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## Can Food Assistance Promoting Food Security and Livelihood Programs Contribute to Peace and Stability in Specific Countries?

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## I. Purpose of Research

The 2010 State of Food Security in the World (SOFI) report, “Addressing Food Security in Protracted Crises,” emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of the structural causes of long-lasting or recurring crises that perpetuate severe hunger. Of the 22 countries defined in the SOFI report as experiencing protracted crisis,<sup>a</sup> all 22 have experienced a “human-induced emergency” – a conflict or political crisis.<sup>1</sup> This statistic is not surprising: conflict disrupts or destroys the conditions and systems upon which food security depends – access to agricultural and pastoral land, to water and other natural resources, and to functioning roads, markets, and basic services. Conflict can also displace or annihilate government and traditional structures critical to effective governance, and destabilize structures needed for the planning, coordination and delivery of external aid.<sup>2</sup> Given the high prevalence of conflict in countries with persistent food insecurity, analysis of the specific causal relationship between these attributes is imperative if we are to design assistance strategies that appropriately integrate food and livelihood security initiatives with coexisting goals in building peace and stability.

This paper represents an effort to contribute to this analysis by examining the role food assistance has played at the nexus of food security and livelihood programming, peacebuilding and statebuilding. The paper presents findings from a study on food assistance and stability in transition. Promoting stability involves investing in rebuilding local institutions, helping to restore essential services and safeguarding or protecting vulnerable populations.

The purpose of the study is to assess the extent to which food assistance can contribute to stability by preventing or mitigating the drivers of conflict in countries experiencing or emerging from civil unrest. Through three in-depth case studies and an examination of the relevant literature, the study sought to identify ways in which humanitarian relief and recovery assistance can support livelihood recovery, reduce the potential for conflict, promote stability in communities undergoing post-crisis transition, and bring about social cohesion and peace dividends. The study also examines the challenges and shortcomings of assistance—and to a limited extent, the factors that enable conflict.

This paper begins with a thorough description of the various linkages between conflict and food insecurity more generally, with examples drawn from case study countries. Section III then explains some of the inherent challenges in attempting to utilize food assistance to promote peace, political stability, and transition to economic recovery in situations of protracted crisis. Section IV discusses some of the more concrete and representative findings from case studies regarding the impact of food assistance on peace and stability. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations intended to help donors, governments and humanitarian organizations more effectively utilize food assistance to achieve stability in situations of protracted crisis.

The research entailed an extensive review of secondary literature followed by primary research in Pakistan, South Sudan, and Timor-Leste.<sup>b</sup> As is common in research initiatives of this nature, the study team encountered and overcame several important constraints. First and foremost, the case study countries were deliberately selected to examine various conflict contexts in order to identify common factors that either contribute to or inhibit the use of food assistance to achieve stability and transition among populations recovering from conflict. However, given the disparity of the socio-economic context in each country, including the drivers, protagonists, and political processes involved in the conflict, it is difficult to reach conclusions regarding the causal linkages

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<sup>a</sup> The SOFI report defines countries in protracted crisis using the following measurable characteristics: longevity of the crisis (food crisis for at least eight years between 2001-2010), composition of external aid flows (countries receiving more than 10 percent of official development assistance as humanitarian relief), and inclusion on the list of low-income food-deficit countries.

<sup>b</sup> This study is supported by the World Food Programme.

between food security, conflict, and humanitarian interventions that are generalizable across other countries and regions. Secondly, food assistance in case study countries has not been explicitly conceptualized as a means of achieving peace, stability, or good governance. As such, there are relatively few policy documents, results frameworks, or program-specific theories of change that researchers can use to assess and attribute progress toward these goals.

## II. Linkages between Vulnerability to Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict

An important hypothesis relevant to a livelihoods or resilience framework when working in a conflict or fragile context is that **a household's vulnerability to poverty** and its vulnerability to violence are two factors that determine whether or not it participates in conflict.<sup>3</sup> These vulnerabilities depend on contextual conditions influenced by a complex interaction between the conflict, household assets, and socio-political institutions. A full exploration of the livelihood-conflict nexus therefore entails analysis of vulnerabilities at the household level and also an understanding of what has happened historically, politically, socially, economically, and environmentally within a given conflict context.<sup>4,5</sup> The livelihood opportunities available in conflict and post-conflict environments, and the specific livelihood strategies adopted, will influence livelihood outcomes that can either mitigate or deter conflict – or prolong and exacerbate it.

Not surprisingly, many of the structural causes of vulnerability to food insecurity coincide with those that underlie conflict. The drivers of violent conflict can be classified into political and institutional, socio-economic, and environment/resource-related categories that also apply in **vulnerability analyses around food security. In addition, various “enabling factors” make it difficult** to prevent or stem conflict such as weak state legitimacy, relative strength and authority of rebel and government forces, and geopolitical trends. It bears noting that the conditions or attributes related to conflict do not necessarily sit neatly within the categories of drivers or enablers; while these categories provide an organizing nomenclature, it is important to consider the inter-linkages between them.

