

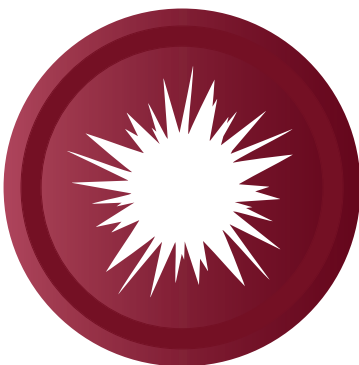


Nutrition, food systems & conflict

Information note

Conflict can be a significant challenge to achieving the nutrition targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as it can be associated with short-and longer-term malnutrition outcomes.

THE ISSUE



- > **Conflict is an important challenge to achieving world nutrition targets.**
- > It influences nutrition and food systems by affecting value chains, disrupting physical, economic, political and socio-cultural contexts in which people interact with food systems and influencing intrahousehold practices.

EVIDENCE & ACTION



- > **Important gaps remain in applying a comprehensive food-systems lens for nutrition in conflict-affected settings.**
- > These gaps include the definition of trade-offs and entry points for actions in these specific contexts, including how to realistically tackle different forms of malnutrition and ensure the sustainability of results.

FAO'S CONTRIBUTION



- > **FAO can help bridge these knowledge and action gaps.**
- > Major ways in which FAO can contribute include comprehensive analysis of specific contexts, support to related evidence-based policymaking and programming and leveraging high-level political commitment.

The issue

Many conflicts that have arisen in recent years remain unresolved and the number of conflicts globally continues to rise (IEP, 2018). A large amount of the 151 million stunted children in the world live in conflict-affected countries, where wasting and micronutrient deficiencies are also common (FSIN, 2018; UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, 2018; FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2017).

Conflict can impair nutrition by disrupting the physical, economic, political and sociocultural contexts in which people interact with food systems.

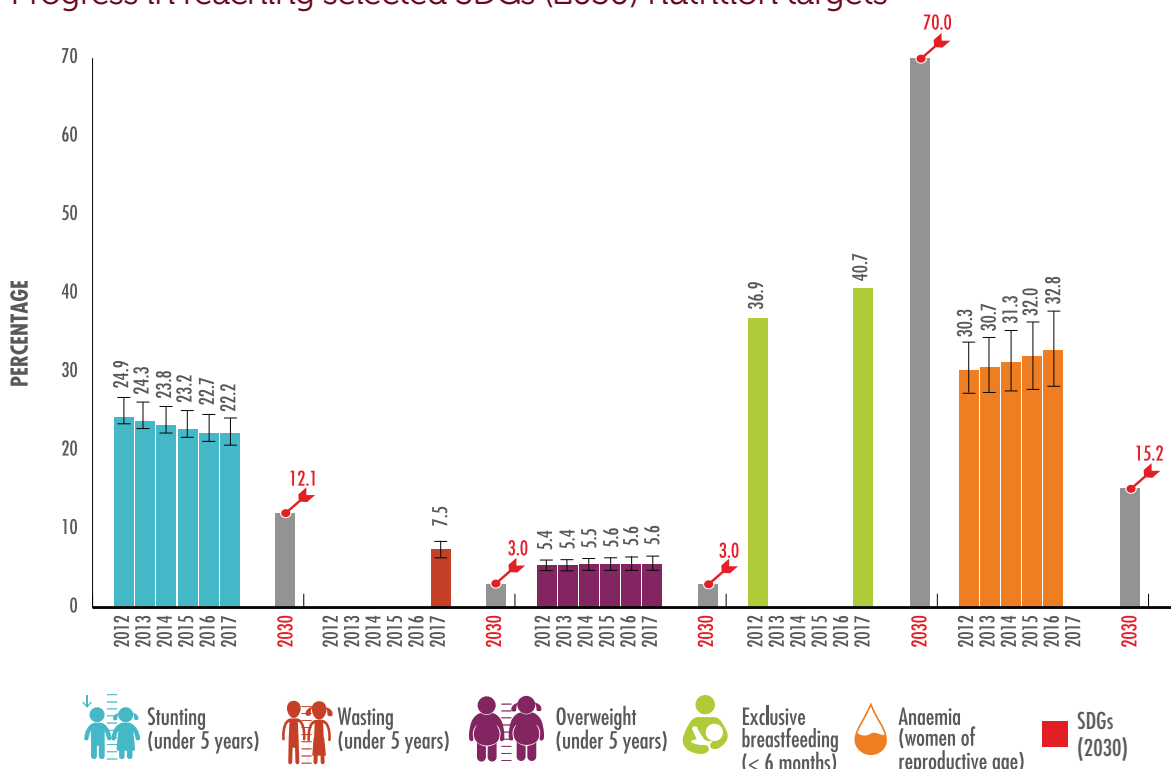
Conflicts destabilize supply chains by destroying crops, livestock and natural resources (land, water and forests) and by harming the infrastructure and people on which food production, storage, processing, distribution and consumption depend. They cause economic recession and inflation, disrupt livelihoods and social networks and erode social services. They can force people to leave their homes and abandon their assets and livelihoods. Violence resulting from conflict can also disrupt the implementation of existing food and nutrition interventions and prevent the safe delivery of aid to the neediest populations.

