

# FOOD INSECURITY ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ IN PROTRACTED CRISES



## HIGH-LEVEL EXPERT FORUM

ROME 13-14 SEPTEMBER 2012

## CATALYSTS TO CREATE CHANGE - POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

### BACKGROUND

Protracted crises, whether human-induced or the result of repeated natural disasters, are often characterized by poor governance, weak institutional capacity and high levels of violence. These conditions can exacerbate food insecurity and hamper efforts to respond in a technical or non-political way. Often, the state has limited capacity to respond to and mitigate threats to populations, provide adequate levels of protection, or even to absorb aid and direct it in ways that address the underlying causes of the crisis.

Describing governance as fragile or weak covers a multitude of circumstances. In protracted crises, weak governance may be the result of structural deficiencies that hamper the ability of state institutions to respond to or mitigate threats to populations but may also reflect a deficiency in social and political inclusiveness, lack of accountability, or a breakdown in the social contract between a state and its citizens<sup>1</sup>. In such environments insecurity often prevails, service delivery is poor, and lack of justice or accountability can give way to elite capture of resources or other forms of corruption. Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises thus requires being acutely attuned to the unique nature of each situation and varying levels of weak governance, understanding the impact of these on livelihood and food systems, and adapting food security strategies and investments accordingly.

### KEY GOVERNANCE ISSUES

#### Violent conflict and weak governance

One-and-a-half billion people live in areas that are subject to fragile governance, violent conflict or widespread violence<sup>2</sup>. Development in these areas is stagnant at best: only one low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has achieved a Millennium Development Goal. Although conflict was once largely between nations or in civil war, many countries and parts of countries now face repeated cycles of violence, weak governance and instability. Too often, countries that emerge from conflict relapse: 90 percent of the last

decade's civil wars occurred in countries that had already had a civil war in the last 30 years. Even where countries have overcome violent political conflicts, they commonly succumb to high levels of violent crime, often with links between local and international conflicts and organized crime. Countries in protracted crises and fragile and conflict-affected countries are not necessarily the same, but there is a generally strong overlap. For example, 19 out of 22 countries in protracted crisis in *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises* (SOFI 2010) were also classified by the World Bank as "fragile situations" in 2011<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the characteristics of fragile states – weak institutional capacity, poor governance, weak, a ready supply of small arms, political instability, ongoing violence or the legacy of past violence – strongly overlap with characteristics of protracted crisis described in 2010 SOFI.

Food insecurity is often a cause and an outcome of protracted crises – worsening food insecurity can lead to unrest and ultimately violent conflict, which, in turn, can exacerbate further food insecurity. Violent conflict causes death, disease and displacement, destroys physical and social capital, damages the environment, and discourages social and economic investments (cite Brinkman and Hendrix, WFP Occasional Paper). It disrupts markets and other normal economic activity such as food production and destroys infrastructure, cutting off availability and access to food supplies, often as a tool of counterinsurgency. In South Sudan, for example, conflict has directly and indirectly contributed to increased levels of poverty, infant mortality rates, and life-threatening diseases<sup>4</sup>. Although food insecurity is not often a direct cause of violence, it frequently acts as a threat multiplier for violent conflict when combined with other obstacles to peace such as large numbers of unemployed or underemployed youth, high levels of socioeconomic inequality, divisive politics (particularly linked to ethnicity and identity), unscrupulous management of state resources, land disputes, and injustice<sup>5</sup>. While these conflicts and tensions are not new, the dynamics and dimensions of violent conflict have changed as a result of a proliferation of small arms, the importance of non-state actors, including trans-

1. Cite A Harmer and Macrae

2. World Bank. 2011. World Development Report 2011: Conflict, security and development. Washington, DC, World Bank.

3. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTLICUS/Resources/511777-1269623894864/Fragile\\_Situations\\_List\\_FY11\\_\(Oct\\_19\\_2010\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTLICUS/Resources/511777-1269623894864/Fragile_Situations_List_FY11_(Oct_19_2010).pdf).

4. UNDP. 2012. Community Consultation Report: Warrap State, South Sudan. South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission (May 2012).