Equally important to understanding the *causes* of conflict and vulnerability is an analysis of the *effect* of conflict on vulnerability to food and livelihood security. Direct impacts of conflict on livelihoods and food security include attacks on people and property, and looting or theft of key livelihood assets such as houses, food stocks and livestock. Indirect impacts may include the destruction or loss of basic services or access to those services, the collapse of public health and education systems, and loss of access to employment, markets, farms or traditional pastures.<sup>6-8</sup>

The following section provides brief synopses of the means through which vulnerability to food insecurity and violent conflict influence one another in the case study countries. While general, these descriptions give insight into the complexity of addressing food insecurity in situations experiencing protracted crisis, particularly for humanitarian agencies intending to promote transitions to greater peace and stability.

### ➤ *Dependence on limited livelihood options*

There is a strong link between conflict, vulnerability to food insecurity, and livelihood opportunities. The degree to which communities and households are exposed to conflict and its consequences has a direct bearing on the range of livelihood options available to them. The more limited the range of livelihood options, the higher the likelihood that households will be vulnerable to food security shocks. Where pre-conflict livelihoods are undiversified and capacity is already poor, the impact of conflict on food security can be devastating. This is especially true in

predominantly agricultural areas affected by conflict since agricultural production is a key determinant of vulnerability to food insecurity at household, community and even national levels. Conflict introduces challenges to agriculture for multiple reasons: widespread displacement as a result of conflict limits farming activities; roads infrastructure needed for transporting inputs to farmers and for getting products to market is often damaged, destroyed; and access to agricultural lands, grazing lands, and natural resources critical to agricultural livelihoods may be cut off. Finally, the widespread involvement of productive-age men in conflict typically reduces the amount of household labor available for agricultural activities. The combined effect of these constraints is decreased productivity and food insecurity among vulnerable households dependent upon subsistence agriculture or on a sole livelihood strategy.

For example, the food and livelihood security of subsistence farmers in Timor-Leste was severely affected by 1975 invasion by the Indonesian military. The intense fighting in subsequent years had a cumulative effect on the ability of smallholder farmers to recover from years of conflict-related losses to both crops and livestock.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the near absolute reliance on cattle raising as a livelihood strategy in South Sudan heightens vulnerability to both food insecurity and conflict: violent cattle raiding is a common feature of the conflict, which also cuts off access to markets, land and social services critical to livelihood security. In both instances, the ability of vulnerable populations to successfully cope with the effects of conflict is severely constrained by their social, cultural and economic dependence on a single livelihood strategy.<sup>10</sup>

An overall lack of income earning opportunities, especially among youth populations, is a key component in the conflict context of each of the case study countries (see discussion below). There is significant economic migration from FATA, Pakistan due to limited economic **opportunities: an estimated one quarter of FATA's employed population is employed outside** the country, about 30 percent in another province and approximately 10 percent in another district or agency.<sup>11</sup> According to a 2010 WFP survey, 46 percent of households in FATA have insufficient food consumption. These are typically wage labourers and petty traders with minimal assets and little or no property **who are "disproportionately affected by crop and livestock losses,** displacement and damaged property, suggesting that a significant share may have been pushed **into poverty as a result of the crisis."**<sup>12</sup> Timor Leste and South Sudan also suffer from having insufficient employment opportunities to meet demand.

### ➤ *Widespread employment among growing youth populations*

The lack of employment opportunities for rapidly expanding youth populations was found to be a serious issue in all case studies. South Sudan, Timor-Leste and Pakistan all had sizeable populations of uneducated youth with few livelihood opportunities, with implications for the recurrence of conflict and for recovery. Especially in protracted crises, violence may become a normalized strategy for survival to which youth are particularly susceptible. Ready access to weaponry and the recruitment of youth by militant groups have fuelled inter-ethnic and politically motivated violence.

In South Sudan, more than 51 percent of the population is under the age of 18. Social ills associated with lack of opportunities such as alcohol abuse, theft, youth violence and banditry are becoming increasingly visible, especially in towns. Youth frustration has thus emerged as a central component of conflict dynamics,<sup>13</sup> as has the development of criminal gangs outside the reach of traditional conflict mitigation mechanisms and government security organs.<sup>14</sup> In addition, alternative livelihoods to cattle-keeping are almost non-existent throughout all states, and youth are particularly encouraged to engage in cattle raiding to bring more wealth to the community.<sup>15</sup> Evidence from Eastern Equatoria suggests that modern cattle raiding is mostly carried out by criminal youth operating across tribal lines and not adhering to traditional practices. They are

reportedly well-armed and often raid for economic reasons, not for marriage or the transfer of wealth.<sup>16</sup>

The situation in Timor-Leste is characterized by a spike in the youth population, Dili-centred economy with limited employment opportunities, and increasing migration to Dili by low-skilled job seekers, including an abundance of young men. Already in the mid-1990s it was estimated that there were approximately 300,000 school graduates in *Timor Timur*,<sup>17</sup> while official data for 1996 indicated a total of 1,230 job vacancies.<sup>18</sup> Following the crisis of mid-2006, the large number of disenfranchised youth confirmed the extent to which they were a threat to stability, as gang warfare continued even after the arrival of the International Stabilization Force. Indeed, the numerous martial arts gangs and veterans groups in the country are fertile arenas for youth activity in the absence of livelihood alternatives that would support development and recovery.

