



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

FAO OF THE UN

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# **FOOD SECURITY AND PEACE**

## Discussion Note

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**FAO** has worked to promote agricultural development as a means for contributing to peace, bringing together the areas of its mandate, including fisheries, forestry and natural resource management. Rehabilitation of agriculture is a central condition for development, reducing poverty, preventing environmental destruction and reducing violence. Good governance is also crucial in building healthy conditions for agriculture, and thus breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, instability and violence. For example, FAO will work with Colombia in building a durable peace and strengthening rural development in the country's post-conflict stage.

# 1. OVERVIEW

Hunger remains an everyday challenge for almost 795 million people worldwide, despite significant progress in overall economic growth and food production.

Hunger persists because the poorest do not have the means to purchase or produce the food they need. A large number of hungry people live in marginal or environmentally degraded areas. Violent conflicts – many of which are in protracted crisis<sup>1</sup> contexts – are also a leading cause of hunger.

In those instances where hostilities have ceased, peace is frequently fragile and governance structures are weak. Hunger can contribute to renewed violence by exacerbating existing tensions and grievances. However, although peace is a precondition for eradicating hunger, the inter-relationship between violent conflict, food security and nutrition, and peace is complex and multi-dimensional.

There is unassailable evidence detailing how violent conflicts have devastating and lasting impacts on food security. Conflicts affect the ability to produce, trade and access food, including by destroying farming resources, damaging infrastructure and destroying markets. At times, limiting access to food is used as a deliberate tactic of war.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Protracted crises are situations characterized by recurrent human-made and natural hazards, longevity of food crises, breakdown of livelihoods and insufficient governance and institutional capacities to deal with the crisis. While causes are many, overlapping and persistent, violent conflicts are a key driver. Rates of undernutrition and levels of food insecurity are particularly severe in these contexts.

2. Examples abound. During World War II the siege of Leningrad became possibly the most lethal in history when Axis powers cut off supply lines to the city. The siege lasted 872 days, and an estimated 1.5 million people died of famine. More recently, wheat has been used as a strategic tool for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). With its advance across large parts of northern Iraq, the group seized control of silos and grain stockpiles, and now controls a large portion of Iraq's wheat supplies. The UN estimates land under ISIS control accounts for as much as 40 percent of Iraq's annual wheat production, one of the country's most important food staples alongside barley and rice.

Loss of life, injuries, the life-long impact of malnutrition, displacement, theft or destruction of farming and productive assets, and damage to infrastructure have impacts well beyond the duration of violence itself.

Conversely, food insecurity, particularly when related to sudden events, such as the case of food price increases in 2007-2008 can contribute to or trigger political instability as demonstrated during the events in Arab Spring countries. Conflicts over resources such as land and water, both critical for agriculture and food production, have also contributed to violence in several countries. Grievances over social and economic inequalities that affect food security (e.g. as a result of inequitable access to food assistance and/or social protection programmes) have also played a role in triggering conflict or civil strife in some countries. Moreover, there is evidence that involvement in rebel movements or extremist groups can be motivated in part by the access it provides to food, clothing, shelter and other material benefits.

There are also compelling arguments that food security and food security related interventions can have positive effects by preventing and mitigating violent conflict, and contributing to more sustainable peace. In this, supporting agricultural livelihoods plays a key role.

Agriculture is the dominant sector supporting the livelihoods for the majority of households in fragile and post-conflict countries. Efforts to revive the agricultural sector and trade, and increase food security, have had positive effects on the sustainability of peace. The creation of jobs, particularly for young people, and the enhancement of livelihoods in the agricultural sector help reduce the risk of violence.