Within households, conflicts can worsen intrahousehold food distribution, consumption patterns, child feeding practices, food preparation, including food safety aspects, and care and hygiene practices.

The need to address conflict and nutrition is now widely recognized (Development Initiatives, 2018). In 2016, the Grand Bargain commitments arising from the World Humanitarian Summit called for further collaboration, including between humanitarian and development actors, to tackle the needs of vulnerable populations, including those at risk of and affected by conflict. In 2018, the United Nations Security Council explicitly recognized the close link between conflict and hunger, including through disruptions in food systems (UNSC, 2018).

Acting on this calls for a deeper understanding of the linkages between nutrition, food systems and conflict and concerted action to address them.

Progress in reaching selected SDGs (2030) nutrition targets



Source: adapted from FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2018

Studies show that interventions such as therapeutic feeding, supplementary feeding, general food distribution and micronutrient distribution improve nutrition outcomes of people living under emergencies and conflicts. Depending on the intervention, these outcomes include decreases in infant and child mortality, anaemia and diarrhoea and improvements in child anthropometrics (Carroll *et al.*, 2017; Blanchet *et al.*, 2015; Hall, Blankson and Shobham, 2011).

Beyond these, our understanding of how agriculture can contribute to addressing malnutrition has increased in recent years (Ruel, Quisumbing and Balagamwala, 2018; FAO, 2016). Interventions that have shown positive impacts on nutrition outcomes include homestead food production, small-scale irrigation, biodiversified crops, small-scale livestock, fisheries, value chains and market access, and women's empowerment in agriculture.

In line with increasing understanding that value chains, food environments and citizens' behaviour influence diets and nutrition, increasing attention has been paid to food systems for nutrition in recent years. The food supply chain affects the quantity, quality and regularity of available food. Food environments – the contexts in which consumers engage with food systems – influence dietary choices. Citizens' values and culture influence food preferences, including preparation and intrahousehold food allocation (Gillespie and van den Bold, 2017; HLPE, 2017).

However, there are still important gaps in our knowledge of how best to apply a comprehensive food systems lens for nutrition in conflict-affected settings. Value chains, food environments and citizens' behaviour, along with their interactions, are marked by particular features and challenges in these contexts. They are often shaped by weak availability and access to resources, assets, inputs and markets as a result of insecurity, destruction of infrastructure and co-option of value chains by conflict actors. Their performance can also be hampered by limited governance structure, along with disrupted social and economic services, changes in peoples' food choices and intrahousehold food dynamics based on what is actually available and accessible.

It is thus necessary to strengthen our understanding of food systems and nutrition in conflict-affected settings and identify the most appropriate courses of action. This requires a broader comprehension of the interactions and trade-offs between the diverse elements of food systems in specific contexts, definition of realistic entry points for action and identification of priority interventions for nutrition.

A lot also remains to be done to understand how best to employ a food systems lens to address the different forms of malnutrition and their intermediary outcomes in conflict-affected contexts and to ensure that this approach is effectively utilized. Further efforts are needed, for instance, to properly address chronic malnutrition in such contexts (Mates *et al.*, 2017).

In addition, more needs to be done to prevent deterioration in nutrition in conflict-affected areas and to sustain nutrition-related gains in the longer-term. This would entail shared understanding of the humanitarian and development needs of affected populations and strengthening the enabling environment that affects food systems and nutrition in conflict-affected settings. These efforts are paramount to bridging the gaps in the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

How can FAO contribute?

FAO works in close collaboration with governments, other United Nations agencies and development and humanitarian partners in support of achieving the SDGs. Nutrition, food systems and conflict are embedded in the Organization's strategic objectives of helping eliminate hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, of enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems, and of increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

FAO has extensive experience and expertise in promoting improved nutrition, supporting food systems and building resilience. Using both humanitarian and development lenses, the Organization undertakes important work in conflict-affected situations in support to livelihoods and diets. FAO uses its technical competences to develop tools and guidance, for example to assist stakeholders in addressing root causes and outcomes of conflict and to develop early-warning systems that facilitate timely and better-targeted actions.

Building on its competences, FAO can support bridging the knowledge and action gaps in nutrition, food systems and conflict in the following areas.

Knowledge and evidence generation

FAO can support development and sharing of tools and analytical frameworks that underpin comprehensive analyses of food systems for nutrition in conflict-affected contexts. These analyses can help identify specific features and dynamics that influence food systems and bottlenecks that hamper nutrition outcomes and how to address them. They can also pinpoint what works (or does not work). Approaches include the use of information and monitoring tools (including early-warning systems), situation analysis, evaluations and other tailored knowledge products.

FAO is part of the Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Phase Classification (IPC), an innovative multipartner initiative for improving food security and nutrition analysis and decision-making. There are three IPC classifications – acute food insecurity, chronic food insecurity and acute malnutrition – with specific actions needed to address each condition.