In FATA, Pakistan, unemployment rates are high, particularly for young men aged 15-29, and some 60 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line.<sup>19</sup> Low levels of literacy and **educational attainment, as well as the prevalence of unregistered madrassas for boys' education,** provide an opportunity for propagation of radical interpretations of Islam. The combination of these factors makes male youth particularly susceptible to militancy and participation in the illicit smuggling economy. According to the 2010 post-conflict needs assessment for KPK and FATA, militant stipends are as much as double the pay for legal, unskilled labour.<sup>20</sup> This is an unfavourable context for peacebuilding and development prospects given that youth (15-24 years) account for 20 percent of the population and those under 15 years account for a further 41 percent, and the prospects for legitimate and well-remunerated employment are low.

➤ *Disputed / inequitable access to land*

An uneven distribution of land, seizure of land during conflict, and unsettled issues around land titling, are common features of vulnerability to food insecurity and present to varying degrees in most conflict-affected countries, including the case studies in this research. For example, the Swat region of Pakistan has a strong agricultural base, but tremendous land inequality. A FATA disaster management official referred to the high land rental prices and land inequality in the narrow valley, noting that four khans ("**elite" families**) **owned some 30** percent of the land on the right bank of the Swat River – a source of grievance locally among tenant farmers, whom the Taliban sought as recruits, targeting landowners. Inequality of land meant more men dependent on wage labour, and the wage rates offered to new recruits by the Taliban far exceeded the market wage.

In Timor-Leste, a large number of unresolved land and property disputes involving customary, formal, and irregular claims deriving from the Portuguese, Indonesian, and post-Indonesian periods<sup>21</sup> have contributed to vulnerability characteristic of a fragile state. Unresolved land claims, disputes over titles and the lack of a legal framework on land tenure following the 1999 Indonesian resistance were underlying factors contributing to the 2006 political crisis.

Land issues are also part of the vulnerability and conflict dynamics on South Sudan, where competition over access to seasonal grazing land (and water sources) often exacerbate long-standing tensions among pastoralist groups. Ethnic communities come into conflict when they **migrate into rival groups' territories in search of water, grazing land or cattle. These are persistent** problems in Jonglei and in the cross-boundary areas between Warrap, Lakes and Unity states.<sup>22</sup> In Lakes state, a common complaint was that other communities claimed lands historically belonging to their particular group or tribe. Controlling larger stretches of land could be immensely lucrative, making it easier to meet traditional obligations such as marriage, and allowed for dominance of commonly utilized natural resources such as land, water and pastures.<sup>23</sup>

### ➤ *Complex emergencies/protracted crises*

As described above, the presence of conflict is often not the only dynamic affecting the ability to dispense food assistance and build stability. Complex and successive disasters in protracted crises such as Pakistan (war, earthquake, flood) and South Sudan (war, ethnic conflict and drought) have **constrained development actors' abilities** to adopt a long-term strategic approach to peacebuilding. This is due to the adverse impacts of complex emergencies on human resource capacity, financial resources, political stability, transportation and communication networks, and natural resources. In Pakistan, for example, beginning in 2005 there were substantial emergency operations due to severe weather, followed by a devastating 7.6 magnitude earthquake in Kashmir and NWFP, and high food prices in 2008;<sup>24</sup> in the last three years, UN agency activities have scaled up significantly in response to militant extremism in the northwest of the country and to the 2010 and 2011 monsoon floods.<sup>c</sup> In South Sudan, various states (Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, Warrap) experience chronic food insecurity due largely to prolonged drought or other severe climatic conditions. Conflict also can cause or be exacerbated by food price crises and massive disruption of national and local economies, further adding to the urgency and complexity of strategic solutions. In Timor-Leste, case study respondents in areas affected directly by the conflict as well as those in outlying areas (Baucau, Oecusse) referred to shortages of key foodstuffs (notably rice and cooking oil) stemming from shipping and transport blockages caused by the crisis in Dili, and resulting price increases. In all of these examples, immediate measures needed to be taken to address the emergency within a fragile political and security environment, posing significant challenges and risks to implementing agencies and communities in need. In such fragile environments, food assistance that is poorly designed, targeted or distributed can actually contribute to or exacerbate instability.

### ➤ *Displacement and resettlement*

Conflict frequently results in mass population displacement as people move to safer zones, within or outside of official IDP camps, with substantial consequences for food security and livelihood options of both the displaced persons and the host communities. The difficulty of pursuing a sustainable livelihood is a challenge that is perhaps inherent to displacement; for instance, IDPs are often prohibited from farming activities because there is no land available, and employment inside the camps is hard to come by. When IDPs seek resources and employment outside the camps, this can create tensions with host communities. In addition, the phenomena of mobile populations and population surges in host communities can overtax already-strained capacities, resources and infrastructure for providing basic services. In Pakistan, for example, an estimated 1.4 million people have been displaced from FATA by militancy and anti-militant operations.<sup>d</sup> There are several IDP camps; the largest – Jalozi IDP camp on the outskirts of Peshawar, established in November 2008 – now hosts some 7,000 families from FATA.<sup>e</sup> According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, **"Insecurity and difficulty in recovering livelihoods, shelter and access to basic services" are obstacles to safe return.**<sup>25</sup> In South Sudan, hundreds of thousands of people are displaced across Jonglei state, and external agencies still provide most essential services.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>c</sup> According to the 2011 Detailed Livelihoods Assessment conducted by FAO (and partners) following the 2010 floods residents of 'The districts in which this (repeat flooding with seriously limited recovery from 2010) may be an issue are: Dadu; Ghotki; Jamshoro; Qambar Shadadkot; Kashmore; Larkana; Thatta; Jaffarabad (Balochistan) and Nasirabad (Balochistan)'.