5. Cullen Hendrix and Henk-Jan Brinkman. 2012. Food insecurity and conflict dynamics: causal linkages and complex feedbacks. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.

national organized crime networks, ineffective governance and shifting alliances in pastoral areas<sup>6</sup>. The result is a vicious circle in which violence leads to – and is in turn fuelled by – food insecurity.

Signing a peace treaty on its own does not necessarily result in improved governance. There are instances, for example, of governments using development resources, including foreign aid, as a tool to pursue an agenda of political repression or as a crutch for the ruling elite<sup>7</sup>. This kind of weak governance at a minimum undermines public confidence in the State and at worst fuels conflict both by instigating or exacerbating grievances and undermining social fabric and norms and the effectiveness and credibility of national institutions.

Whether characterized by on-going conflict and violence or more general governance failures, the result for vulnerable, food insecure people is often an all-encompassing lack of protection. Adherence to international humanitarian law or human rights law in protracted crises may be inconsistent or lacking, rule of law is weak, and the recourse of crisis-affected people to formal and informal justice institutions is uneven.

### Environmental governance and linkage to vulnerability and violence

Many conflicts have been fuelled by competition for natural resources and other environmental stresses. While these are rarely the sole cause of conflict, they have been shown to contribute to all phases from outbreak to perpetuation to undermining prospects for peace<sup>8</sup>. In some contexts, violent conflict has centred on high-value resources such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil. In others violence fuelled by competition over control of scarce resources such as fertile land and water is exacerbated by the weakening of traditional institutional systems responsible for supporting agriculture-based livelihoods. Violent conflict, in turn, can result in damage to the environment, including further breakdown of institutions and governance mechanisms that traditionally limit overexploitation of natural resources and protect health, livelihoods and security.

Even when political stability exists or has been re-established, failure to reduce the risk or consequences of repeated exposure to extreme natural events that disrupt livelihoods and food systems has a causal relationship with poor environmental governance. Governance mechanisms that are unable to successfully integrate disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation into national policies and investments that affect food systems are undermined further when new climate events and shocks are experienced.

### Governance challenges in international aid

Efforts to address food insecurity through humanitarian and

development interventions have themselves on occasion been a source of conflict and tension, distorting markets and depressing local production or exacerbating inequality. The tendency of aid agencies to apply technical solutions can sometimes result in interventions that ignore important political dimensions and play into the hands of those using their political or military muscle to gain a disproportionate share of resources<sup>9</sup>. In some cases the provision of food assistance, or participation in its distribution, has been perceived to favour certain groups over others or enable certain groups to gain political advantage. At times, humanitarian agencies are also seen as assuming the role and responsibility of the government and traditional institutions for providing social services and protection to its people, which can undermine efforts to develop local capacities, leading to aid dependency.

While emergency and development interventions have in some instances demonstrated their usefulness in addressing conflict dynamics, international actors have at times put too much faith in aid as a means of reducing conflict and too little effort into diplomatic or political solutions. Efforts to address protracted crises have commonly focused on micro- or community-level interventions, where small-scale impact is easier to achieve and demonstrate. These efforts assume that building resilient livelihoods may be sufficient to allow for recovery or withstand future shocks without addressing the underlying causes of the crisis. This approach tends to ignore power dynamics, interests and the responsibilities of higher-level political actors whose engagement is needed to deal with underlying governance issues<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, failure to recognize successful informal or traditional governance mechanisms and integrate them with formal ones, risks marginalizing and ignoring the aspirations and needs of populations that continue to be governed by those systems. With some exceptions, support to resettlement of internally displaced people and refugees tends to be separate from peacebuilding efforts. As a result, relief and development have tended to work “in” crises, but not “on” them. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach of integrating peacebuilding into humanitarian and development policies, programmes and projects is required.

### Promoting gender equality to improve governance

Roles and responsibilities taken on by women during conflict are often radically different from those they have in “normal” times. As men migrate to cities in search of work, are drafted into armies or engaged in other armed groups to avoid conscription into armed forces, women take on a much greater role as breadwinners and heads of households. However, existing governance and institutional structures in many cases do not allow women adequate access to the assets and opportunities they need to play this role effectively. As such, it is necessary to address gender equal-

6. World Bank. 2011. World Development Report 2011: Conflict, security and development. Washington, DC, World Bank. Timothy R. Frankenberger and Kimberly A. Deni. 2012. Can Food Assistance Promoting Food Security and Livelihood Programmes Contribute to Peace and Stability in Specific Countries? Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.

