



Security Council Update

Food Insecurity in Conflict Areas

Introduction

According to the 2015 Global Hunger Index (GHI), the developing world has advanced toward their goals to reduce hunger by 27 percent.¹ “The end of many Communist regimes, adoption of international human rights norms, and the rise of globalization are among key factors that may help us eliminate famine forever.”² However, the highest GHI index scores reflect that Asia and South of the Sahara have the most concerning hunger levels despite improvement in the developing world.³ “An issue of vital importance to Africa South of the Sahara is the link between agriculture and nutrition. More than two-thirds of the region’s population relies on agriculture for income, including more than 90 percent of the region’s extreme poor.”⁴ Asia and some of South America face the same scenario.

The GHI report not only publishes the measurement levels of hunger by country but also explores the relationship between hunger and armed conflict. It has been argued that a lack of sustainable food sources has been the genesis of past and recent conflicts. On the contrary, conflict has also induced notable instances of food insecurity. Some theorists argue that food scarcity does not necessarily lead to conflict and that a “trigger condition for violent conflict may be natural, such as a prolonged drought or economical, such as the change in price of the principal food or cash crop.”⁵ In 2011, the World Bank offered an even different perspective: “a debate widely known as ‘greed or grievance’” was argued in the *World Development Report*, but it concluded that there is no simple explanation for the underlying connection between conflict and hunger.⁶ While each perspective has its legitimate arguments, it seems that conflict can be viewed as both a cause and effect of hunger. The constant that remains is the fact that Member States under the greatest stress often have the least capability to respond or rebound.⁷ Despite a clear link between hunger and conflict, researchers in 2017 reported that “due to the effectiveness of humanitarian responses in the modern world, conflict need not necessarily lead to the extreme hunger that is famine.”⁸ As such, finding a way to prevent cycles of hunger, through sustainable agriculture and rural development, is where the international emphasis is.⁹

Understanding the Magnitude of the Problem

As of 2017, at least eight countries have recorded catastrophic levels of food insecurity in at least 25 percent of their population.¹⁰ The year prior, it was reported that of the 815 million people living with acute food insecurity, 489 million lived within conflict zones.¹¹ As such, “the World Bank revised its position on conflict – upgrading it from

¹ 2015 Global Hunger Index: “Armed Conflict and the Challenge of Hunger”, International Food Policy Research Institute, October 2015, <file:///C:/Users/JDeJesus/Downloads/129892.pdf> (Accessed 7 February 2018).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Emergency Nutrition Network, “Conflict: a cause and effect of hunger” <https://www.enonline.net/fex/12/conflict> (Accessed 7 February 2018).

⁶ 2015 Global Hunger Index: “Armed Conflict and the Challenge of Hunger”, International Food Policy Research Institute, October 2015, <file:///C:/Users/JDeJesus/Downloads/129892.pdf> (Accessed 7 February 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Danish Refugee Council, Action Against Hunger USA, “Unresolved conflicts producing hunger and displacement: a call to Africa and Europe,” <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/unresolved-conflicts-producing-hunger-and-displacement-call-africa-and-europe> (Accessed 7 February 2018).

¹⁰ The Guardian, “‘Price of conflict is too high’: hunger at crisis levels in eight countries,” <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jan/30/price-of-conflict-is-too-high-hunger-at-crisis-levels-in-eight-countries> (Accessed 7 February 2018).

¹¹ Ibid.

being one of many drivers of suffering and poverty, to being the primary driver.”¹² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly highlighted the two-way relationship between development and conflict, stressing the “need for increased international collaboration in conflict prevention and resolution.”¹³ While some of the more notorious international organizations have begun to acknowledge that food insecurity is a clear contributor to political instability and conflict, there are several other aspects to consider when discussing the ties between violent conflict and a lack of food. In recent history, armed intrastate conflict has significantly increased the risk of famine in numerous states. Armed conflict, particularly civil conflict, has the potential to disrupt economic activity, as well as consume and destroy land that would otherwise be used for agricultural activities.¹⁴ 65 percent of the most food insecure nations have experienced civil conflict in the last ten years.¹⁵ Competition over resource scarcity, particularly water, food, and land, often ignites and prolongs instances of civil conflict. In some of the most fragile states, we have witnessed the effect of civil war and food insecurity: massive displacement and migration flow.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations (UN) has expanded its security mandate to link conflict and development, by mitigating existing security crises and preventing them.¹⁶ Part of this concept requires an increase in attention to those development factors that lead to hunger. UN agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), have emphasized the link between conflict and hunger, and have adopted the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to measure the extent of hunger and risk of famine in a particular area.¹⁷ The IPC scale has five classifications: Phase 1 – Minimal, Phase 2 – Stressed, Phase 3 – Crisis, Phase 4 – Emergency, and Phase 5 – Famine.¹⁸