<sup>d</sup> As of November 2011, nearly 850,000 people in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) were internally displaced by conflict according to statistics from the FATA Disaster Management Authority (FDMA): some 77 percent of these are from Kurram and South Waziristan (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/pakistan/>.) However, the actual numbers may be higher due to registration issues.

<sup>e</sup> As reported in the latest OCHA situation report (April 2012) due to army operations in Khyber Agency there has been a sharp spike in IDPs fleeing the fighting and registering in Jalozi which had 159,000 people registered as of April 2nd 2012.



In some cases, IDPs experience an improvement in their conditions and a reduction in their vulnerability to food insecurity, at least for the short term: in Timor-Leste, in the 2006-07 crisis, people were attracted to the camps for security reasons but also by the prospect of access to food. Whereas evidence suggests that food was also distributed outside of the camps by the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS) and its FRETILIN predecessor, the Secretariat for Labour and Solidarity (SLS), it appears clear that food deliveries occurred within the camps on a far more regular basis.

In light of the options for durable solutions to IDP situations — return to their community of origin, settlement in the area to which they have been displaced, or settlement in another part of the country—there is a risk of tension or potential conflict if institutions, services and other resources in the community are overextended. Disputes over ownership of land assets in South Sudan and Timor-Leste made it difficult for returnees to resume their agricultural livelihoods, and these disputes in themselves were further drivers of community conflict. In South Sudan, community members in Jonglei state noted that there is a constant cycle of displacement as a result of violent conflict whereby livestock are killed and crops destroyed.

The high rate of displacement and mobility in conflict-affected situations has a direct impact on the extent to which humanitarian agencies can promote longer-term food security. In such contexts, general food distribution (GFD) is often a more practical and efficient means of addressing needs than other longer-term projects such as food for assets or food for training. Unfortunately, unlike these more livelihood-supportive interventions, GFD does little to enhance the future productive capacity or food security of participating households.

### ➤ *Access to functioning markets*

Conflict can also compound vulnerability to food insecurity when it affects the function of markets. Reduced access to markets was an effect of conflict in all three case study countries. For example in FATA, Pakistan, traders face significant obstacles to market access due to roadblocks, curfews, and conflict.<sup>27</sup> In conflict-affected environments, food prices often increase, and markets become both less competitive and less integrated with outside markets. In Timor-Leste, the outbreak of violence in the capital, Dili, led to a disruption of markets and a steep increase in the price of rice, leading to food shortages and problems accessing food particularly among poor urban households and in the enclave (Oecusse). In South Sudan, closing the border with northern Sudan led to an increase in annual inflation from 20 percent to 80 percent,<sup>28</sup> with a severe effect on food prices.

### ➤ *Nutrition and health*

Many conflict situations are characterized by widespread malnutrition and death among vulnerable groups (e.g., children, women, and the elderly).<sup>29</sup> Empirical evidence has shown that civil wars result in largely negative and long-lasting nutritional effects amongst children in war zones.<sup>30</sup> For example, widespread acute malnutrition in North Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan, especially in drought-prone areas, is increasing. This trend is unlikely to be reversed in the near future given the lack of NGOs specializing in nutrition who are willing to work there due to the security situation. Persistent undernutrition among a nation's infants and young children has widespread implications for the development of the human capacity (and livelihood options) of future generations. Women and children are also particularly vulnerable to the emotional, physical and sexual violence that often accompanies outbreaks of civil unrest in countries undergoing transition.

### ➤ *Basic services*



Conflict can disrupt access to basic services such as health and education and dismantle the institutions responsible for providing them. Low service coverage may predate conflict and be constricted even further due to security issues and damage to infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The lack of access to basic services over the long term increasingly constrains the capacity for recovery because people are unable to meet their fundamental needs for survival; meanwhile prolonged conflict drains the human and financial resources needed to restore or build the infrastructure that enables social service provision, so a damaging and self-perpetuating cycle ensues. Pakistan and South Sudan have experienced protracted crisis periods with severe tolls on basic service provision, and the impact of Timor-Leste becoming a **“temporarily broken state”** created major disruption to livelihoods and access to services in Dili.

In terms of education, the disruption wrought upon educational systems due to conflict has long-term implications not only for household food and livelihood security but also for the stability of the state because it translates into low literacy, low numeracy, and general low capacity to perform the skilled functions needed for post-conflict transition and recovery. All case studies evidenced challenges in their educational systems, predating and/or exacerbated by conflict. In South Sudan, the need to improve basic social services such as education and health care was identified by communities in all states as a key peacebuilding priority; the UN is working with government partners at the national and local levels and NGOs to support the provision of such needs, for example through the construction of properly equipped health facilities and support to primary schools in Warrap state. Pakistan experienced widespread disruption to its educational systems due to conflict; this has continued and slowed the progress of economic growth and poverty reduction. The educational attainment and educational quality in Timor-Leste are also low.

