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Conflict and hunger

"I'm not sick, I'm hungry" said Nyalen Koung, a South Sudanese woman, while a camp hospital doctor was putting her on an intravenous feeding drip. She was suffering from diarrhoea caused by acute malnutrition and her body was no longer able to absorb nutrients. After several weeks of treatment, Nyalen returned to her two daughters. Although she had lost her husband, two sons and all their cattle during an attack on their village, she is now able to catch fish in order to survive and she has all that she needs to continue this new means of earning a living, thanks to the help of equipment distributed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in South Sudan. Nyalen is only one of millions who have experienced how conflict causes hunger, destroys individual and household resilience and undermines rural livelihoods. In her case, as for most people affected by conflict and war, agriculture is their only way of life. Conflicts damage ag-



A girl carrying her food in Kabala market, Sierra Leone.

riculture, disrupt food production and food systems, fuel the plundering of crops and livestock and lead to the loss of assets and incomes. As a result, they are major drivers of both acute and chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. The proportion of undernourished people is almost three times as high in countries in

conflict and protracted crisis than in other developing countries. Approximately 167 million undernourished people live in countries in protracted crisis today – roughly one-fifth of all people suffering from hunger. Malnutrition tends to affect children the most and, when it happens at a critical age may cause life-long mental and physical handicaps. Food insecurity can also trigger conflict, although it is always accompanied by other factors. Sharp increases in food prices, accompanied by cuts in subsidies or rising fuel prices reduce the real incomes of a significant proportion of the population and triggering discontent. At the same time, reduced access to food may lead to poverty, unemployment and marginalization. Restoring and supporting resilient livelihoods and efforts towards peacebuilding and conflict resolution are critical for sustainable development, food security and nutrition. Equally, investing in food security strengthens efforts to prevent

conflict and achieve sustained peace. For decades, FAO has worked to protect and restore the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, reducing food insecurity and malnutrition. FAO supports investment at the local, national, regional and global levels in order to reduce poverty and build sustainable food and farming systems. FAO works on the ground to support farming-based livelihoods, fostering employment opportunities for the young who will be responsible for building peace once conflicts are over. FAO also works to help people stay on their land and to create conducive conditions for the return of refugees, migrants and displaced people. The link between peace and food security is so close that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes peace as a vital threshold condition for development and establishes, as the first two Sustainable Development Goals, the eradication of poverty and hunger, achieving food security and promoting sustainable agriculture. ■

Sowing food security, reaping peace

by José Graziano Da Silva
Director-General of the FAO

To sow the seeds of peace, we first need the seeds themselves, and farmers to plant them!

Food security and a healthy agricultural sector can play a central role in our efforts to prevent conflict and build peace.

Currently, the international community dedicates most of its resources towards humanitarian assistance aimed at saving the lives of those affected by protracted crises. Unfortunately, not enough is made available to help these people – most of whom live in rural areas – to save and reconstruct their livelihoods, so that they do not become refugees, illegal migrants or are forced to beg on the streets, rather than caring for themselves and their families.

On 30 March I met with the Security Council of the United Nations, which surprisingly was the first time that the Council had been addressed by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Our aim was to foster dialogue regarding how the international community could be more effective in helping to prevent and manage conflict. Protecting livelihoods and creating resilience in rural and agricultural communities will reduce the number of lives at risk. Consider, for example, the present situation in Syria. As I write, more than two-thirds of the population requires humanitarian assistance, and 8.7 million people do not have enough to eat. Around 4.8 million Syrians are refugees, and there are even more people displaced within the country. Most have been uprooted because their livelihoods have been destroyed, in some cases owing to a lack of access to food due to direct violence. FAO has continued to be active on the ground in Syria and has helped farmers by providing them with seeds and other supplies, as well as by vaccinating their livestock. We have proven that just US\$200 allows a Syrian farmer to produce two tonnes of wheat, enough to feed a family of six for

a whole year, as well as providing seeds for the next year's crop. This is only a fraction of the economic cost of aid, not to mention the dramatic cost to human lives. This small contribution has helped significantly. Syrian farmers have been able to harvest 60% of their pre-conflict average level of wheat. Of course, this is not enough, but it has helped to ensure that extreme desperation did not lead to an even greater exodus. We need to redouble our efforts to maintain food production and keep food systems functioning, even under extreme conditions, since this can help to break the vicious circle of hunger and conflict. It is part of what is understood by the term sustainability, and international efforts need to last longer and reach further to take this into account.