Member States currently affected by both conflict and severe food insecurity, as classified by a Phase 4 or 5 on the IPC scale, are Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Nigeria.¹⁹ Additionally, each of these Member States are categorized as a developing state by the UN²⁰ which is noteworthy because armed conflict is more prevalent in developing Member States.²¹ When considering the developmental status of the state combined with issues such as poor resource distribution, political upheaval, extreme inequality, and environmental effects such as drought, it is easy to understand how conflict can be cultivated.²² Further, in these Member States, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is the primary industry, with up to two-thirds of the population employed in this sector.²³ Agricultural services in these states have been disrupted by armed groups embroiled in fighting, as land and trade routes otherwise used for agricultural activity, are completely compromised.²⁴ In some cases, militants use hunger as a weapon, cutting off food distribution routes and purposefully starving populations.²⁵

¹² World Economic Forum, “The true cause of hunger and famine? War and weak governance,” <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/04/conflict-and-famine-time-for-honesty/> (Accessed 7 February 2017).

¹³ The Food Security Portal, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Chronic Hunger on the Rise,” <http://www.foodsecurityportal.org/state-food-security-and-nutrition-world-chronic-hunger-rise> (Accessed 8 February 2017).

¹⁴ José Graziano da Silva and David Beasley, “Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations: A joint FAO/WFP update for the United Nations Security Council,” *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, June 2017, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7490e.pdf>.

¹⁵ World Food Programme, “Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict: Causes, Consequences, and Addressing the Challenges,” <https://ucanr.edu/blogs/food2025/blogfiles/14415.pdf> (Accessed 9 January 2018).

¹⁶ Ana Maria Lebeda, “UN Security Council Discusses Links with 2030 Agenda,” *SDG Knowledge Hub*, 25 November 2015, <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-security-council-discusses-links-with-2030-agenda/> (accessed 13 January 2018).

¹⁷ Da Silva & Beasley, “Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Fighting famine: 'Unprecedented crisis' putting 20 million people at risk, warns UN agency,”

²⁰ “Developing regions,” *United Nations Development Programme*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/developing-regions> (accessed 31 January 2018).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Messer, Cohen, & Marchione, “Conflict: A Cause and Effect of Hunger.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Current Situation

Of primary concern, inadequate access to food sources can serve as an incentive for civilians to join revolutionary, terrorist, or criminal groups, in the interest of attaining a steady and reliable source of food.²⁶ This was the case in Somalia in 2011; militant group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (al-Shabaab) capitalized on a drought-induced famine and increased its recruitment success by providing a source of food in exchange for involvement in acts of violence on both the government and civilians.²⁷ These activities only exacerbated the severe food insecurity in the state, as well as continued to serve as a reliable tool for recruitment, highlighting the humanitarian and security implication for several Member States.²⁸ This trend has steadily increased across the globe, presenting a significant two-prong challenge for Member States riddled by rebellious factions.

Stephen O'Brien, UN Under Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs, went before the Security Council in March 2017 and stated, "we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the United Nations."²⁹ Currently, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and northeast Nigeria are affected by severe food insecurity, associated with civil conflict and lack of access to humanitarian assistance.³⁰ An estimated 20 million people, including 1.4 million children, are at risk of starvation.³¹ In Yemen alone, there are 21.2 million in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, with 7.6 million at risk of starvation.³² The primary cause of this food insecurity is the civil war between the government, backed by an international coalition, and the Houthi rebellion.³³ Additionally, both Somalia and South Sudan are Member States which have experienced previous famines. Combined with civil war, weak government institutions, and drought, there are widespread food and water shortages.³⁴ Finally, in northeastern Nigeria, the protracted conflict between Islamist-extremist group Boko Haram and the government military has left thousands displaced; although the area is not considered to be at risk for extreme famine, 8.5 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance, including provision of food and water.^{35 36} Among these factors, the common thread is anchored by violent civil conflict that limits both the ability of governmental action and proper delivery of food supplies.

Yemen

In 2014, Houthi rebels, allied with former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, and ousted interim president Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi with a violent take-over of the capital city of Sana'a, as well as most of western Yemen.³⁷ Since then, Yemen has been embroiled in a devastating humanitarian crisis. Saudi Arabia, supporting the al-Hadi government, has created a coalition of Arab states that are using an airstrike campaign in attempt to fight off the Houthis; this coalition controls much of southern Yemen.³⁸ On the opposing side, Iran has supported the rebellion

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cullen Hendrix & Henk-Jan Brinkman (2013), "Food Insecurity and Conflict Dynamics: Causal Linkages and Complex Feedbacks," *International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(2).