Health services can also be crippled by conflict, thus compounding health-related vulnerabilities. In some cases, the health sector is underdeveloped prior to the onset of conflict: access to services is uneven across the country, with district health centres being the only facilities available to remote communities. Community respondents in Timor-Leste, for example, pointed out that the government services they normally receive are not extensive, with some communities having access solely at the district level even after 10 years of independence. In 2008 and 2010 public opinion polls in Pakistan, health and education were ranked equal to or higher than justice and security as priority needs in FATA.<sup>f</sup> **There are also capacity issues that affect the government’s** ability to ensure the health and education of its constituents; for example, technical capacity in nutrition may be limited within government health ministries at federal and local levels, as in Timor-Leste. In South Sudan, schools and healthcare centers have limited coverage and tend to be under-funded with over-extended staff.<sup>31</sup>

Summary: Each of these factors were present, to a certain extent, in each of the case study countries. While specific interventions can (and have been) be designed to address individual factors, the following section illustrates that the complex interaction of these dynamic factors presents significant challenges to promoting peace and stability through provision of food assistance.

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<sup>f</sup> Except during the 2009 crises when security and combating terrorism were top priorities by a wide margin. Naveed Ahmad Shinwari (2010) “Understanding FATA: Attitudes Towards Governance, Religion, and Society in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas,” Volume IV, (Islamabad: CAMP), p. 29.

### III. Challenges to Building Peace and Stability through Provision of Food Assistance

The theory of change guiding the case study research posits that food assistance can help people maintain their livelihoods during conflicts and assist a process of recovery. Findings indicate that food-based livelihood assistance has the potential to directly address some of the underlying causes of conflict in affected communities . It can do so through creation of productive infrastructure, provision of social protection, and improving the technical capacity of government and other local counterparts (see Section IV).

However, there are obviously substantial challenges to providing assistance strategically and effectively in conflict and post-conflict settings. The following section highlights some of the more critical challenges to building peace and stability through the provision of food assistance in conflict-affected environments.

#### ➤ *Ongoing conflict and security issues*

In certain areas of Pakistan and South Sudan, conflict is active and ongoing. Areas of FATA remain highly insecure due to ongoing military operations and militant activities, and access in the region by humanitarian organizations is extremely limited. **Pakistan's national security strategy calls for "state-led" humanitarian and early recovery assistance, which sets requirements for external actors** that in practice, can limit their ability to conduct operations effectively. For example, international organizations and NGOs are required by internal policies and the Government of Pakistan to take mitigating measures in order to protect staff from harm. This includes government control of and restrictions on security clearances for UN and NGOs/community-based organizations, use of armed police escorts, direct government implementation of programs, and, in some cases, remote **management of programs. Organizations are required to obtain "No Objection Certificates" from the FATA Disaster Management Authority/ Provincial Disaster Management Authority for initiating new projects, a process which can delay or block the delivery of assistance.** Another important security issue in Pakistan is that the population has experienced military-induced displacement and a subsequent **"securitization" of aid (including but not limited to food assistance).**

In Warrap, South Sudan, community members (particularly in Tonj East and Tonj South counties) **raised concerns that despite state authorities' efforts to disarm populations, many** civilians still possessed firearms. There is easy availability of light weapons and small arms, and people continue to keep their guns for protection from raids and for settling differences due to the prevailing perception that law enforcement is weak. These kinds of continuing instability and potential for violence heighten the risks not only for the local population but for humanitarian actors providing food assistance; warehouses, delivery trucks and food distribution points require robust security in these volatile environments. Even safe zones such as IDP camps are not wholly insulated from violence; in Timor-Leste, for example, fighting occasionally broke out within IDP camps and IDPs were sometimes hit by rocks thrown from the outside. In such instances, security concerns can preclude the provision of food assistance to the most vulnerable populations and limit the potential of any food assistance intervention to promote peace and stability.

#### ➤ *Food assistance in support of livelihood recovery*

An important challenge in designing a food assistance strategy that supports peacebuilding and stability is tailoring support so that it diversifies livelihood options for recovering populations. The disruption of communication, transportation, and market infrastructure poses challenges for all livelihoods that depend on these systems. Moreover, as noted in the previous section, the

common practice of relying on a single livelihood strategy (e.g. livestock herding) presents a major constraint to recovery in conflict and post-conflict settings. In protracted conflict situations, whole generations may be cut off from the values, assets and skill sets associated with traditional livelihoods.

The case studies presented numerous examples of the challenges of re-establishing livelihoods in active or post-conflict settings. In Swat, Pakistan, community members repeatedly described how their crops were destroyed either through fighting, an inability to harvest, or an inability to move them to market, and how capital was expended fleeing from the fighting and floods. In Timor-Leste, Oecusse respondents reported that following the crisis the Indonesian Military sealed off the borders, which were essential to informal cross-border trade with Indonesian West Timor. This prevented the importation of supplies and made the West Timor market inaccessible for selling stock and vegetables at a time when the Dili market was not accessible and the local markets in rural districts had dried up.

