fact that extreme human suffering is without a doubt currently ongoing in the Gaza Strip and does not change the immediate humanitarian imperative to address this civilian suffering by enabling complete, safe, unhindered, and sustained humanitarian access into and throughout the Gaza Strip, including through ceasing hostilities. All actors should not wait until a Famine classification is made to act accordingly (UN, 2024a).

Humanitarian aid crisis

Gaza has been an occupied territory for a long time, dependent on food imports and aid, and before 7 October 2023, around 500 trucks were entering Gaza each day, carrying both humanitarian aid and commercial items for people to survive there. That number fell by approximately 75 percent in the early months of the conflict. Since then, very limited humanitarian supplies have been allowed to enter Gaza because of restrictions, arbitrary denials, infrastructural problems, and security concerns. Echoing deep and repeated warnings from humanitarians about the scale of the severe emergency across Gaza linked to the lack of aid access, the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) noted that “at least half of all humanitarian aid missions are denied access, impeded, or cancelled due to operational or security reasons” (UN, 2024b).

International humanitarian law regulates the protection of civilians in times of war. In Gaza, these principles have been ignored. Humanitarian aid has been subjected to constant negotiation and has not been implemented consistently. On 22 December 2023, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2720 on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which called for increased provisions of fuel, food and medical supplies. The resolution, among other points, demands immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip. The UNSC demanded that the parties “allow, facilitate and enable” international humanitarian law principles in order

⁷ The Famine Review Committee in March 2024 concluded that “famine is now projected and imminent” in Northern Gaza by the end of May. On 8 June 2024, the same body rejected this conclusion and said that is not “plausible” that Northern Gaza has entered a state of famine on the grounds that such assertions ignored or underestimated the value of both commercial sources of food and certain forms of humanitarian aid. See: <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/06/17/expert-panel-rejects-claims-of-famine-in-northern-gaza/>.

to coordinate and implement Resolution 2720 (UNSC, 2023). Further, the UNSG appointed a Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. Unfortunately, several months after the adoption of Resolution 2720, there has been no meaningful increase in the scale and predictability of the humanitarian aid distribution in Gaza.

Humanitarian aid is fully available for Gaza at the Gaza border, yet the inflow of food aid is blocked at the border, soft and hard infrastructure has been destroyed, and it is extremely unsafe for humanitarian aid workers to deliver aid. The United Nations reported that as of 30 April, 254 aid workers and at least 493 health care workers have been killed in Gaza. This includes nurses, paramedics, doctors and other medical personnel (UNSC, 2024).

There is a need to clarify the two issues here that are hampering distributing aid right now in Gaza:

1. lack of formal access from the authorities; and
2. operations being severely affected by an escalation of fighting in the south and the centre of Gaza and the security vacuum and lawlessness in the south.

Those political and security concerns are both limiting humanitarian aid access in different ways.

4. THE SUDAN

Though extreme hunger is not new to the country, the situation in the Sudan is extremely dire. **The Sudan was plagued by a protracted crisis long before war erupted in April 2023.** The long decades of conflicts in many parts of the peripheries and resultant isolation of rebel-held areas have already made most places food insecure. In 1984, drought and conflict killed an estimated 240 000 people, most of them children. Ever since, the Sudan has experienced high levels of political and economic volatility: After the oil boom years (1999–2010), the secession of South Sudan, the loss of oil revenues, and the designation of the Sudan as a sponsor of terrorism have cut the country from foreign assistance. Following the democratic transition in 2019, the country started reforms and obtained a relief of debt. The process was interrupted by a military takeover in 2021 followed by war, first between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Response Forces (RSF) in April 2023 for the control of the capital Khartoum, now spreading to the whole country. In the recent eruption, a large part of the country has been affected as conflict rapidly spread from Khartoum to the Darfur and Kordofan regions and beyond, involving an increasing number of armed actors. As a result of the year-long civil war, hunger is spreading fast (Michael, 2024).

The consequences of the conflict have had a devastating impact not only in the Sudan, but in the neighbouring countries of the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan. In June 2024, the IPC predicted that over half of the population of the Sudan, 25.6 million people, will face “crises of worse” conditions between now and September 2024, coinciding with the lean season. This means families are adopting consumption coping strategies such as skipping meals and selling possessions to buy food; **8.5 million people are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4)**, and child death rates are increasing. About 755 000 people face level 5 Catastrophic/Famine conditions in ten states, including in Greater Darfur as well as South and North Kordofan, Blue Nile, Al Jazira and Khartoum, where they have nothing to eat. The number of Sudanese children facing severe food shortages almost doubled in the first half of 2024, with about 75 percent going hungry daily as conflict drives hunger to record levels (UNICEF, n d.).