7. International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/>), Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/>), Amnesty International ([www.amnesty.org.uk/](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/)).

8. UNEP. 2009. From Conflict to Peacebuilding. The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment. Nairobi, United Nations Environment Programme. C.S. Hendrix and I. Salehyan. 2010. Climate Change, Rainfall Triggers, and Social Conflict in Africa. Working paper, University of North Texas.

9. David Keen. 2012. Aid and development in the context of conflict: some problems and pitfalls. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.

10. Simon Levine and Sara Pavanello. 2012. Rules of the range: Natural resources management in Kenya–Ethiopia border areas. HPG Policy Brief 45. London, Overseas Development Institute.

ity to buffer the impact of conflict on food security. In many cases, it is also critical to promote more sustainable and resilient patterns of use of natural resources, livelihoods and agricultural production. External actors intervening in protracted crises must address gender issues in assessments of the institutional and governance environment and develop interventions aimed at supporting women's empowerment and citizenship, and gender equality more broadly.

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

Governance challenges including the prevalence of violence in protracted crises are substantial and complex. Investments in food and nutrition security need to be made in tandem with national and international efforts, such as the International Dialogue's agenda on peacebuilding and statebuilding<sup>11</sup>. Emerging leadership in g7+ (fragile) states including those that have nominated themselves to implement the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States provides an opportunity to offer support to countries transitioning out of protracted crises in a coherent and sustainable way that considers the inter-linkages between the different dimensions of the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding<sup>12</sup> Goals and food and nutrition security in nationally-owned plans.

Both SOFI 2010 and the *World Development Report* (WDR 2011) highlight the need for direct support to institutions, both informal and formal, to address protracted crises. SOFI 2010 notes that effective governance is one of the factors that has the largest impact on food security. The WDR (2011) emphasizes that strengthening "legitimate institutions and governance to provide citizen security, justice, jobs and social services are crucial to break cycles of violence".

## A greater emphasis on context and conflict analysis

Humanitarian and development efforts would benefit from improved conflict and political analysis, to identify the underlying causes of the crises and determine which institutions and governance mechanisms are in place and functioning. Informal or customary institutions, including those responsible for social protection, dispute resolution and justice, often remain or emerge to fill crucial gaps when national institutions have failed. In some cases, these may have the potential to play a key role in addressing protracted crises. However, they are often overlooked or discounted by external actors. Conversely, external actors may show a preference for working with local civil society institutions rather than formal institutions linked to the state, which undermines local government and fosters parallel governance systems. To avoid these pitfalls, international actors must better understand the political power, interests and governance framework in the crisis-affected country or region so as to ensure that interventions do not undermine existing formal and informal structures that are successful and accountable. Such assessments must address various scales, from the household to the societal level, and must also address gender roles and relations.

## Balance between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding objectives and principles

Food and nutrition security interventions, including social safety net programmes and capacity-development activities, should be framed when appropriate within overall peace and state-building goals or within national plans for transitioning from crisis. New or recurrent life-saving and livelihood-preserving needs are likely to continue even as countries, or parts of countries, emerge from protracted crises. The principles of delivering humanitarian assistance and protection, in an impartial, neutral and independent manner, are not always compatible with the political, security and development dimensions of stabilization or peace consolidation objectives. Moreover, the hopefulness of many actors to see the end of a crisis can lead to a rush to support stabilisation or peace consolidation efforts, sometimes at the expense of continuing humanitarian needs and sometimes irrespective of the on-going protection threats faced by vulnerable populations (cite Keen).