Previous research points to Food for Assets (FFA) programs as one potential means of supporting **livelihood recovery in transitional settings**. **It's argued that FFA is particularly effective in such situations** because it not only meets the immediate consumption needs of participating households, it also creates durable assets designed to enhance the skills and livelihood security of participants, and when employing male youth, gives them a profitable alternative to participation in violent conflict. However, one key challenge in implementing FFA programs is that they require relatively high levels of technical and logistical capacity at the institutional level. This is often not present in transitional settings characterized by nascent or fragile institutions. For example, in both Timor-Leste and South Sudan, major FFA programs have experienced difficulties in finding adequate technical staff and faced funding shortfalls, both of which limited the impact of FFA during the recovery period. While FFA may be an appropriate and preferred assistance modality for promoting stability over the longer-term, practical realities may limit its implementation in transitional settings.

### ➤ *Equity versus impact*

Food assistance can have a short-term effect in calming volatile situations and helping to avoid conflict. However, perceptions of inequitable distribution of food and other resources – whether due to political favouritism, corruption, collective retribution, or lack of access – can also perpetuate or aggravate conflict between different communities or ethnic groups. One way that governments and humanitarian actors have attempted to avoid this is to provide general food distribution (GFD) to all ethnic groups involved in the conflict, which is a simple way to demonstrate impartiality. However because this blanket approach overrides household targeting based on vulnerability to food insecurity, it dilutes the impact of food assistance among those most in need.

In South Sudan, for example, the government dictates that food assistance be distributed evenly among counties in targeted states, regardless of the extent and severity of food insecurity. In certain instances this has helped to quell concerns of violence related to misallocation of food assistance based on political or tribal alliances. However, in others, it has increased tensions as highly food insecure populations feel marginalized by political considerations. The Pakistan case study also revealed challenges with targeting related to the exclusion of some affected populations due to government policies and access. Similar to South Sudan, some of these issues draw on a long-standing narrative and perceptions or experiences of exclusion that have been exploited by militant groups. Government requirements of equal distribution of food assistance among political jurisdictions also constrains the ability of external agencies to remain flexible to changing conditions and maximize the potential of food assistance to support livelihood recovery.

The debate over equity versus impact, and the outcomes of strategies adopted, draws into clear relief the distinct, and sometimes competing programming objectives of increased food security versus political and social stability.

### ➤ *Commodity resource constraints*

Breaks in commodity pipelines due to the destruction of infrastructure or ongoing security/political issues not only impede the delivery of food assistance, they may also fuel conflict and undermine the stability of fragile or fledgling governments. While external agencies have tried to address the problem of periodic pipeline breaks in South Sudan through construction of rural storage facilities and pre-positioning of food, populations continue to blame the government for occasional food shortages such as those recently experienced in North Jonglei. Likewise, pipeline breaks and rapid expansion of emergency programs to address the needs of populations displaced by conflict have led to significant downsizing of school feeding programs in South Sudan and Timor-Leste. In South Sudan resource constraints may also be due to limited transport access resulting from insecurity or seasonal rains, while in Timor-Leste, problems associated with resources for school feeding had more to do with the government assuming full responsibility for the program before it had adequate capacity to oversee the operational logistics.

Regardless of the cause, pipeline breaks and other commodity resource constraints not only have a negative impact on the food security of beneficiary populations, they also have direct consequences on the use of food to support transitions to peace and stability in post-conflict settings.

### ➤ *Limited human resource capacity*

Many countries transitioning towards peace and stability are severely constrained by limited human resource capacity. In each of the three case study countries, there is a clear lack of technical capacity on the part of government and food assistance organizations to develop, implement and monitor food and livelihood security programs. For example in Timor-Leste, as the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) draws down and other UN agencies prepare to phase out, there is increased emphasis on supporting the government to assume full management and operational responsibilities for basic services that during crisis and recovery phases were undertaken largely by external actors. While the ministries essential to food security have been strengthened through capacity development activities, there is a need for continuing work in supply chain management, logistics for emergency and general food distribution, and monitoring. As one IOM official in Timor Leste noted, **“Where there is a gap in capacity, the context remains vulnerable.”** As mentioned earlier, despite increasing demand for the use of FFA in support of livelihood recovery, few government or non-government institutions have the technical capacity to manage such programs. Similarly, despite substantial gains in enrolment attributable to humanitarian agency support for school feeding, the Government of South Sudan has thus far been unable or unwilling to make commensurate investments in teacher training and certification, leaving classrooms in many rural schools severely overcrowded. In this sense, human capacity constraints will likely limit the long-term educational impact of external assistance.

Related to the issue of limited capacity, the roles of humanitarian agencies and national governments are often compartmentalized in transitional settings. In conflict and post-conflict settings, governments often focus exclusively on security while external agencies are assumed to be responsible for provision of basic social services. This division of roles not only places an undue burden on the human and financial resources of humanitarian organizations, it limits the development of capacity among national governments, masks their accountability for basic service provision, and over the long-term creates an unsustainable dependency on external

assistance. This situation inevitably highlights a stark choice between greater stakeholder participation and quality project implementation.