According to the IPC, as much as 5 percent of the Sudan’s population might be subjected to starvation by September 2024 (IPC, 2024b).

Due to the severe impact of the conflict on agricultural production, combined with displacement, loss of life, destruction and damage to major infrastructure and livelihoods, disrupted trade flows and poor market functionality, food prices have severely increased.

Humanitarian agencies have been targeted by different armed actors, and militias seeking monetary gains and the looting of trucks, offices and warehouses are curtailing the capacity of humanitarian organizations. The western region of Darfur, where the threat is greatest, is nearly cut off from humanitarian aid (de Waal, 2024b).

About 70 percent of hospitals and medical facilities are not functional, and people are dying from the spread of curable diseases and operable injuries (Madani, 2024). The window to significantly reduce the impact of what is becoming the world's largest hunger crisis in decades is rapidly closing (Hoffman, 2024).

Similar to the current situation in the Gaza strip, it is technically difficult for the IPC to declare a situation of famine, due to the lack of or insufficient reliable data, and the impossibility of safely entering war zones by national or international NGOs. Nutritionists, statisticians, and famine experts cannot base their assessments on speculations about child malnutrition and mortality. However, according to the most likely scenario: "escalation of conflicts underscores the risk of famine ahead of the lean season's peak August-September 2024 [when] seven million people will face catastrophic levels of hunger (Level 5)" (FEWS NET, 2024). With mass starvation being the prospect, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese children will be starving to death over the coming months (de Waal, 2024a).

Large-scale forced displacement

Even before April 2023, the Sudan counted approximately 2.8 million internally displaced people, mainly consisting of refugees from South Sudan, Ethiopia, and other neighbouring countries, as well as members of pastoral communities who were unable to sustain themselves during the lean season. Now, with **more than 7 million people estimated to have been displaced by the conflict, the Sudan has witnessed the largest internal displacement crisis globally**. Half of the displaced are children, also making this the largest children's displacement crisis globally (UNOCHA, 2024).

The most acutely food-insecure peoples are in the Khartoum, Bahri and Omdurman regions, where many internally displaced people (IDP) originated from. The consequences of the conflict in the Sudan have severely affected its neighbouring countries, with 1.2 million people having crossed into neighbouring countries. Chad has received the largest number of people, followed by Egypt, South Sudan, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic (FAO and WFP, 2023b).

The conflict has also had a **disproportionate impact on women and girls**, especially due to the use of rape as a weapon of war (FAO and WFP, 2024b).

Major impact on agricultural sector and food systems

The Sudan conflict started in cities, which are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity as they rely on food produced elsewhere (HLPE, 2024). **Conflict has severely restricted access to land for cultivation, livestock movement and seasonal activities, making it extremely difficult for households to produce food**. Major infrastructure for food production and storage has been destroyed, and supply chain disruptions have further

limited the availability and distribution of seeds, inputs and agricultural finance. Violence is reducing access to water and pasture for livestock and disrupting seasonal migration in heavy fighting areas.

Agricultural households account for 45 percent of the labour force in the Sudan. Agricultural activities are affected by extreme weather events, such as erratic rainfall or droughts that lead to huge losses of crops and livestock. Even before the last war, food prices were very high, increasing threefold between 2021 and mid-2022. About 64 percent of households did not have stocks for the lean season. In June 2022, already 9.65 million people were highly food insecure (IPC Phase 3 or above), out of which 3.1 million people were in Emergency (Phase 4) due to poor harvests, dire macroeconomic conditions and protracted conflict. Female-headed households and the poorest 20 percent of households were particularly vulnerable to these shocks. Almost 80 percent of households had no access to safe water or vital food items (WFP, 2022).

The 2024 harvests in the Sudan were very low due to a combination of bad weather and the destruction caused by the war, and food stores are now empty (Government of the Netherlands, 2024). The conflict has halted production in certain areas, and destroyed human capital and state capacity. The productive capacities of the Sudan have been heavily compromised, with damage, looting and the destruction of critical infrastructure, namely the financial sector, private property, food-manufacturing facilities and markets, bringing production and economic activities to a halt in certain areas. All these negative developments indicate that acute food insecurity will increasingly continue as long as conflict continues.