²⁹ Associated Press, "World faces worst humanitarian crisis since 1945, says UN official," *The Guardian*, 10 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/11/world-faces-worst-humanitarian-crisis-since-1945-says-un-official> (accessed 15 January 2018).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Fighting famine: 'Unprecedented crisis' putting 20 million people at risk, warns UN agency."

³² Zachary Laub, "Yemen in Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified 19 April 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis> (Accessed 12 January 2018).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jeffrey Gettleman, "Drought and War Heighten Threat of Not Just 1 Famine, but 4," *The New York Times*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/world/africa/famine-somalia-nigeria-south-sudan-yemen-water.html> (Accessed 13 January 2018).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Nigeria: Famine averted but millions still at risk, stresses top UN relief official," *UN News Centre*, 13 September 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57509> (Accessed 15 January 2018).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

through the provision of military-grade weapons.³⁹ To further complicate the issue, the terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has taken over areas on the coast.⁴⁰ The conflict has created a multifaceted humanitarian crisis with multiple actors who have opposing agendas. Food insecurity within the civilian population is accompanied by agricultural decline, lack of access to safe water and healthcare, internal displacement, economic collapse, and the shutdown of schools.⁴¹

The current situation in Yemen is perhaps the most pronounced and severe among the four aforementioned Member States experiencing food insecurity, with two-thirds to four-fifths of the population in dire need of humanitarian aid, especially food supplies.^{42 43} In response to an attempted attack by the Houthis, Saudi Arabia began enforcing a trade blockade on Yemen on 6 November 2017.⁴⁴ The restriction of sea and air imports increased the severity of the crisis, both reducing the already low amount of food available and blocking aid workers from entering the Member State.⁴⁵ Although Saudi Arabia lifted its embargo on 1 December 2017, the supplies entering since then have not been enough to mitigate the effects of the famine.⁴⁶ In addition to the significant lack of access to food, a cholera outbreak, caused by a failing sewage system and exacerbated by malnutrition among the population, has affected hundreds of thousands, mostly children.⁴⁷ To further complicate matters, 14.1 million people in Yemen lack adequate access to healthcare, as 600 healthcare facilities closed and 63 have been directly attacked thus far throughout the conflict.⁴⁸ With no end in sight for Yemen's civil war, the situation will remain pressing, and on the radar of the United Nations.⁴⁹

South Sudan

As the world's newest state, South Sudan has faced tremendous difficulty, with one of the highest poverty rates in the world and little to no economic development.⁵⁰ These vulnerable conditions, combined with a devastating civil war, caused famine throughout the country.⁵¹ As is the case in Yemen, the civil war is the principal cause of the famine in South Sudan. However, unlike Yemen, the war in South Sudan is mostly confined to the state's borders, with no international actors involved aside from the UN Peacekeeping mission deployed in the Member State.⁵² Forces loyal to current President Salva Kiir have continued to clash against militants, who have been aligned with former Vice President Riek Machar since 2013, despite a peace agreement in 2015.⁵³ The nature of the conflict has divided the population among ethnic lines.

³⁹ Laub, "Yemen in Crisis."

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ OCHA Yemen, "Crisis Overview," *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, <http://www.unocha.org/yemen/about-ocha-yemen> (Accessed 12 January 2018).

⁴² AP, "World faces worst humanitarian crisis since 1945, says UN official."

⁴³ Zachary Laub, "Yemen in Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified 19 April 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis> (Accessed 12 January 2018). I need more info for this source please!

⁴⁴ Zeeshan Aleem, "Saudi Arabia's new blockade is starving Yemen," *Vox*, 22 November 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/11/22/16680392/saudi-arabia-yemen-blockade-famine-casualties> (accessed 31 January 2018).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Amanda Erickson, "Saudi Arabia lifted its blockade of Yemen. It's not nearly enough to prevent a famine," *The Washington Post*, 1 December 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/30/saudi-arabia-lifted-its-blockade-of-yemen-its-not-nearly-enough-to-prevent-a-famine/?utm_term=.fdfd010aa1e6 (accessed 29 January 2018).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Laub, "Yemen in Crisis."

⁴⁹ Shuaib Almosawa, Ben Hubbard, and Troy Griggs, "'It's a Slow Death': The World's Worst Humanitarian Crisis," *The New York Times*, 23 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/23/world/middleeast/yemen-cholera-humanitarian-crisis.html> (Accessed 12 January 2018).

⁵⁰ Kimberly Curtis, "The 'Four Famines,' Explained," *UN Dispatch*, 17 March 2017, <https://www.undispatch.com/four-famines-explained/> (Accessed 15 January 2018).

⁵¹ Jane Ferguson, "20 million starving to death: inside the worst famine since World War II," 1 June 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/6/1/15653970/south-sudan-hunger-crisis-famine> (Accessed 11 January 2017).