The question of food security and peacebuilding has an important gender dimension. In many post-conflict contexts, women are responsible for family food security and provide the majority of agricultural labour. Experience and evidence show that women are more likely to spend their incomes on food security, health care and education, thus making crucial contributions to post-conflict recovery<sup>3</sup>. Yet women face tremendous obstacles in securing productive and safe employment and decent incomes. In many countries, women do not have equal rights to own or inherit land, and even where women have legal entitlement to ownership, they continue to be denied land rights, primarily for cultural and political reasons<sup>4</sup>. The phenomenon of 'land-grabbing' in some

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3. UN Women. 2012. *Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security*, Chapter 5 *Women Working for Recovery: The Impact of Female Employment on Family and Community Welfare after Conflict*.

4. Lastarria-Cornhiel, S. 2005. *Gender and Property Rights within Post conflict Situations*. USAID, Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination. United States Agency for International Development: Washington, DC.

post-conflict settings, and shifting legal systems, can make women particularly vulnerable to landlessness<sup>5</sup>.

Food security interventions can be an opportunity to address deeply entrenched gender inequalities and promote women's economic empowerment, their right to land ownership and usage, as well as their participation in decision-making on natural resource management.

On the UN General Assembly Resolution entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which set out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a clear message on the interrelations between development and peace is enshrined: "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development".

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes peaceful and inclusive societies - at all levels - against the backdrop of an increasing share of the extreme poor and hungry living in countries affected by violent conflict. A key overarching message is to leave no-one behind.

Understanding the interplays between food security, human security and the promotion of sustainable peace is essential to address the challenges ahead for achieving the SDGs. Eliminating poverty and achieving a world free of hunger, are also essential conditions to pave the way for sustainable and lasting peace in the world.

Food security interventions can enhance social cohesion, address root causes or drivers of conflict, generate peace dividends and build the legitimacy of, and trust in, governments. This optimistic function, explored in more detail below, is at the heart of the rationale to build a virtuous relationship, where food security supports peacebuilding and peacebuilding reinforces food security.

5. UN Habitat. 1999. *Women's rights to land, housing and property in post-conflict situations and during reconstruction*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme: Nairobi.

## 2.

# LINKS BETWEEN FOOD SECURITY, AGRICULTURE AND CONFLICT

### Impact of conflict on food security

Conflict is a leading cause of hunger and undermines food security and nutrition in multiple ways. Mortality caused by conflict through food insecurity and famine can far exceed deaths caused directly by violence<sup>6</sup>. Between 2004 and 2009 approximately 55 000 people a year lost their lives as a direct result of conflict or terrorism<sup>7</sup>. In contrast, as a result of famine caused by drought and conflict, more than 250 000 died in Somalia alone between 2010 and 2012.<sup>8</sup>

Most conflicts mainly affect rural areas and their populations, heavily impacting agricultural production and smallholder livelihoods. This is particularly true for civil conflicts, which in recent years have become the most common form of armed conflict. We are witnessing increasingly fragmented and asymmetric conflicts, with no

6. FAO. 2000. *The State of Food and Agriculture: Lessons from the past 50 years*. FAO: Rome.

7. The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. 2011. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: lethal encounters*. GDAVD: Geneva. (<http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2011.html>).

8. <http://www.fao.org/somalia/news/detail-events/en/c/247642/>.

# Key trends

At the end of 2013, each of the ten largest UN-led consolidated humanitarian appeals involved situations of armed conflict. In most cases, responses to these crises have been ongoing for more than five years. Approximately 86 percent of funding requested in all UN humanitarian appeals between 2002 and 2013 was in support of people affected by armed conflict<sup>9</sup>. Overall, humanitarian appeals have increased six-fold over the past ten years, reaching USD 20 billion in 2015. Similarly, the UN peacekeeping budget now exceeds USD 9 billion, with sixteen ongoing operations. Poverty rates are 20 percent higher in countries affected by repeated cycles of violence, and it is estimated that every year of civil conflict causes a 2.2 percent reduction in gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>10</sup>. The economic impact of violent conflict is also growing, with estimates that conflicts globally cost USD 14.3 trillion, some 13 percent of world GDP<sup>11</sup>. Violent conflicts are also a key driver of forced displacement, contributing to a record 59.5 million people around the world displaced by the end of 2014 – the highest number since the end of the Second World War. These figures are even more dramatic considering that almost half of the displaced people are children under the age of 18. Population growth and environmental degradation are intensifying competition over already scarce resources, such as land and water, and climate change threatens to increase such competition even further. Many expect natural resources to become key drivers in a growing number of disputes, with potentially significant consequences for international, regional, and national peace and security. For example, up to 40 percent of the global population is expected to be living in areas of severe water stress<sup>12</sup>. These worrying trends, and the persistence of hunger globally, all point to the importance of identifying, investing in, and advocating for, innovative and practical solutions that support both peace and food security.

