



Highlights on the resilience and vulnerability of populations affected by conflict

Mind the gap – briefing paper 3

Bridging the research, practice and policy divide to enhance livelihood resilience in conflict settings

This is the third in a series of three briefing papers that form part of the Mind the gap – Bridging the research, practice and policy divide to enhance livelihood resilience in conflict settings project, a collaboration between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University.

The first two briefing papers accompany regional case-study reports on Chad, South Sudan and the Sudan¹ and on Uganda² that challenge many long-held assumptions about nutrition and livelihoods in countries struggling to recover from conflict, violence and fragility. FAO reviewed these regional case-studies at a two-day high-level workshop in Rome in November 2018.

This brief summarizes the report highlights on the resilience and vulnerability of populations affected by conflict, including insights from the workshop participants and some implications for policies, programmes and future research.



Supporting vegetable production in South Sudan to enhance nutrition and livelihood resilience in conflict settings.

The lived reality, history and experiences of people must drive the design and implementation of responses to support sustainable and resilient livelihoods and address global acute malnutrition.

¹ FAO and Tufts University, 2019. *Twin peaks: The seasonality of acute malnutrition, conflict and environmental factors in Chad, South Sudan and the Sudan*, Briefing paper 1.

² FAO and Tufts University, 2019. *Comparative analysis of livelihood recovery in the post-conflict periods in Karamoja and northern Uganda*, Briefing paper 2.

Key messages

Twin peaks: the seasonality of acute malnutrition, conflict and environmental factors – Chad, South Sudan and the Sudan

- Contrary to the assumption that the peak of acute malnutrition occurs at the end of the lean season when food security is poor, our data shows that there are two peaks of acute malnutrition. The first and larger peak occurs at the end of the dry season, followed by a secondary but smaller peak after the lean season. The perspectives of local women helped to highlight factors contributing to seasonal acute malnutrition that are associated with livelihoods.
- The report underscores the importance of understanding livelihood adaptation to extreme climate variability and of the long-term transformation effects of a history of protracted conflict, climate and other shocks. The experience and needs of different livelihood specialist producers should influence targeting decisions and matching inputs and technical support to specific gaps in knowledge and experience.
- The report concludes that an analysis of the drivers of malnutrition using a livelihood lens generates insights into household livelihood goals and decision-making, which in turn influence the underlying causes of malnutrition related to food security, care and health. A livelihoods approach also sheds light on the many challenges and trade-offs families make when facing seasonal constraints or various idiosyncratic and covariate shocks.

Comparative analysis of livelihood recovery in the post-conflict periods in Karamoja and northern Uganda

- Northern Uganda and Karamoja have both experienced a rapid improvement in peace and security over the past 15 years. The peace processes were largely top-down to various degrees, with little participation from the affected populations. Although the security improvements in both areas are pronounced, tensions still exist and long-term stability is not a given. Peace is best described as tenuous.
- The report links recovery in northern Uganda with the return of displaced people to their homes and resumption of farming. In Karamoja, recovery is linked with improved security and an increase in markets and trade, which have allowed animal- and crop-based livelihoods to expand. However, it is unclear if the reported economic growth and recovery will affect a broad enough portion of the population. Continuing challenges of food insecurity and acute malnutrition remain, with those experiencing war crimes and crimes against humanity during the war as the most vulnerable to food insecurity long after the end of the conflict.

Several parallels can be drawn from both reports that have policy and programme implications

- Rates of global acute malnutrition (GAM)³ remain above emergency thresholds in many districts in Karamoja, Uganda, even though the period of intense insecurity ended more than ten years ago. In all dryland contexts, incorrect assumptions about the seasonality of acute malnutrition will lead to the mistiming of nutritional assessments and failure to recognize seasonal peaks in acute malnutrition and their drivers. Additional assessments throughout the year (particularly at the end of the dry season) would help to establish accurate trends.
- Small-scale herders and rain-fed farmers in dryland contexts are particularly vulnerable to climate extremes and their livelihood diversification usually involves marginal activities that come with wide-ranging costs. In the longer term, these marginal activities potentially undermine the resilience of their own livelihoods or the livelihoods of others.
- Within these regions, there is often a history of marginalization from the central state, underdevelopment and endemic poverty and vulnerability to climate change and cross-border incursions or intertribal conflict. This means many of the structural issues behind the various levels and types of conflict have yet to be resolved.
- The impacts of conflict and related shocks may continue at the individual, household and community level for years or even decades, with implications for livelihoods, nutrition and food security. Continuing fragility and tenuous peace require a cautious outlook post-conflict.
- Donors have invested millions of dollars in interventions, especially in Karamoja, with what at times appear to be few visible results, in relation to the problem of persistent GAM. This is due, in part, to the extent of the issues, the lack of causal analysis in the case of GAM, limited local capacity, low skill levels and high illiteracy.
- The lived reality, history and experiences of these populations must drive the design and implementation of appropriate and effective responses to support sustainable and resilient livelihoods and address persistent GAM.