Violence patterns in the Sudan converge around control of assets. For example, land is a major aspect of the militia's primitive accumulation techniques. In almost all locations that have fallen under the control of RSF, agricultural land has been claimed by fighters and farmers pushed out. This has implications beyond harvest levels, and speaks to the violent reordering of land relations, a possible catalyst for civil war.

Impact on humanitarian access and humanitarians' ability to work

The Sudan is one of the most difficult humanitarian operational environments in the world today. Operating in the Sudan represents a high risk for humanitarians, with 20 aid workers killed in 2023. Humanitarian agencies have been targeted by different armed actors, and financing humanitarian aid is challenging in many conflict zones, including the Sudan. The 2024 Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan requires USD 2.7 billion to provide assistance to 14.7 million people across the Sudan. As of June 2024, the appeal is only funded up to 16.6 percent of the estimated needs, leaving a substantial funding gap (UNOCHA, 2024).

Nevertheless, there is a risk that in-country capacity to distribute assistance may be overwhelmed, with disastrous delays, or with the manipulation of aid. Lessons from earlier conflicts warned that food aid and other humanitarian assistance could be valuable resources to warring parties. There is a risk in any conflict that armed actors will tax or loot humanitarian assistance and use it to fuel the war economy, control access to humanitarian

aid, and use starvation as a weapon of war, or otherwise obtain political legitimacy by controlling aid (Mercy Corps 2023b, c).

The Sudan's fragmented rule and governance, which includes both factious military and paramilitary groups, as well as Sudanese state institutions and civil society, hinder effective humanitarian responses. As the conflict continues, both institutions and territory are becoming more divided and fragmented. Further, geopolitical influences from regional and international actors have also impacted the Sudan's national security, military and public finances (Mercy Corps, 2023a).

One positive development is that **Sudanese civil society**, particularly in the form of civic-oriented groups such as neighbourhood resistance committees, although fragmented, partially contribute to the livelihood of local communities, with the help of the Sudanese diaspora's financial support. Humanitarian actors, carefully monitored to ensure impartiality, could support existing local civil society networks, to complement the fragmented governance structure (Mercy Corps, 2023d).

5. PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AGAINST SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RIGHT TO FOOD, INCLUDING STARVATION AND FAMINE IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

It is essential to reaffirm that it is first and foremost for states and parties to conflict to uphold their responsibilities under the applicable legal frameworks for ensuring the right to food in contexts of acute food insecurity. Humanitarian aid plays a critical role in filling gaps in situations where states themselves are unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs of their populations. In many of today's conflicts, the humanitarian aid system is in essence asked to take over basic functions from states and parties to the conflict.

Several branches of international law, including human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law contain norms that apply to protect people in conflict against severe violations of the right to adequate food.⁶

International human rights law

The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (ICESCR, Art. 11) (UNGA, 1966) as an obligatory (binding) international human rights treaty is applicable in peace and war time. The obligations of states regarding the right to food and other economic, social and cultural rights fall into three categories, namely the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil such rights. The neglect of the right to food during a conflict may lead to further human rights' violations and even cause further conflict. States have an obligation to refrain from interfering with people's enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to food, and are also obliged to protect those rights from interference by third parties, including armed groups. States cannot put aside or postpone the realization of the right to food in times of conflict, using all appropriate means to fulfil this right.

In its **General Comment No. 12 (1999) on the Right to Adequate Food**, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 1999) provides a comprehensive interpretation of the provisions of the right to food, as well as in times of conflict. The CESCR distinguishes between the inability and the unwillingness of states' parties to comply, which is a useful distinction in a situation of conflict. Similarly, in paragraph 19 of the General Comment, the committee clarifies that "the prevention of access to humanitarian food aid in internal conflicts

⁶ This section predominantly derives from the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver (UNGA, 2017).

or other emergency situations” through the direct action of states or other entities insufficiently regulated by states is considered a violation of the right to adequate food (UNOHCHR, 1999, p. vi).

The 2004 **Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security** refers to humanitarian law and iterates that food should never be used as an instrument of political and economic pressure and that states should provide for the needs of the civilian population, including access to food in situations of armed conflict and occupation (FAO, 2005).