For example, IPC acute malnutrition provides a set of tools and procedures to assess the severity of an acute malnutrition situation and to identify key drivers in areas where acute malnutrition is high. It was implemented in Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda in 2018.

National policies

FAO can support evidence-based policymaking to strengthen the pathways through which food systems can improve nutrition outcomes in conflict-affected settings. This includes technical support to policy design, coordination, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and budgetary allocation. The Organization can also provide support across relevant policy areas, such as nutrition, food security, agriculture and disaster risk reduction.

In collaboration with the European Union (EU), FAO supports the enabling policy and institutional environment for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture in more than 30 countries and territories through the Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) facility. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, for instance, FIRST facilitates policy dialogue within the SDG2 National Working Group and supports the formulation of the territory's first National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and Investment Plan. In Afghanistan, it contributes to the establishment and institutionalization of a multisectoral and interministerial coordination structure for food security and nutrition, and supports the launch of the Scaling Up Nutrition initiative.

Programme and operations

FAO can contribute to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions that allow food systems to address the immediate and longer-term nutrition needs of populations affected by conflict. Tailored action can consider, for instance, support to nutrition-sensitive agriculture and value chains, reduction of food loss and waste, improvement in food safety, income-generation activities, cash-based transfers, locally-sourced school food and nutrition, and support for consumption of nutritious food.

FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) jointly promote nutrition and the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crisis contexts through a multi-year resilience initiative supported by Canada. This has supported provision of small livestock and consumption of animal protein in households with undernourished children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It has also promoted awareness-raising and capacity-building on locally available micronutrient-rich foods in Niger. Community-based interventions to prevent malnutrition are planned in Somalia.

Through their Partnership Programme against Food Crises, FAO and the EU are implementing country-level interventions designed to enhance resilience against food crises and generate knowledge of context-specific solutions. The programme is supporting communities in Yemen that are experiencing IPC Phase 3 (crisis) conditions through cash transfers and complementary poultry, livestock and crop production interventions. In South Sudan, the project aims at diversifying livelihoods and income sources of target communities through support to milk, fish and vegetable production, along with marketing and business development.

In Turkey, FAO promotes resilience building and social cohesion of Syrian refugees and host communities, with the support of Japan. The project provides integrated support for enhancing income opportunities in local food systems, such as through technical support to crop production, beekeeping and food processing.

Awareness-raising and communication

FAO can join efforts in increasing understanding and promoting high-level political commitment to comprehensive support for nutrition and food systems in conflict-affected settings. It does this through participation in the various humanitarian and development spaces where debate and decision-making take place at global, regional and country levels.

FAO has been an active participant with other UN bodies in raising awareness of the links between conflict and hunger.

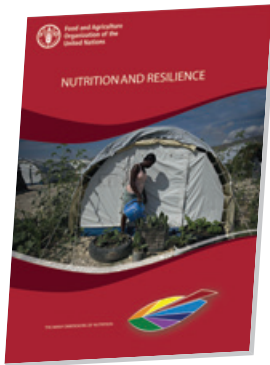
In line with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2417, and in the context of the Global Network against Food Crises, FAO and WFP regularly inform the United Nations Security Council. Regular reports provide the UNSC with an overview of the numbers of people in acute need of emergency food, nutrition and livelihood assistance in countries and territories affected by conflict. The reports also analyse the factors driving food insecurity and examine whether those factors are a consequence of conflict and/or if they are driving further tension.

Partnerships

FAO can continue collaborating with governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector to support extended knowledge and comprehensive action on food systems for nutrition in conflict-affected contexts. It can also provide a platform for bringing various humanitarian and development actors and sectors together, contributing to developing solutions that ensure that nutrition outcomes are achieved and that food systems are sustained in conflict-affected areas.

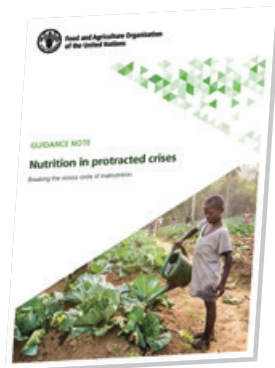
FAO is a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance involving key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

FAO, with WFP, co-leads the Global Food Security Cluster, which coordinates food security response during humanitarian crises. Through engagement in the Inter-cluster Nutrition Working Group, FAO collaborates with the Global Nutrition Cluster and partners in building the capacity of country clusters. This includes joint trainings on multisectoral interventions for nutrition outcomes, such as those delivered in Ethiopia, northeast Nigeria and South Sudan.



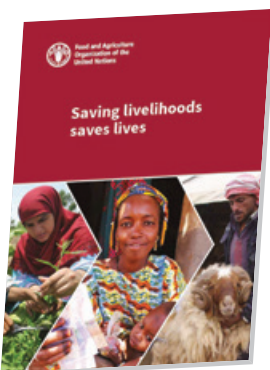
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