For human beings to prosper, they need to enjoy peace and freedom, and they shouldn't live in fear. Together with the eradication of hunger and poverty, these three elements are vital if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by all countries. Assistance to guarantee food security and protect and rehabilitate the agricultural sector is an important contribution that often goes unnoticed. Together with its clear role in the fight against hunger, it can also help to mitigate and even prevent conflict. Peace and food security often mutually reinforce each other. This is why FAO places particular emphasis on rural development as a priority. Agriculture is the main activity of poor rural populations, which are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of civil conflict, currently the most common form of armed conflict. Fostering agricultural prosperity helps to reinforce social cohesion, reducing tensions arising from

opposing claims on natural resources and, through the creation of rural employment, undermines the breeding ground for violent extremism around the world. Evidence shows that timely and well-implemented assistance in food security allows individuals and communities to increase their resilience to conflict and helps them to recover from conflict more quickly. We should take advantage of what we have learned. Let us reflect on two lessons from Sierra Leone: firstly, the long civil war in the country led millions of people to abandon their farms, which meant much more time and effort was needed for production to be re-established once the war was over. After the conflict, FAO sponsored field schools offered training and improve skills to farmers. These two points not only helped food production to be re-established but they were also the catalyst for community organisations to grow, helping social cohesion to be re-established. One intangible advantage of providing such services was later reflected in the high voting turnout in the areas most affected by the war, a strong signal that it was less likely that the country would lapse back into conflict. Many other factors corroborate this. The results speak for themselves. In the long term, efforts to protect livelihoods will mean fewer lives will need to be saved as a consequence of a peace that was never built or never maintained.

The large increase in the number of displaced people is a daily reminder of what is at stake. Without support, many more farmers in situations of conflict will have no other option than to abandon their homes and move elsewhere within the country, or beyond its borders.

Sustainable peace is closely linked to sustainable development. Please allow me to emphasise sustainable development, which is based on many factors, food, and the production of food, among others.

FAO will provide reports to the UN Security Council on Food Security



FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, addresses the United Nations Security Council on 30 March.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will provide reports to the United Nations Security Council with advanced and up-to-date analysis of the state of food security in countries in conflict. This was agreed on 30 March in New York between the Director-General of FAO, José Graziano da Silva, and the President of the United Nations Security Council for March, Ismael Gaspar Martins of Angola.

Thanks to this collaboration, FAO will support the Security Council through early warning mechanisms assessing the situation of food insecurity in countries in conflict. Amongst these are the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) and the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC), which comprise a standardized toolkit to generate evidence and information on food insecurity, as well as the severity and causes of food and nutrition crises.

Every three months, FAO will provide a report for UN Security Council members on countries such as Syria, South Sudan and Central African Republic. FAO maintains that improving food security can help to build a sustainable peace and even prevent future conflicts, and this is why it underlines the importance of offering technical information of the highest accuracy.

After signing the agreement, Graziano da Silva highlighted that "FAO is able to survey families that are in conflict areas and then know what they have or have not eaten due to the conflict". The Security Council will use this information to analyse more deeply the relationship between peace and food security. "Although the relationship be-

tween hunger and conflict is complex and non-linear, food security is a factor that can contribute to the destabilization of societies and aggravate political instability," said the FAO Director-General. He called on members of the Security Council to work together, and with FAO, to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This should be a goal even during times of conflict and when peace and stability are under threat. Graziano da Silva stated that the basic premise of the 2030 Agenda is that "there cannot be sustainable development without peace, and there can

be no peace without sustainable development".

Graziano da Silva also gave a taste of the report by UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility*, prepared for the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, in May 2016. In the report, the Secretary General calls for "active participation to prevent conflict" from all international actors, including the Security Council. "Prevention" he said, "requires addressing the root causes of conflicts, including hunger and food security". The FAO Director-General announced in New York that the Organization is developing a policy of cooperation to consolidate peace so that it can contribute further to the prevention of conflict by creating a more effective and flexible framework of collaboration.

FAO's work on the ground

FAO's main goal is to achieve food security, end hunger in the world and protect rural and sustainable livelihoods. It aims to create resilience in countries in vulnerable situations, bearing in mind that agriculture can play a vital role in peacefully ending conflicts. In fact, FAO offers its leadership, its experts' knowledge and hundreds of projects on the ground to fulfil its aim of fostering an end to disputes.

INFORMATION FOR EARLY ACTION

Informing stakeholders and building technical consensus on the severity of food insecurity is vital, particularly during conflicts. FAO, together with 11 partners including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and regional intergovernmental bodies, promotes a common approach and standards for food security analysis through the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). IPC is a set of standardized tools currently used in over 20 countries to generate evidence and information on the severity and causes of food and nutrition crises as well as persistent food insecurity.

Only when the IPC team declared famine in Somalia in July 2011 and FAO decided to alert the international community was mass starvation prevented in the country. The call for international aid stopped a situation of mass starvation and slowly created the conditions for recovery. Unfortunately, responses arrived late. Many of the 200 000 deaths that occurred due to famine in Somalia in late 2010 and 2011 could have been avoided had the international community been more responsive to early warnings from the IPC. Since then, the IPC has become a key tool in decision making – and these decisions are not made in vain.