In 2015, the CFS endorsed a series of **principles for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises** to improve the food security and nutrition of populations affected by, or at risk of, protracted crises by addressing critical manifestations and building resilience; adapting to specific challenges; and responding to underlying causes (CFS, 2015). While the Framework is voluntary and non-binding, it draws on widely endorsed international and regional instruments and global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals. It is the first formulation of a global consensus to mitigate threats to food security and nutrition during protracted crises. The Framework is based on 11 principles, including meeting immediate humanitarian needs and building resilient livelihoods; empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality; strengthening country ownership, participation, coordination and accountability; contributing to resolving underlying causes; and peacebuilding through food security and nutrition.

International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law is a set of rules that seek to limit the adverse effects of armed conflict on civilians. Three of the main rules of humanitarian law, based on the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, are designed to protect people not participating in hostilities.

International humanitarian law prohibits the use of starvation as a weapon of war, which includes destruction of crops, foodstuffs, wells and other objects that are essential for the survival of civilians (UN, 1949),⁸ and prohibits forced displacement (Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention).

Denying or blocking humanitarian assistance is also prohibited under international humanitarian law. Humanitarian aid must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. These principles are endorsed by the UNGA resolutions (UNGA, 1991; UNGA, 2004). Also, humanitarian food aid in periods of war should be distinguished from food aid in periods of peace (Ziegler, 2002).

⁸ Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in times of War, 1949; article 54 [1] of Additional Protocol I and article 14 of Additional Protocol II.

International criminal law: individual criminal responsibility

Certain gross or serious violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law have been considered of such gravity by the international community that they have been regulated under international criminal law, imposing individual criminal responsibility.

The intentional use of starvation as a weapon of war is forbidden under international criminal law, and it is classified as a war crime under Article 8 (2) (b) (xxv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). The 2018 UN Security Council Resolution 2417 is a good step forward to discussing starvation as a war crime; the “intentionality” factor should further be elaborated, as it is too narrow, allowing only for when intentionality can be proven as a direct and deliberate action. However, hunger can be used in different ways to weaken a group, to push them to surrender or as punishment, or as a predictable but not entirely intentional outcome of counter insurgency, or land grabbing, as well as deliberately destroying the earth and committing ecocide during wartime (de Waal, 2018).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current increase of severe food insecurity in conflict, protracted conflict and post-conflict situations are major concerns of our time. **Timely intervention is a key to saving lives in acute food insecurity crises.** Humanitarian aid donors must not wait to finance aid until famine is officially declared. Decision-makers should scale up assistance as soon as an area is classified as being in Crisis or Emergency (IPC/CH Phases 3 or 4).

Also, in many places, conflict-induced acute or chronic food insecurity, aggravated by climate change, pandemics, natural disasters and economic shocks, creates deeper food insecurity and long-term vulnerability. Conflict also drives gender-based food insecurity, increases inequalities and brings forth additional vulnerabilities (HLPE, 2023). To avoid the vulnerabilities multiplying, there is a need for forward-looking promising policies, and approaches and innovations to support local food systems and ensure resilience in conflict-prone areas. Such policies should be designed for people who are the most affected by conflict, enabling them to be agents of change rather than passive receivers in times of humanitarian assistance.

The international community needs to promote the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to prevent conflict-related hunger crises while building long-term sustainable and equitable food systems.

Starvation has historically been used by warring parties as a weapon of war. In recent conflicts similar tactics have frequently been used against civilians. Policies and laws help to pre-empt the use of starvation as a weapon of war. The United Nations Security Council Decision 2417 (2018) firmly established the link between armed conflict and food insecurity, defining starvation as a war crime if intentionally used against civilians as a method of warfare. However, since the resolution was unanimously adopted, it has not been implemented in any conflict to stop starvation and punish the perpetrators of parties involved. Unfortunately, the present lack of political will and geopolitical complexities block such policy recommendations from being implemented, and security concerns and funding shortages delay or block urgent action.