front lines, no clear conflict zones and blurred distinctions between combatants and civilians.

Conflicts disrupt food production through physical destruction and plundering of crops and livestock, harvests and food reserves; they prevent and discourage farming; they disrupt food transportation systems; they destroy farm assets and capital; they conscript or entice young men to fight, forcing them away from farm work; and they suppress income-generating activities and occupations.

The impact of conflicts on food security often lasts long after the violence has subsided, as assets have been destroyed, people killed or maimed, populations displaced, landmines have been scattered, the environment damaged, and health, education and social support networks and services shattered.

In failed and fragile states, there can also exist a vicious cycle of instability where food insecurity both results from and contributes to repeated rounds of armed conflict. When national governance fails as in the case of Somalia, conflict can lead to large-scale food insecurity and famine. But the relationship can also go the other way. Livestock husbandry underpins rural income earnings for pastoralists and semi-pastoralists for more than 60 percent of Somalia's population. Increasing drought frequency and intensity often leads to livestock price collapses, contributing to the conditions for food insecurity. If the economic incentive exists to engage in conflict (based on an expected 'income') rather than 'normal' livestock husbandry activities, the opportunity cost to participate in violence shifts and it may be seen as 'worthwhile'<sup>13</sup>. In this way food insecurity can lead to more people entering a conflict and the vicious cycle continues.

## Food security and peace

There are many avenues to building peace<sup>14</sup>. And there is increasing evidence that when implemented appropriately, well-timed food security related interventions can build resilience to conflict not only by assisting countries and people to cope with and recover from conflict, but also by contributing to conflict prevention and mitigation, while supporting sustainable development more broadly.

9. A/69/80-E/2014/68. 2014. Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. Report of the Secretary-General, para. 59.

10. World Bank. 2011. World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development. Washington, DC: The World Bank. ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011\\_Full\\_Text.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf)).

11. Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). 2015. Global Peace Index 2015. New York, Mexico City and Sydney: IEP.

12. OECD. 2012. OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050: The Consequences of Inaction. OECD: Paris.

13. IFPRI Food Policy Report. 2014. How to build resilience to conflict: the role of food security. IFPRI: Washington, DC.

14. Peace-building encompasses a non-linear blend of conflict prevention, political, security, humanitarian and development activities, tailored to particular contexts. There may not be a single, or simple, template for peace-building, or even a consensus on an operational definition, but there is a clear shared goal to reduce the risk of lapse, or relapse, into conflict. In the context of advocating for links between food security and peace, and how agendas may be complementary and virtuous, peace-building can be understood to include formal and informal actions that prevent and mitigate conflict, promoting social cohesion and stability, as well as those that contribute to peace-building processes in post-conflict settings.

“We must use all of the tools at our disposal, including dialogue, mediation and other forms of preventive diplomacy, to help prevent natural resources from fuelling and financing armed conflict as well as destabilizing the fragile foundations of peace.”

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, 6th November 2014.