Further research needed

- Further research is needed to understand the difference in causal factors between the two peaks of malnutrition and to ascertain if this seasonal pattern repeats in other dryland contexts. An analysis of the seasonality of livelihoods is directly relevant to informing multisectoral programmes and encouraging both practitioners and policymakers to consider nutritional outcomes within the context of sustainable and resilient livelihood systems.

³ Weight-for-height z-score below -2 (WHZ < -2) and/or oedematous malnutrition.

Summary of each report

Twin peaks: the seasonality of acute malnutrition, conflict and environmental factors – Chad, South Sudan and the Sudan

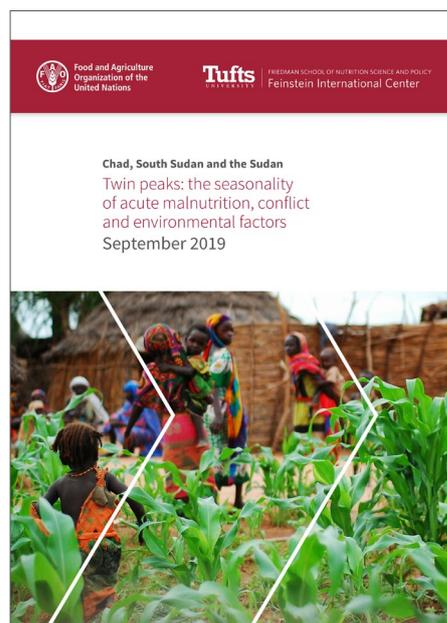
This report highlights major new findings on the seasonal patterns of child malnutrition and their links to climate variability, conflict and livelihood systems in Chad, South Sudan and the Sudan.

Many humanitarian programmes have been in continuous operation in eastern Chad; Darfur, Sudan; and Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan for two decades or more. From a community perspective, the past 50 years have been a series of multiple and overlapping hazardous events, many persisting for years, exacerbating their impact and eroding resilience. At the same time, the region is characterized by environmental variability, including rainfall variability (spatially as well as seasonally and over years) and ecological diversity. Farming and pastoralist livelihood systems characteristic of the region have co-evolved in response to this environmental variability and have adapted to manage delayed rains and drier spells. However, the long history and protracted nature of many shocks, combined with wider trends, have contributed to pivotal changes and to transformations of these livelihoods, although the dryland farming and pastoralist systems remain central to local livelihoods and the economy. The role of seasonality is further reflected in the observed patterns of different types of conflict.

Our data reveal that GAM⁴ is a recurring and persistent problem across this region, with seasonal peaks regularly exceeding the emergency threshold of 15 percent less than -2 weight-for-height z-scores. Furthermore, contrary to the assumption that in a unimodal rainfall system the peak of acute malnutrition occurs at the end of the lean season, when food insecurity is at its height, our data shows that there are two peaks of acute malnutrition. The first and larger peak occurs at the end of the dry season and the beginning of the rains. It is followed by a slight improvement in acute malnutrition and then a secondary but smaller peak after the lean season.

In these three countries, a higher normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) is consistently correlated with better nutritional status. High temperature is correlated with worse nutritional status.

⁴ GAM is defined as the sum of the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) plus moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) at a population level.



FULL REPORT

www.fao.org/3/ca5761en/CA5761EN.pdf

Farming and pastoralist livelihood systems characteristic of the region have co-evolved in response to environmental variability and have adapted to manage delayed rains and drier spells.

Our data reveal that global acute malnutrition is a recurring and persistent problem across this region.

The highest temperatures are experienced before the rains, highlighting the vulnerability of children prior to the rains.

A regression analysis that combined precipitation, temperature, NDVI and conflict data explained 31 percent of the variation in population-level nutritional status over time, which confirms the importance of environmental variables and conflict as basic causes of malnutrition.

Drawing on the qualitative community perspectives, our analysis highlights the seasonality of livelihood activities linked with environmental variability as the crucial determinants of the twin peaks, through its effects on the underlying causes of malnutrition – food security, care and health. The analysis also provides insights into the seasonality of different types of conflict, part of which is also related to the seasonality of livelihood activities.