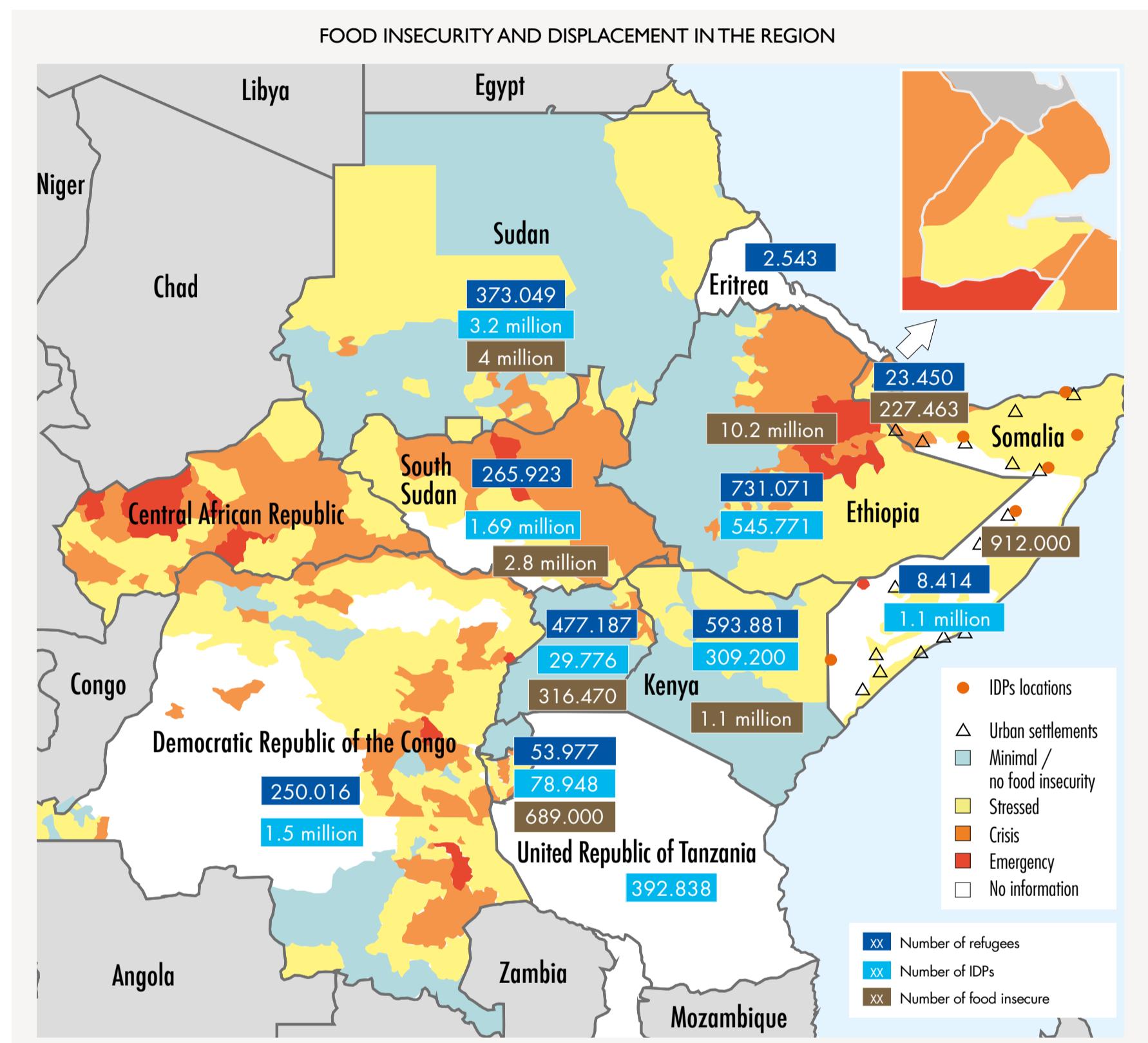
SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

In South Sudan, FAO has helped to coordinate and prioritise humanitarian assistance, helping to mitigate the impact of recent conflicts. Contributing to sustainability is an essential element in FAO's work towards peace. For example, FAO support in building fuel-efficient mud stoves in Darfur meant that trees did not need to be cut down. As well as being sustainable, this practice creates jobs, generating vital income for families, as well as including women in social and work environments, improving energy efficiency and improving health.

The programmes in Somalia and South Sudan are just two of the many examples of FAO's work in the Horn of Africa, which also includes the early identification of illnesses in livestock and investment to create sustainable fishing.

Empowering vulnerable populations is another important tool for FAO to improve the capacity for recovery during and after wars. This means, above all, adapting programmes to women's needs, given that they are almost always the ones to take on additional responsibilities during conflict situations, and to the young, whose access to employment is always vital for sustainable development.

FAO's mission on the ground includes both technical and legal aspects as well as collecting evidence and producing studies and knowledge. Its aim is to mobilize international aid and bring resources together to combat national and international emergencies affecting food security.



THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE MAIN VICTIM OF CONFLICT

It is important to bear in mind that contemporary civil wars frequently take place in the countryside, and in the long term weaken the entire agricultural infrastructure. For example, to mitigate the effects of civil war, FAO is helping the government of Sierra Leone to implement the SEED programme (Seed Enterprise Enhancement and Development), helping to produce high-quality seeds and so initiate the sustainable development of industrial seed production.

This is not all. Once conflicts have ended, problems continue, especially in terms of land management. In the Participatory and Negotiated Territorial Development scheme, projects set up negotiating tables for the various parties who are often at odds, but are in agreement about the need to make land tenure more secure and promote the sustainable use of natural resources. Participatory communication can be crucial

and have significant benefits in promoting gender equality, social participation and community governments in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Burundi and Ghana, where FAO works along these lines.