## South Sudan – Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE)

FAO is implementing activities which help reduce inter-community tensions and reduce the exposure of women to protection risks around Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps in South Sudan. In places like Bentiu, women must walk long distances in search of firewood and face the risk of sexual assault and rape. Environmental degradation around IDP camps is partly associated with the extraction of wood for cooking fuel, which can increase tensions between host and IDP populations, who may compete for woodland resources. In order to reduce the demand for firewood, almost 10 000 fuel-efficient stoves have been distributed to IDP households in Bentiu by FAO and its partners – with a further 12 000 distributed in Nimule and Minkeman IDP camps. With fewer collecting trips required, women leave the relative safety of the camps much less, with the average time collecting firewood reduced by more than a third.

## Colombia – Peace, Food Security and Rural Development

In January 2016, Director-General José Graziano da Silva met with President Manuel Santos during a high-level visit to Colombia. During the visit, the Director-General and Rafael Pardo, Colombia's Post-Conflict Minister, signed an agreement that establishes a mutual cooperation scheme designed to improve the technical capacities for policies and programs linked to rural development, land tenure, food security, access to markets and economic and social infrastructure. The agreement includes the joint work plan between FAO and Colombia to promote peace, rural development and food security. Through the agreement, FAO will make available its technical leadership in agricultural and food security policies, focusing on three pillars: promoting more stability in land management; supporting food and livestock production in rural areas targeted by the government's rural development and land restitution plan; support for the eradication of hunger and chronic childhood malnutrition.



In the aftermath of a social shock, particularly in fragile settings, it is vitally important to rapidly re-engage small-holder farmers - both men and women - in productive activities. Unemployment and income instability in certain groups, particularly amongst young men, is a critical need to be addressed. Put simply, young men are more likely than others to engage in political violence.

Natural resources are critical sources of livelihoods, directly supporting food security and nutrition. However, when natural resources are poorly managed or inequitably shared, or when business operations are implemented without due consideration for context and communities, they can contribute to tensions that can escalate into violent conflict, or feed into and exacerbate pre-existing conflict dynamics.

In conflict, or conflict risk contexts, little wins can make a big difference, by building confidence and trust between individuals. Experience stresses the importance of the community-based origins of peacebuilding, as well as its multi-stakeholder, context-sensitive, inclusive and bottom-up nature<sup>15</sup>.

In order to promote peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, a focus on interventions which contribute to national and local reconciliation efforts, good governance and the proper management of land and natural resources is necessary. Interventions can span a wide range of initiatives including encouraging political and community dialogue, facilitating trust-building and social cohesion, women's empowerment, peaceful resolution of land disputes and strengthening independent institutions and non-state actors. For example, in 2014 FAO collaborated with the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), working with local communities in North and West Darfur on land tenure issues and natural resource sharing to secure livelihood opportunities and promote peaceful coexistence.

In order to generate peace dividends, employment and livelihood support programmes can encourage conflict-affected communities to support peaceful development during fragile post-conflict transitions. Activities include the promotion of private sector partnerships, development of micro-enterprises and employment promotion programmes, often focused on youth and women, with clear and direct link to social cohesion and peace consolidation.

Working closely with peacebuilding and peacekeeping actors within the UN System, FAO has worked on reintegration of ex-combatants, contributing to Disarmament, Demobilization

and Reintegration (DDR) actions plans, for example in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Mindanao region of the Philippines.

These approaches also need to be embedded in processes involving the international community and national governments, to ensure that sustainable peace is achieved and peace dividends are sustained. For example, in the 2013 Somali Compact under the New Deal, FAO is the lead UN agency for the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goal 4 (PSG 4) on Economic Foundations, addressing the increase and diversification of agricultural production, forestry and fisheries, as well as interventions aimed at increasing the resilience of pastoralist communities, bringing together FAO's expertise on animal health and social protection.