## Revitalizing representative and inclusive local institutions as part of integrating peacebuilding into food security interventions

Lessons from many countries show that building longer-term assistance activities on the framework of existing or revitalized local institutions offers the best hope of long-term sustainability and real improvement of food security, provided that these institutions are representative, inclusive, and recognized as authoritative (and thus effective) by local constituencies. For example, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, *chambres de paix* (local peace councils) were the only organization dealing with local land disputes, while in Mozambique customary authorities were one of the pillars of the land reform process. However, there is a need for constant vigilance to ensure that the interventions do not favour – or are not perceived to favour – a particular political or social group and exacerbate tension and conflict. More generally, local institutions and the actors that manage them need to be seen and understood as an element of the governance environment in which interventions must operate. As such, relief and development agencies should work with these institutions and actors with full awareness of the political, not only the technical, nature of the engagement. A participatory approach, involving civil society and local communities, into the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation is critical.

These efforts should be tied into wider political processes aimed at building the foundations for peace, such as the approach used by the Mercy Corps project, "Strengthening Institutions for Peace and Development", in Ethiopia. This aims at building effective and sustainable institutional capacity and collaborative partnerships to prevent and respond to tension and promote peace; improving understanding and application of context-sensitive and peacebuilding approaches and "do-no-harm" principles; supporting initiatives that promote harmonious relationships and collaboration across regional state boundaries; and reducing tensions through support to initiatives that build peace and that address root causes of tension through developmental and livelihood interventions. Cooperation over the management of shared natural resources provides new opportuni-

11. <http://www.oecd.org/international%20dialogue/>

12. Legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations and revenues and services.



ties for livelihood recovery and peacebuilding, while also forcing humanitarian and development actors to squarely confront issues that in many cases lie behind protracted crises (e.g. the reasons why cooperative management of shared natural resources is not taking place to begin with). However, while relatively small-scale interventions can have some benefits in improving relations among communities and supporting enabling conditions for livelihood recovery, it must be recognised that their potential to foster conflict resolution and peace and an enabling security environment at a larger-scale may be limited. There needs to be greater realism about the extent to which food security investments and other technical solutions alone can address the underlying causes of protracted crisis, without strong institutions, political will and the recognition of the interdependencies with other investments (e.g. security, justice).

Investment in public infrastructure, particularly schools and roads, has also been shown to be particularly effective in promoting peace, bringing stability and helping countries or regions to emerge from protracted crisis. They can contribute to public confidence and social cohesion, and improve security and access to markets in the case of roads, if combined with investments in other services, market opportunities, agriculture and human capital (teachers, police and public health workers).

Social protection mechanisms, such as school meals, cash and food-for-work activities and vouchers, can have an immediate and longer-term beneficial impact – supporting the delivery of basic services, stimulating markets through purchase of food aid supplies from local markets or through cash-based schemes, and helping to bridge the gap between traditional humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance.

Such approaches are not without difficulty. Accurately targeting the assistance – even identifying the best entry points and types of assistance – is location and context specific and requires detailed assessment. These are time consuming and inevitably delay action on the ground, which may be politically unacceptable. Moreover, local capacity to deliver the interventions is likely to be low, and even multilateral and intergovernmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations may find it difficult to recruit and retain enough well-qualified staff to deliver effective livelihood programming.

## Long-term investment

Above all, it must be recognised that, even if successful, all of this will take time. Improving governance and developing sustainable institutions is a long-term process. The danger is that the duration of programmes aimed at dealing with protracted crises is determined sometimes by budgets rather than whether local government and institutions have developed the capacity to assume responsibility for emergency preparedness and response.

### RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Brinkman H., Hendrix C. 2012 Food insecurity and conflict dynamics: causal linkages and complex feedbacks. Paper proposed for High Level Expert Forum.

Levine S. 2012, Livelihoods in protracted crises. Paper proposed for High Level Expert Forum.

Keen D. 2012 Aid and development in the context of conflict: some problems and pitfalls. Paper proposed for High Level Expert Forum.

Lautze S., Leaning, Raven-Roberts A., Kent R., Mazurana D. 2014, Assistance, protection, and governance networks in complex emergencies, *The Lancet*, Volume 364, Issue 9451, Pages 2134 - 2141.

Biong Deng L. Confronting civil war: the case of risk managing strategies in South Sudan in the 1990s, *Luka, Kush Inc*, Paper proposed for High Level Expert Forum.

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