A separate, yet similar situation is happening in Colombia, a country where FAO wants to work with the government to build lasting peace, following 50 years of conflict. FAO has managed work in the area of food security and nutrition since 2007 and is working with the Colombian authorities to consolidate the peace agreement.

REFUGEES

FAO is working more and more to improve food security for refugees, a task requiring both hard work to calibrate the needs of communities welcoming refugees, as well as in-depth knowledge of systems of governance, land tenure and how natural resources are used. To meet the needs of refugees, the Organization has created centres offering training to farmers.

In Syria, in rural areas of Damascus and Homs, FAO has helped 3 000 vulnerable families to maintain or recommence poultry farming during the war. In 2013, it gave every family 15 laying hens and 50kg of feed. This help allowed families to produce eggs to eat at home and increase protein intake, while families could also sell any surplus at local markets or use them to barter. This is not the only project in the country.

In 2015, despite enormous challenges and constraints, Syrian farmers produced 2.4 million tonnes of wheat – around 60% of the pre-conflict average. The Organization has provided wheat and barley seeds to farming families who will produce 119 000 tonnes of grain this summer. It has also provided veterinary assistance to more than nine million animals in order to reduce the risk of disease in livestock, thereby protecting herds and flocks. Despite the ongoing conflict, agricultural production is still possible in many parts of Syria. Even in the midst of the violence, FAO is operating in 13

of Syria's 14 governorates, and it is not only working in Syria. In Lebanon, FAO has set up field schools, helping to train Lebanese farmers to increase production to feed the 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country. As ever, FAO continues to call on the international community to take action to help Syria, to end the conflict and bring peace to the country.

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION

When families are displaced by armed conflict, communities frequently see their resources decline, and livelihood opportunities and food sources become very limited. FAO's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes aim to support the voluntary disarmament and discharge of combatants from armed groups. FAO works closely with UN peacebuilding and peace-keeping experts, reintegrating former combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and the Philippines.

CONTROLLING DISEASE, CONTRIBUTING TO PEACE

In 2011, the world was officially declared free of the scourge of Rinderpest, a deadly livestock disease. Eradicating Rinderpest contributed to improvements in food security for livestock but the campaign also contributed to peace and security in the wider population. When conflict has profound implications for animal health, it also limits access to milk and meat, and livestock ownership which has a direct impact on food security and nutrition. Eliminating Rinderpest would not have been possible without a conflict-sensitive approach to animal health, as the last vestiges of the disease were found in communities where conflicts had been triggered by disputes over livestock. In East Africa, animal health workers negotiated peace pacts between rival pastoral groups as a pre-condition for Rinderpest vaccinations. This highlights the positive relationship between support for food and agriculture and the management of conflict risks. ■

Facts and figures to understand the relationship between conflict and food security

1 The proportion of undernourished people living in countries in conflict and protracted crisis is almost three times higher than that in other developing countries.

2 93% of people living in extreme poverty are in countries that are politically fragile, environmentally vulnerable, or both.

3 Post-conflict countries with high food insecurity are 40% more likely to relapse into conflict within a 10-year timespan.

4 Conflicts concerning natural resources are twice as probable to reoccur in the five years after hostilities end compared with conflicts where natural resources are not an issue.

5 Agriculture accounts for two-thirds of employment and one-third of GDP in countries in protracted crises.

6 Since 2000, 48% of civil conflicts have been in Africa where access to rural land underpins the livelihoods of many and in 27 out of 30 interstate conflicts in Africa, land issues played a significant role.

7 Civil strife caused a loss of 438 Kcal in average per capita daily food-energy intake in Somalia, about 20% of minimum daily food requirements.