Immediate steps must be taken to encourage the implementation of existing legal standards and international law principles that include human rights law, humanitarian law and criminal law. From the food security perspective, several domestic and international law principles and policies exist. These includes several voluntary guidelines, and framework principles of the CFS that address food security in protracted conflicts, upholding the right to food, and other relevant rights as they apply to food security in times of peace, conflict and post-conflict periods. Second, there is a need to codify and elaborate existing international humanitarian law principles to cover essential elements of conflict prevention. This must also include the prohibition associated with famine; reforming and revitalizing the humanitarian aid/assistance system that focuses not only on emergency food delivery to save lives, but also on rebuilding and rehabilitating the agriculture sector, entire food systems and other relevant sectors such as health, social security, environment, and infrastructure.

Considering that most conflict-prone countries have agriculture-based economies, **rebuilding the economy**, and facilitating the return to farming or fishing is key to the successful reintegration of local workforces. Especially for victims living in post-conflict places, replacing lost productive assets is not enough. Countries that have recently emerged from conflict are prone to slip back into conflict again. There is a need to make a robust transition from subsistence farming to more resilient, recuperative, sustainable food systems and livelihoods. Innovative research methodologies help to mitigate food insecurity during time of conflict. One of the major problems of evaluating the level of food insecurity is collecting data and evidence-based knowledge. New digital technologies could help to investigate food insecurity levels in combat zones.

For the **transition period**, interventions to support peasants, smallholder farmers, small-scale fishers and other food producers are needed, with priority for decommissioned combatants, women and youth. These groups constitute the largest segments of the workforce in current conflict zones. The capacity of these food system workers to jump-start their livelihoods could be greatly enhanced by providing them with an understanding of how markets work, facilitating their access to improved production systems and making their farms more resilient (FAO, 2016a).

Long-term policies and commitment are essential if the international community is to avoid the periodic recurrence of famine. In their absence, it should come as no surprise that current challenges will have a spillover effect in peacetime. This is a far more realistic prospect than expecting famines to disappear as soon as the guns fall silent. Human rights' violations, war crimes, hostilities, repression and all sorts of inequality are conditions that frequently generate famine. The attention and commitment of the international community must, as a matter of the highest priority, be directed at eliminating the root causes, instead of addressing just the visible symptoms, of the prior food catastrophe (de Waal, 2018). Structural deficiencies such as economic, political and social inequality and long-term dependency on aid need to be tackled to build food sovereignty and self-sufficiency to foster food security and adequate nutrition in conflict and post-conflict zones. These structural reforms need to be completed by funding comprehensive social protection and building resilient and sustainable food systems. In other words, an effective preventive approach to famine is likely to save many more lives than the current reactive approach.

Immediate responses to famine

To stop starvation and avoid famine, the following actions are needed:

- **Respect international law:** The parties of the conflict and the international community must ensure respect for international law and international human rights law, particularly the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. Vigorous efforts must be made to pursue accountability for atrocity crimes committed by all parties involved. In particular, ongoing impunity for the crime of starvation

should stop. The current legal definition of the crime of starvation is too narrow, allowing for the definition to be used only when starvation is used intentionally, which is almost impossible to demonstrate or is simply rare.

- **Ceasefire now:** An immediate and enduring ceasefire, endorsed by the UN Security Council, must be respected. Without a comprehensive and long-lasting ceasefire, it is almost impossible to avoid or recover from deep, comprehensive and full-scale famine conditions.
- **Specialized task force:** Given the ongoing conflicts in Gaza, the Sudan and other regions, to prevent such food insecurity in the future, the international community should consider establishing specialized forces while keeping in mind humanitarian principles, whose priority is to ensure that food can be effectively and objectively delivered to those most in need in conflict zones. The nature of these forces could be akin to UN peacekeepers (e.g. the Blue Helmets). For illustrative purposes, these food facilitators/distributors might be dubbed the Green Helmets and become a distinct UN Agency. The process by which the Green Helmets might be deployed as a rapid response unit should be quasi automatic when the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification System's Famine Review Committee has validated the finding of a Phase 4. United Nations' Member States should guarantee the Green Helmets safe conduct. In particular, the parties involved in the conflict must not be allowed to deny the Green Helmets access to the areas where famine is imminent or prevalent.
- **Establish safe zones:** It is vital for civilians to have access to safe places and passage to safe locations during conflicts, if available. The international community must strive to create safe and secure zones for civilians, which can also provide a more stable environment for humanitarian organizations.
- **End arbitrary restriction to aid:** There is an urgent need to establish a system that delivers food, water and medicine to save the lives of vulnerable groups. The international community should work towards an agreement on the quantities and qualities of food aid needed and ensure that there is an unfettered, concerted and comprehensive approach to delivering humanitarian assistance. This must include diverse UN organizations, such as UNRWA, WFP, FAO, WHO, UNICEF and others.
- **Groups at most risk:** The most vulnerable should be the first to receive aid, including ready-to-use therapeutic food. It is vital to focus on the long-term effects of food insecurity for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and for children up to the ages of 0 to 2, and 2 to 5, as these groups are especially vulnerable to life-long physical and neurological health impacts following episodes of food insecurity.
- **Food security is more than food:** Provide safe water, dry toilets and vaccines to curb the spread of contagious diseases.