➤ *Susceptibility of food assistance to political manipulation*

A complicated challenge to enhancing peace and stability through distribution of food assistance lies in the political nature of the conflict and the ensuing recovery.<sup>32</sup> In order to maintain neutrality in conflict situations and prevent the political manipulation of aid, UN organizations and international NGOs must carefully consider the means through which they select institutional partners and distribute food assistance. Such imperatives are often in juxtaposition with organizational mandates to serve those most in need. This problem is particularly vexing in situations where the only way to access food insecure populations is through local actors that have some stake in the lead up to, or aftermath of armed conflict. This exact scenario has negatively impacted the ability of external agencies to distribute food assistance in Pakistan and South Sudan. Case study interviews indicated that the Pakistan military anticipated and factored into its stabilization strategy a humanitarian response that included the UN. This resulted in a complex relationship in which the government wanted UN support, but on its own terms. For example, the government imposed its own timetables for return of IDPs and established its own eligibility criteria for food assistance that at times, seemed to be in tension with humanitarian principles.<sup>9</sup> These tensions have generated considerable debate among the humanitarian community in Pakistan over the extent of coordination or partnership with the government. A **Humanitarian Policy Group report on humanitarian action in Pakistan noted that “supporting stabilization efforts inevitably entails coordination, if not alignment, with the national government and its international allies. This has implications not only for agencies’ principles, but also for the degree of acceptance and access agencies can expect within affected communities.”**<sup>33</sup>

Even actions that might be implicitly perceived as favouring particular parties (in a conflict) can actually perpetuate conflict. For example, social protection and livelihood programs in the Swat district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan. The UN has a third-party monitoring mechanism to monitor whether the programs are being implemented according to plan. As a result, steps have been taken to further integrate robust beneficiary complaint and feedback system with mechanisms for enhancing transparency and accountability to affected populations. Yet, the study found evidence that at times, implementing institutions were seen as benefiting certain groups and households at the expense of others. Addressing concerns and clarifying potentially volatile misunderstandings in such situations remains challenging due to insufficient communication and information-sharing with local communities.<sup>34</sup> In order to avoid political manipulation of food assistance, and potential exacerbation of conflict drivers, humanitarian agencies must engage in regular, context-specific conflict analysis and prioritize transparency of selection criteria among government representatives, implementing partners, and beneficiary communities.

Summary: Food assistance agencies have long been aware of these operational challenges to distributing food aid in conflict and post-conflict environments. However, each of these challenges **takes on a new light when the promotion of a transition to ‘peace and stability’ is included among the objectives of food assistance.** The following section (Section IV) provides empirical evidence of the extent to which food assistance organizations have been able to overcome such challenges and make durable contributions to stability.

<sup>9</sup> The military has been criticized for forcing IDP returns to Swat (and FATA) following the “completion” of military operations, and for regarding those that do not as economic migrants without need of assistance. The military has tightly controlled returns, with many accusations of forced return – and of UN complicity in enabling returns to areas that may not be safe.

## IV. Empirical Evidence of the Impact of Food Assistance on Peace and Stability

Analysis of each of the case studies provides overwhelming evidence that the underlying causes of conflict, and thus potential solutions, are contextually specific at the national and sub-national levels. Furthermore, findings from the current and previous research clearly demonstrate that the scale and modality of external aid, including but not limited to food assistance, have had a mixed influence on the instigation or reduction of conflict.<sup>35</sup> In situations of protracted crisis, instability is often due to long-standing but dynamic ethnic divisions, dynamic political economies, competition over natural resources, demographic trends, limited alternative economic opportunities, and cultural issues, many of which lie outside the influence of humanitarian assistance.

The following evidence obtained from primary research in case study countries demonstrates that while food assistance has had certain positive impacts in specific circumstances, the enabling conditions that must be in place in order to achieve desired outcomes are quite complex and context-specific

### ➤ *Provision of infrastructure*

One of the ways in which food assistance has contributed to stability is through support for the creation of public infrastructure (roads, schools, health posts, markets, etc.). While not directly related to conflict resolution and peace building, these investments in the construction of trunk and feeder roads, Food for Assets and/or Cash for Assets have directly contributed to social and economic stability and a reduction of violence in conflict-affected communities. **They've done so** by enabling greater provision of basic social services, allowing easier access of security forces, and providing linkages with markets and other livelihood opportunities (South Sudan, Pakistan). Other important multiplier effects of road construction by food assistance agencies include facilitation of the return of IDPs, greater access to public transport (and thus lower transport costs), and establishment of roadside markets that create income-generating opportunities for women and strengthen ties between communities.

Though peacebuilding was not an explicit goal of FFA, there is an implicit link between livelihood recovery and peacebuilding when transitioning from conflict to stability. Households that are able to feed their families and exchange their surplus production for cash are less likely to come in to conflict. During the transition to stability, food assistance specifically designed to support livelihood recovery (FFA, CFW) has in many instances led to creation of important productive community assets (irrigation networks, feeder roads, school gardens, etc.). Importantly, these activities also made contributions to longer-term livelihood security and resilience through activities aimed at livelihood diversification, reforestation, improved water management, and erosion control (South Sudan).