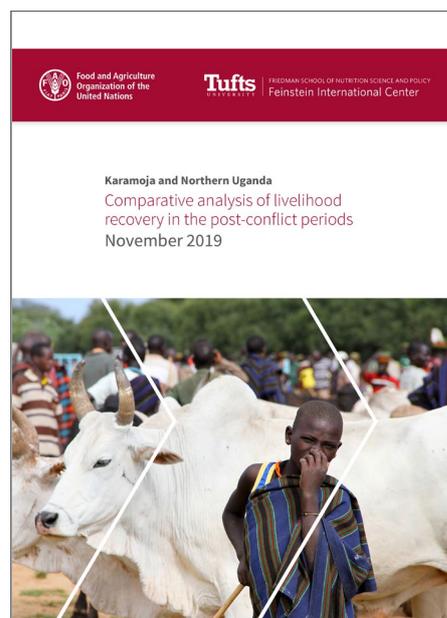
The findings from this study have implications for our understanding of household recovery, livelihood resilience and nutrition. They also raise specific considerations for data collection, future research, programming and policy.

Comparative analysis of livelihood recovery in the post-conflict periods in Karamoja and northern Uganda

This paper examines the parallel but separate trajectories of peace-building, recovery and transformation that have occurred over the past 15 years in northern (Acholi and Lango subregions) and northeastern (Karamoja subregion) Uganda. While keeping in mind the key differences in these areas, we highlight the similarities in the nature of recovery, the continuing challenges and the need for external actors to keep in mind the ongoing tensions and vulnerability that could undermine the tenuous peace.

The initial peace processes in both northern Uganda and Karamoja were largely top-down in nature, with little participation from the affected populations. In Karamoja, the Ugandan military started a forced disarmament campaign in 2006. This was the second such effort in five years and was top-down and heavy-handed. Although many observers gave it little chance of success, by 2013 large-scale cattle raids were infrequent and road ambushes were almost nonexistent. Critically, local initiatives eventually emerged in parallel to the top-down disarmament efforts. Prime among these were local resolutions adopted in 2013–2014 that created a system of compensation for thefts enforced by “peace committees.” In northern Uganda, a top-down, politically negotiated peace process between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda ended two decades of fighting in 2006. The internally displaced person camps were disbanded and thousands of displaced people returned to their rural homes, some because they had no other option once assistance in the camps ceased.

One of the most important factors in recovery in Karamoja has been the growth of markets. Traders were reluctant to bring wares to the region during the period of insecurity and hence goods were few and prices high. Today, most trading centres host markets on a weekly basis and shops have consistent inventories. In northern Uganda, the biggest driver of recovery has been the return of displaced people to their homes and the resumption of farming. By 2011, crop production had resumed its pre-conflict status as the primary livelihood in the region. In both locations, however, engagement in markets is limited and many people remain economically marginalized.



FULL REPORT

www.fao.org/3/ca5760en/ca5760en.pdf

The initial peace processes in both northern Uganda and Karamoja were largely top-down in nature, with little participation from the affected populations.

Continuing problems with food security and nutrition call into question many assumptions about recovery and development.

Challenges to recovery and long-term stability are similar across the two locations. Both northern Uganda and Karamoja continue to struggle with food insecurity and malnutrition, despite the massive influx of development funds, improved security and expansion of markets. In northern Uganda, the conflict continues to influence household livelihoods. Households that have a member who experienced war crimes are consistently worse off. These continuing problems with food security and nutrition call into question many assumptions about recovery and development. In particular, the idea that peace will bring a natural bounce in economic and household well-being does not appear to hold up in these cases.

Additional structural challenges to recovery in both locations include climate change and environmental degradation, poor governance and corruption, limited opportunities for decent work, livelihood transformation and loss and conflict over land. These factors reinforce each other and make it extremely difficult for average households to develop sustainable and secure livelihoods.

External interventions often fail to take into account the local priorities and realities in these areas. Many programmes are place based or focus on rural areas, but the population is in flux. This is especially true for young people. In addition, while many people are doing much better than they were 15 years ago, others are being pushed out of pastoralism and are struggling to achieve diversified and sustainable livelihoods. Overall, while the recent trajectories of recovery in Karamoja and northern Uganda are remarkably similar, the context, livelihoods and challenges in each location are importantly unique. National actors should not seek to derive combined approaches or policies that lump together these two areas. In both cases, the lived reality, history and experiences of the population should be central to designing appropriate, effective and sustainable responses to the ongoing obstacles to a stable peace and full recovery.

Saving livelihoods saves lives

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