⁵² "South Sudan: Events of 2016," *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/south-sudan> (accessed 31 January 2018). I need more info on this source

⁵³ Ibid.

In February 2017, the United Nations declared a Phase 5 food insecurity situation in the region of Unity State in South Sudan.⁵⁴ 100,000 people in the region were at the point of starvation, with 5.5 million people, or half of the country's population, facing food insecurity.⁵⁵ According to Serge Tissot, head of the FAO in South Sudan, the civil war has disrupted all of the arable land in the Member State.⁵⁶ In addition, there has been a near-total economic collapse and hyperinflation; this, combined with conflict in neighboring states that export food to South Sudan, creates a situation in which much of the population cannot afford food or garner access to food.⁵⁷ Attacks on civilians by both sides, combined with a lack of accountability, will make the famine situation more deadly.⁵⁸

Role of the International System

Traditionally, humanitarian assistance regarding food security has been left to agencies like the WFP and FAO.⁵⁹ However, these agencies, among others, have suffered from decreased funds, which are spread thinly over an increasing number of food crises.⁶⁰ At present, addressing the situation fully would require an additional 900 million USD and a multifaceted approach.⁶¹

On 9 August 2017, the Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement acknowledging that there are currently 20 million people at risk of famine and called upon relevant stakeholders and humanitarian agencies to take immediate action.⁶² The Security Council also stressed the importance of working with governments, individuals, and private institutions to prevent the spread of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and northeastern Nigeria, while noting that certain parties in all four countries were deliberately blocking access to food for civilians, and urged them to cease these activities in accordance with international law.⁶³ Further highlighting this point, in a separate report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food noted that militant groups were using hunger as a weapon of war.⁶⁵

Addressing food insecurity, particularly in conflict-affected areas, is key to preventing conflict in the future.⁶⁶ Like Somalia, an individual could be incentivized to support a violent insurgent group if that group provides a reliable source of food.⁶⁷ The Security Council has the ability to act on this issue, given the committee's mandate to promote international peace and security and, as emphasized by the Sustainable Development Goals, a preventative approach to escalation of conflict.⁶⁸ In Yemen particularly, the conflict has escalated to international levels, with both Saudi

⁵⁴ Associated Press, "Famine declared in part of South Sudan's Unity state," *Al-Jazeera*, 21 February 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/famine-declared-part-south-sudan-unity-state-170220081516802.html> (Accessed 11 January 2017).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Da Silva & Beasley, "Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations."

⁶⁰ Stephane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," *United Nations*, 11 January 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/db180111.doc.htm> (accessed 12 January 2018).

⁶¹ "Fighting famine: 'Unprecedented crisis' putting 20 million people at risk, warns UN agency."

⁶² "Security Council Presidential Statement Urges Greater Humanitarian Access to Famine-Threatened Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria," *UN Meeting Coverages & Press Releases*, 9 August 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12946.doc.htm> (accessed 31 January 2018).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "States must act now to fulfil famine victims' right to food – UN expert," *UN Human Rights*, 23 October 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22278&LangID=E> (accessed 31 January 2018).

⁶⁶ José Graziano da Silva and David Beasley, "Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations: A joint FAO/WFP update for the United Nations Security Council," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, June 2017, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7490e.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Cullen Hendrix & Henk-Jan Brinkman (2013), "Food Insecurity and Conflict Dynamics: Causal Linkages and Complex Feedbacks," *International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(2),

⁶⁸ Ana Maria Lebada, "UN Security Council Discusses Links with 2030 Agenda," *SDG Knowledge Hub*, 25 November 2015, <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-security-council-discusses-links-with-2030-agenda/> (accessed 13 January 2018).

Arabia and Iran supporting the two warring parties.⁶⁹ The involvement of al-Qaeda within Yemen has led to the strengthening of the terrorist group.⁷⁰ The Security Council is faced with an urgent situation and it is important to keep in mind that “denial of essential food has been recognized as a category of human rights violation and is well established in humanitarian law.”⁷¹

After decades of international gains toward eradicating hunger, food insecurity is once again on the rise. International food assistance plays an important role during both post-conflict and conflict periods. Hunger and food insecurity will not be averted unless violence and conflict as a key factor is adequately addressed. Although this is a complex issue, there are many reasons to feel optimistic about achieving progress toward Sustainable Development Goals 2.1 and 2.2. Economic development, conflict resolution, activation of international response and relief, and the creation of sustainable food infrastructures can all help to eliminate conflict-related hunger.

⁶⁹ Zachary Laub, “Yemen in Crisis,” Council on Foreign Relations, last modified 19 April 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/yemen-crisis> (Accessed 12 January 2018).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ellen Messer, Marc J. Cohen, & Thomas Marchione (2001), “Conflict: A Cause and Effect of Hunger,” Environmental Change and Security Project Report, 7, 1-20.