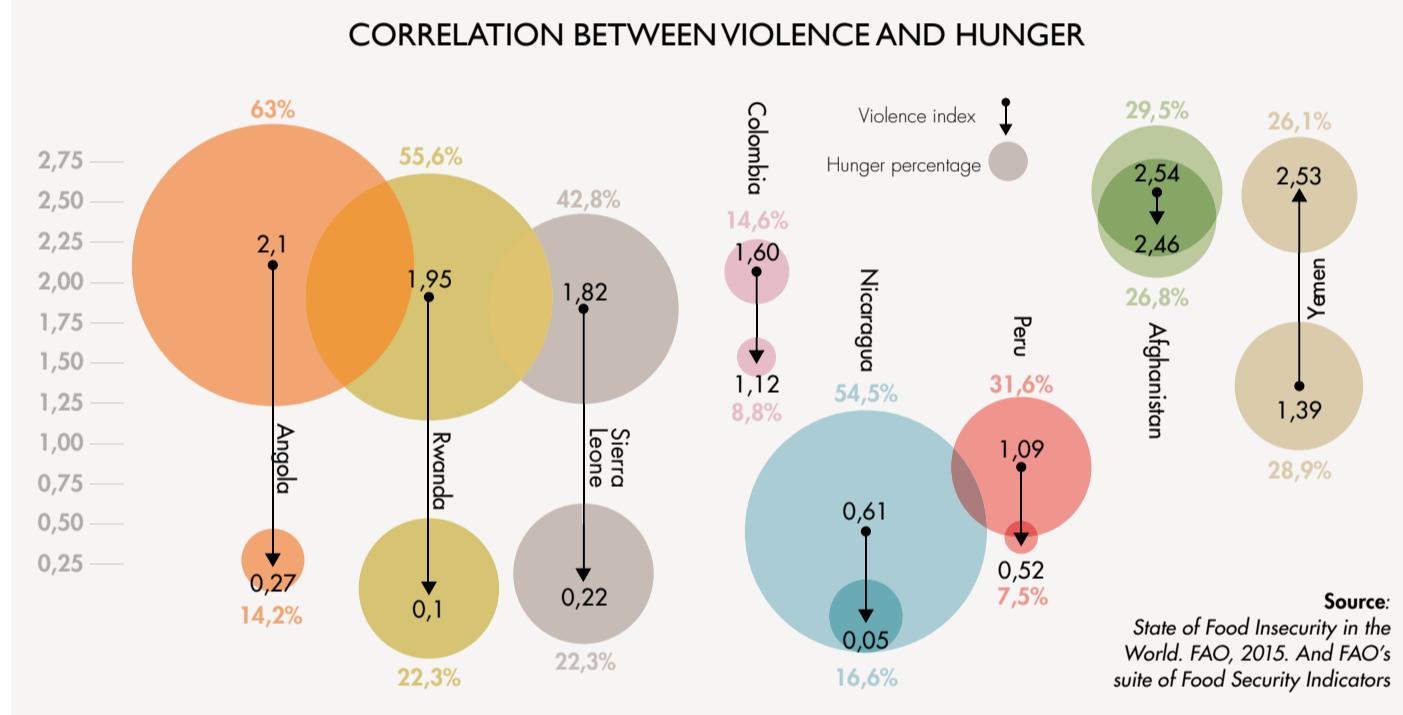
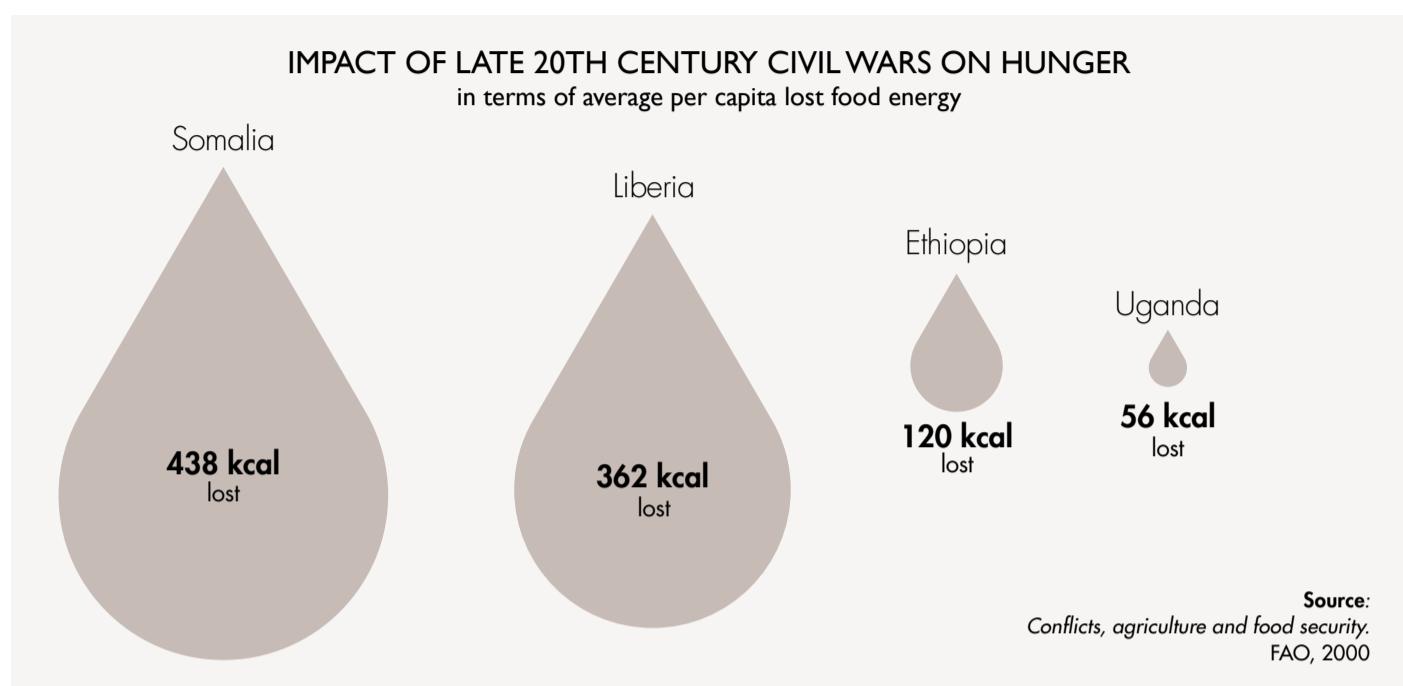
8 Livelihoods of 80% of the population of South Sudan depend on livestock, a sector that has lost US\$2 billion in potential GDP during the current conflict.

9 Conflict also affects schooling. Rural Mayan women in Guatemala exposed to the country's civil war (1985-1997) received 30% less schooling compared to older and younger generations.