Most recently, at the level of global governance, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) finalized a Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises<sup>16</sup>, endorsed in October 2015 by the CFS Plenary Session. This intends to galvanize political commitment, promoting more comprehensive, coherent and effective policies and actions by all stakeholders. CFS Members and Participants agreed to a specific principle on contributing to peacebuilding through food security, which recognizes the need to identify opportunities to support and reinforce peace initiatives, particularly local ones, as elements of food security-related interventions, recognizing and promoting the roles of women in these interventions and in reconciliation and confidence building.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo – consolidating the peace process through livelihood support

Five hundred former combatants put down their weapons to become fishermen under an FAO-supported government programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to disarm and reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life. In addition to training, the former fighters received an FAO kit that contained nets, lines and hooks, plus a bicycle. Today, these demobilized combatants have established a successful fishing association and returned to their community lives, reflecting the positive impact that support to productive livelihoods can have on consolidating a peace process.

15. Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. 2015. *White Paper on Peacebuilding*. Geneva Peacebuilding Platform: Geneva.

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# CONCLUSION

We are in the midst of an unprecedented global drive for transformative change. Huge efforts are being made to renew global frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai, March 2015), Financing for Development (Addis Ababa, July 2015), Sustainable Development (New York, September 2015), Climate Change (Paris, December 2015) and Urbanization (Ecuador, October 2016).

2015 has also seen the Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (June 2015), the Review of UN Peace Operations (also June 2015), the Review of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing (December 2015) and the High Level Panel on Global Response to Health Crises (December 2015), and the 32nd Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (December 2015). The first World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, May 2016) is the culmination of inclusive global consultations to set a new vision for meeting the needs of the tens of millions of people affected by conflicts and disasters.

FAO was founded to help rebuild a world devastated by war, in the belief that the eradication of hunger and promotion of food security would contribute to peace and prosperity.

The United Nations Zero Hunger Challenge recognizes that eliminating hunger will make a significant contribution to the achievement and maintenance of peace and stability and to the reduction of poverty. Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the world community is determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence. The 2030 Agenda recognises that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development.

While it is clear that political settlements are fundamental to sustainable peace, and only political solutions can prevent violent conflict, address the root causes of suffering and bring conflict to an end, sustainable recovery from conflict and peace is dependent on "...security, justice and jobs"<sup>17</sup>.

To fully support and realise these complementary global visions a shift in understanding is required. Security concerns should better reflect 'food security' as well as 'human' and 'physical' security. Fair and secure access to productive natural resources such as land and water needs to be integral to understanding justice. And employment in areas related to food security, particularly agriculture, is vital.

For food security actors this means more nuanced understandings of risk in post-conflict and transition settings to ensure that interventions do not exacerbate or trigger conflicts, as well as heightened conflict-sensitivity in programme design and technical support. This means deeper and more robust partnerships with key stakeholders, particularly peacebuilding partners. This is why FAO has launched an initiative to link food security and peace. The goal of the initiative is to contribute building the necessary political will to eradicate hunger within this generation and to build sustainable peace. The strategy to implement this initiative includes: (i) putting at countries' disposal FAO's technical leadership in agricultural and food security policies to promote peace, rural development and food security (such as the Colombia Peace Proposal, and FAO's programmes to support peacebuilding in DRC); (ii) briefing the United Nations Security Council on the interdependencies between Food Security and Peace (March 2016); and (iii) convening an advisory board of Nobel Peace Laureates to raise awareness and champion action integrating food security with peacebuilding.<sup>18</sup>

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is characterised by a shared responsibility to achieve inclusive and shared prosperity in a peaceful and resilient world. Well-designed and integrated policies and actions supporting food security have a vital role to play both in preventing conflict, and in building and securing peace. With strong political commitment, and deepened understanding of the economic, social and environmental forces at work, it is possible to address food insecurity, while reducing the potential for conflict and instability.

16. <http://fao.org/cfs/ffa/>

17. World Bank. (2011). World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development. Washington, DC: The World Bank. ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011\\_Full\\_Text.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf)).

18. The FAO – Nobel Peace Laureates for Zero Hunger team will be launched in May 2016 in an International Event on Food Security and Peace to be held in FAO headquarters.