- **Assistance to displaced peoples in camps:** This includes allowing displaced peoples to cultivate land around the camp, for as long as necessary, especially until basic infrastructure in their origin region is rebuilt.
- **Facilitate trade and private sector activity:** This is to rebuild income-generating activities and cash flows in affected areas.
- **Ease migration and remittances, recognized as vital income-generating activities:** Increase the transparency and efficiency of international remittances, making them less costly, while addressing concerns of possible manipulation in a war economy.

To recover and rebuild the capacity of the conflict zones to produce food, there must be a plan to do the following:

- **Increase access to affordable, healthy diets** in all places prone to food insecurity crises.
- **Involve locals:** Aid agencies must work with food producers, local governments, and organizations to rebuild the productive capacities of local communities and productive resources on land and at sea. In the long term, rebuilding farms, food-processing facilities and distributing farm equipment and inputs are key.
- **Restore the environment:** Rebuild damage to environmental and agricultural resources to avoid environmental disasters, address loss of biological diversity, and clean up chemical pollution on land and in water resources. Future food security, self-sufficiency and the rebuilding of resilient food systems are dependent on environmental and ecosystem restoration.

Medium-term actions

Just as they do in peacetime, people in conflict zones depend on supply chains to deliver food. Therefore, the following medium-term priority must be met to help **rebuild food systems in post-conflict zones**:

- **Rebuild supply chains:** Given widespread devastation, the international community must rebuild facilities to safely produce, harvest, clean, process, transport and distribute food. Rebuilding the food supply chain requires a focus on transportation networks, power grids, and food markets. The capacity to safely store and refrigerate food is a critical priority.
- **Build infrastructure:** In conflict zones, roads, harbours, sewage systems, water lines, and energy infrastructure are often damaged or destroyed. This is the case specifically in the Gaza Strip where massive destruction has been caused. Rebuilding agricultural capacity, along with the infrastructure to process, transport and distribute food is a multi-year undertaking. Furthermore, it is necessary to support producers with seeds, livestock, tools, and – depending on the length of displacement – training

to re-establish the agricultural production system. This may involve rehabilitating and, where necessary, de-mining farmland.

- **Social protection and services:** To reduce the long-term negative socioeconomic outcomes of food crises, the international community must commit to support national governments that seek to implement measures to establish or expand social protection programmes targeted to the most food insecure.
- **Provide a social safety net:** Provide transfers in cash or in-kind, contingent upon the annual hungry season or bad years (by adding beneficiaries and increasing the amount delivered), learning from successful experiences on productive safety nets and the combined provision of asset, income, health care and mentoring.
- **Secure funding:** The international community should expeditiously come together and develop plans that include compensation, and financing mechanisms that allow the reconstruction of infrastructure, with a specific focus on the food-related supply chain.

Long-term actions

Long-term peace requires **fostering economic recovery, peacebuilding, reconciliation, rebuilding social services and creating welfare programmes**. A functioning food system is a prerequisite of a healthy society. Wars create public disorder. It is vital to build a comprehensive and holistic system that is resilient to future crises. As such, most interventions to support long-term recovery are not specific to food systems per se.

- **Reinforce the existing Global Famine Fund and establish a new one to response urgent conflicts:** Secure international funding other than voluntary contributions by establishing mandatory funding at the international level, following the example of the Green Climate Fund. The new funding should be available to use before IPC level 5 Catastrophe/Famine occurs. IPC Level 3 or 4 should be enough to fund if there is a political will to avoid famine.
- **Reform the international humanitarian aid/assistance system** to respond to current conflict zones that prioritize solving structural problems, such as economic, financial and social conditions that were the very reasons that created conflict in first place.

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