10 Every day in 2014, conflicts and violence forced approximately 42 500 people to flee their homes and seek safety either internally or across borders. Very few refugees, only 1%, have returned, less than at any point over the past 30 years.

11 In 2014, children constituted 51% of the refugee population, the highest percentage in more than a decade.

12 20% of school-age children live in countries in conflict. Instability raises the risk of child labour, especially in its most dangerous and violent forms.



Key issues

CONFLICTS AND FOOD SECURITY

Most conflicts mainly affect rural areas and their populations. This is particularly true for civil conflicts, which today are the most common form of armed conflict. The consequences of conflict on food security and nutrition

are clear and undeniable. In fact, conflicts are the main cause of food insecurity and malnutrition. The effects on personal development are immediate but long-lasting: malnutrition tends to affect children the most and may cause them life-long mental and physical handicaps.

Although the link between conflict and food security varies according to the territory affected, in general terms it is food systems and the production of food that are disrupted. Where there is armed conflict and instability, crops and livestock are frequently plundered, and income and assets are lost. As a consequence, people's access to food is directly affected.

CAN FOOD INSECURITY LEAD TO CONFLICT?

It is true that food can be a source of conflict but it is never the sole factor behind a dispute. There are certain factors related to food insecurity that can foster conflict, such as the plundering of land or livestock or the sudden rise in the cost of foodstuffs. However, conflicts only arise when they are accom-

panied by other problems and in a context of social unrest, where much more comes into play.

PEACE AND FOOD SECURITY

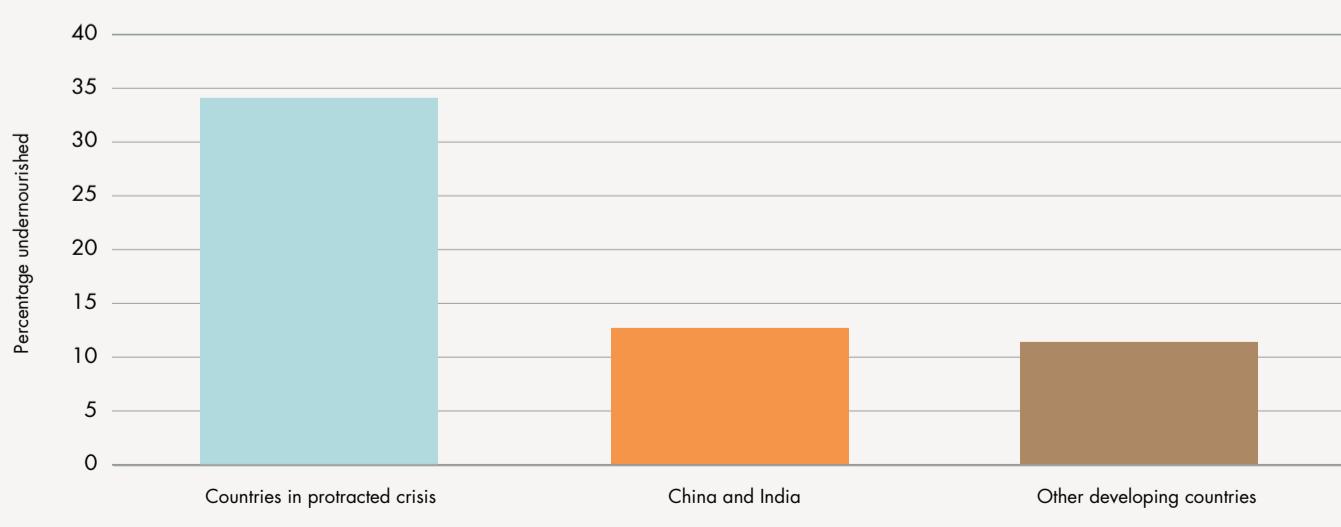
The consolidation of peace is vital for food security and nutrition. Little is known about how, and to what extent, improved food security could prevent conflict, and build and sustain peace. Yet, what we know for certain is that food aid, social protection and food security contribute significantly to peacebuilding in areas once at war. FAO data show that, on average, the proportion of people who are undernourished is almost three times as high in countries in protracted crisis than in other developing countries. While protracted crises are typically caused by multiple factors, conflict is nearly always one of them. Not all countries in protracted crisis present very high levels of undernourishment because crises are localized to certain areas or regions, rather than taking place across an entire country. In 2013, there were approximately 167 million undernourished people in countries in protracted

crisis – roughly 21 percent of the world's undernourished people live in areas with long-standing difficulties.

FOOD, HUNGER, PEACE AND CONFLICT

The relationship between food, hunger, peace and conflict has been well explored and documented. First, conflict tends to have a strong adverse impact on hunger and food security, and this finding is uncontested. Second, there is evidence that high food prices and lack of access to food have contributed to political instability and sparked new civil conflicts, although in such cases the relationship is more nuanced. Food security and an improvement in rural livelihoods can also help to mitigate and prevent conflict, ensuring sustainable peace. This relationship between food security and peace has not been explored fully. Although studies into conflicts, food security and peace have a long way to go, results to date make it clear that this complex relationship should be studied further so we can create effective assistance programmes. ■

THE PROPORTION OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE IS ABOUT THREE TIMES HIGHER IN COUNTRIES IN PROTRACTED CRISIS (percentage of undernourished in 2012-14)



The impact of conflict on food security

Mortality caused by conflict through food insecurity and famine far exceeds deaths caused directly by violence. To put it another way, hunger and the lack of food security can cause more deaths than direct violence. Between 2004 and 2009 approximately 55 000 people a year lost their lives as a direct result of conflict or terrorism. In contrast, as a result of famine caused by drought and conflict, more than 250 000 people died in Somalia alone between 2010 and 2013.

Acute and chronic hunger remains a global problem, and severe hunger can exist even without conflict. A number of Asian and African countries face serious or alarming levels of hunger despite their relatively stable and peaceful

recent history. However, it is in cases of conflict that the situation worsens and conditions are aggravated.

MANY KINDS OF HARM

Conflict entails enormous and multifaceted costs, including direct human suffering and catastrophic socioeconomic disruption, which can significantly impede economic and social progress. Most conflicts mainly affect rural areas and their populations, with heavy impacts on agricultural production and rural livelihoods. This is particularly true for civil conflicts, which in recent years have become the most common form of armed conflict. The harm done to food security is self-evident, and worryingly serious. Conflict can reduce the amount of

food available, disrupt people's access to food, limit families' access to food preparation facilities and health care, and increase uncertainty about satisfying future needs for food and nutrition. The impact of conflict on poverty is also clear. Poverty rates are 20 percentage points higher in countries that have not lived in peace. Normally, countries with a higher degree of poverty also live through violent conflicts. A high risk of conflict is a common characteristic of the most vulnerable countries.

Central African Republic and Chad are among the worst-scoring countries in terms of poverty, and unsurprisingly both have experienced violent conflict and political instability in recent years. In contrast,

in Angola, Ethiopia and Rwanda, hunger levels have fallen substantially since their large scale civil wars of the 1990s and 2000s ended. Ethiopia was still considered in protracted crisis in 2010, but managed to reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1c target of halving the proportion of undernourished people in its population, thanks to sustained political commitment and efforts to improve food production and nutrition. This was done with the help of FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Although the causes of conflicts may vary, there are common characteristics. In general, conflicts disrupt food production through

the physical destruction and plundering of crops and livestock, harvests and food reserves. What is more, they prevent farming and disrupt food transportation systems. At the same time, they destroy farm assets and capital, and conscript or entice young men to fight, taking them away from their farm work. Jobs disappear in conflict situations, and with them, income-earning opportunities. Moreover, instability makes it difficult for governments and humanitarian workers to reach those in need.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The role and position of women is relevant to the way in which conflicts affect food security and how food security can support long-term peacebuilding. In most rural and agricultural settings, women are mainly responsible for food security and nutrition within the household. As well as buying food and cooking, in many developing countries they also supply the bulk of agricultural labour, although they usually find it harder than men to earn a living as

farmers or agricultural workers because they often do not have the same rights as men to own or control land, buy goods, obtain credit, or receive an education. During civil strife and conflict, these constraints tend to be exacerbated because more men, who normally assume a variety of responsibilities, are absent as they engage in front-line conflict, and in the meantime women have to take on the responsibility of searching for alternative livelihoods.

Experience and evidence show that women are more likely than men to spend their income on food, healthcare and education. Hence, they are critical for family survival during conflict, as well as being the drivers in post-conflict recovery.

Women can contribute significantly to improving household resilience once conflicts are over, as well as in peacebuilding. This is why it is important to promote women's economic empowerment, their right to access and use resources as well as their participation in decision-making in natural resource management. ■

Hunger, a matter of global security

by Enrique Yéves *

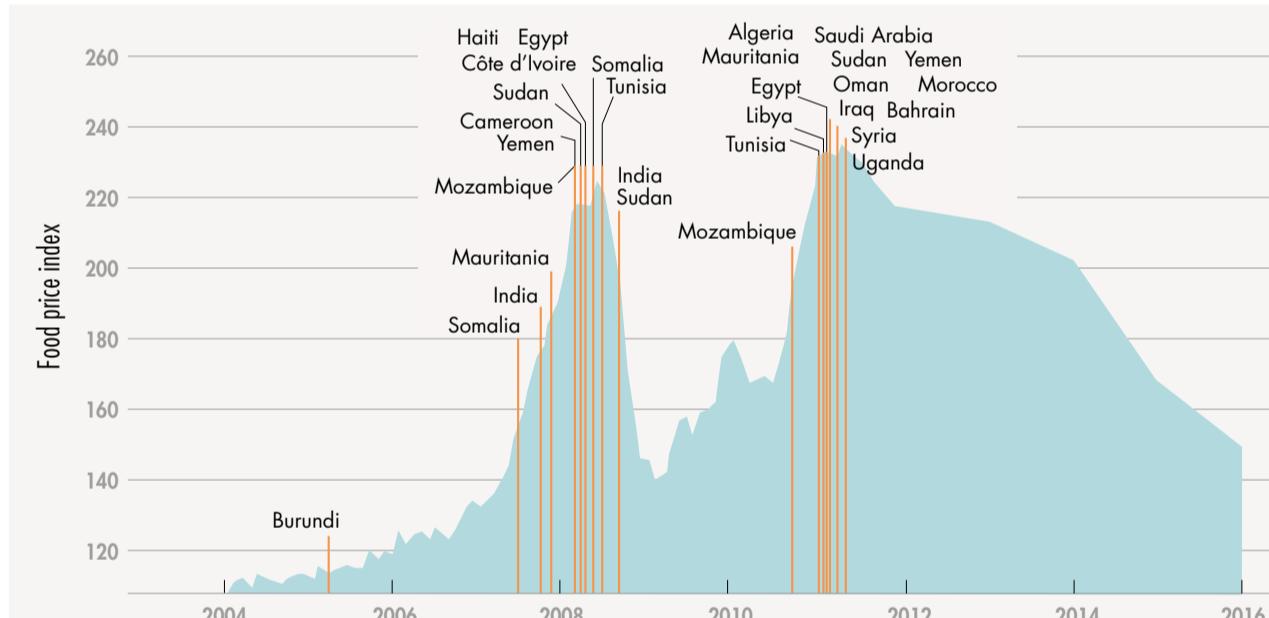
Food insecurity, at the heart of a great number of conflicts, should be considered a matter of world security if the international community wants to succeed in achieving long-lasting peace.

Desperate, frustrated, and with little hope for the future, on 17th December 2010, the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi doused himself in petrol and set himself alight. Thus began the popular revolution that toppled the dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in power since 1987, and with it a domino effect that spread across North Africa and the Middle East.

The events took place in the small city of Sidi Bouzid but they could have taken place in any other part of the world so deeply affected by the high price of goods as basic and vital as bread. Paradoxically, Mohamed sold fruit and his dream was to buy a van and see his business grow. The global food price crisis in 2008 coincided with revolts in over 40 countries and the fall of several governments such as in Egypt and Libya, highlighting the link between food security and political instability. The protests in Tunisia and other countries were initially demonstrations against the high price of food. This was not the only cause but rather the trigger of deep-rooted public indignation, although there was a common denominator.

In 2011, a similar rise in food prices led to new internal conflicts or exacerbated old ones in many countries, as can be seen in the diagram accompanying this article; when the price of foodstuffs reaches extreme levels, political instability and civil unrest is clear for all to see.

The lack of food, or to be more precise, the ability to acquire food – that is, poverty – is one of the most immediate threats to security and to people's lives in conflicts, and at the same time makes conflicts more drawn-out affairs. There can be no peace without food security, and no food security without peace. They are two concepts in symbiosis. When FAO was created in 1945, the world was only just emerging from the Second World War and its founders knew that the Organization should play a vital role in the search for peace. That is why, even then, they stated in their first session that "the Food and Agriculture Organiza-



Evolution over time of the FAO Food Price Index from January 2004 to March 2016.

The orange vertical solid lines denote the start of protests over food and unrest in North Africa and the Middle East.

Graziano da Silva has launched a clear signal to the international community of the urgent need to challenge head on the issue of food insecurity in the widest sense of the term. In March he addressed the UN Security Council to highlight the interdependence of hunger and conflict, as well as how hunger destabilizes societies and aggravates political instability. Following this, the Security Council has requested that FAO keeps Council members regularly informed regarding the food situation in the world's most crisis-hit countries. Eradicating hunger is, then, not only a moral obligation, but something vital to guarantee a future for all of us. Improving food security can help to construct a sustainable peace, and even prevent future conflicts. We know that action promoting food security can help to prevent crises, mitigate their impact, and foster post-conflict recovery. It is clear that for us to prevent conflicts we must address their root causes, and amongst these are hunger and food insecurity.

Conflicts are a key factor in prolonged food security crises and the vicious circle is repeated time and again. During conflicts people are three times more likely to suffer hunger than in the rest of the developing world, while those countries with the highest levels of food insecurity are also those countries most affected by conflicts. This is evidenced in examples from Syria and Yemen to South Sudan and Somalia.

Other examples demonstrate that peace and food security are mutually dependent, such as post-conflict Angola and Nicaragua, or Rwanda after the genocide and East Timor after gaining

independence. Without food security, there is the danger of relapsing into violence. If attempts to secure food security fail, attempts to stabilize society come under threat: a threat currently facing Yemen and also Central African Republic, where half of the population suffer food insecurity. This was in fact the main subject of a conversation between the FAO Director-General and the new President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadera. He asked for FAO's support to help disarm and reintegrate armed groups in the country successfully, intensifying efforts in the agricultural sector so that the sector can meet the population's basic needs.

Promoting rural development can also help efforts to build peace. A specific, current example is FAO's joint work with the Colombian government to implement programmes to improve food security and rural development quickly in an attempt to consolidate the anticipated peace agreement.

International efforts towards peace will be more effective if they include measures to build resilience in families and rural communities, since it is they and their livelihoods that conflicts harm most.

However, to achieve all of this, hunger, at the heart of a great number of conflicts, should be considered a matter of world security.

* Enrique Yéves is a journalist specializing in international politics. He is currently FAO Director of Corporate Communications.