### ➤ *Support for social services*

Food assistance aimed at improving access to basic social services – such as school feeding, basic health care, and social safety nets – has in certain instances had a favorable impact on stability. For instance, school feeding programs and Girls Incentive Programs have improved educational attainment among girls and improved school enrolment and retention in each of the three case study countries. In addition to easing the burden of food provision of participating households, these efforts can provide a much-needed sense of security and stability among traumatized populations, particularly school-age children. Food for Education also transfers valuable skills



(literacy, numeracy) and knowledge that can support future livelihood security among school-age populations. Similarly, supplemental feeding has improved the nutrition of children less than two years of age and pregnant and lactating women. While not directly related to peacebuilding, these efforts have helped to address the specific consequences of conflict and instability among especially vulnerable groups. Importantly, however, the case studies also demonstrated that the potential benefits from school feeding and other food-supported social services can only be maximized through complementary investments in quality service providers (e.g., teachers, health professionals, and agricultural extensionists). Such investments are often lacking in countries undergoing protracted crisis.

### ➤ *Short-term assistance to displaced populations*

In situations of protracted crisis involving conflict and the influx of large numbers of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) (South Sudan, Pakistan), the regular provision of food assistance can contribute to **re-establishment of a sense of “normalcy” among populations affected by displacement and violence**. Food assistance provided in each of the three case study countries has contributed to the immediate stability in post-conflict environments by supporting vast numbers of returnees and IDPs. Following the cessation of violence, rations were provided to returnees in both Timor-Leste and South Sudan (for one month and three months, respectively) in order to facilitate transition and reintegration. While beneficiaries and institutional partners in both countries readily acknowledge that the short duration of assistance was insufficient for enabling **“recovery” or “reintegration”** they did attest that they were important for enabling return to former homesteads and strengthening community cohesiveness in conflict-affected areas. Through both GFD and activities more explicitly targeted at livelihood recovery (FFA/CFW), food assistance programs have met both immediate survival needs and created buffers with which households directly affected by conflict can begin to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. In South Sudan, the three-month ration was often accompanied by additional food assistance (Food for Assets) to enable returning households to re-establish their livelihoods.

### ➤ *Increasing state legitimacy and capacity*

The Timor-Leste and South Sudan studies revealed several instances in which food assistance agencies took concrete steps to strengthen the capacity of government counterparts for management of food security initiatives. In Timor-Leste, the UN provided technical support to the **government’s Food Security Unit in establishing a National Information and Early Warning System** on Food Security and a Suco Monitoring System to develop government capacity to manage food security. It has also worked with several ministries to help strengthen their supply chain management systems and provided sector-specific training to expand government capacities in education and health services. In addition, the UN has **supported the construction of the country’s** first food processing facility via a UN-government-private sector partnership. The facility contributes to state capacity and stability by producing fortified foods that help Timor-Leste meet its goals in combating malnutrition, reducing reliance on costly imports, providing a market for local farmers, and generating employment.

The government of South Sudan has also participated in a range of capacity development activities implemented by UN and other food assistance actors in areas such as supply chain management, food security assessment and monitoring, early warning, and disaster risk reduction. However, in South Sudan, despite progress made by food assistance agencies in building the capacity of government actors in certain areas, critical gaps remain in government capacity regarding provision of livelihood support, education and health services.



In Pakistan, the case study research was not able to gather evidence that WFP food assistance was impacting, positively or negatively, state capacity or state legitimacy – a significant shortcoming. While the UN has worked through government partners, including line ministries, to implement recovery programs, it does not resource or capacitate these roles beyond disaster risk reduction.

The case studies also show that when implemented in coordination with local partners, provision of basic social services (e.g., school feeding, health services, etc.) can instil greater confidence in fragile governments and civil society among crisis-affected communities. As a District Administrator in Timor-Leste interviewed for this study commented, **“The various endeavours between the state, donor agencies, NGOs and community were advanced as united ventures, which were helpful to the recovery process.”** This view reinforces more global findings on this issue as noted in the 2011 World Development Report: “Governments that have restored confidence of stakeholders have typically mobilized non-state actors to deliver results rather than doing everything themselves.”<sup>36</sup>

Summary: Evidence suggests that when implemented appropriately, food assistance *can* have a positive impact on the transition toward longer-term social and economic stability. However, when not properly designed, implemented or coordinated in accordance with the specific local context, food assistance also holds the potential to exacerbate underlying causes of conflict and instability. This section has provided specific examples of the means through which food assistance agencies in case study countries achieved impact (positive, negative, and in some instances unintended) on the transition toward greater peace and stability.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations: Moving the Agenda Forward

While empirical evidence is mixed regarding the potential of food assistance to contribute to peacebuilding in protracted crises involving armed conflict, when designed and implemented appropriately it can make significant contributions to long-term social and economic stability. Additionally, by ensuring minimal levels of food security among the most vulnerable populations, and supporting livelihood recovery among conflict-affected populations, food assistance can be an effective tool for facilitating transition from protracted crisis.

However, when not properly designed, implemented, and monitored in accordance with the specific conflict context, food assistance has the clear potential to perpetuate or aggravate instability and conflict in situations of protracted crisis. For instance, in these environments perceptions of inequitable targeting or distribution of food assistance – due to political bias, corruption, collective punishment, or lack of access – can easily exacerbate existing grievances among individual communities. While such outcomes have been relatively limited in case study countries, they have the potential to serve as catalysts for the resumption of political turmoil and armed conflict.

In order to avoid perceptions of bias (and inadvertently raise tensions), food assistance agencies have in some cases abided by government requests to allocate food assistance evenly among geographic areas and/or political jurisdictions in an **explicit effort to ensure ‘equity’**. However, this approach can directly contribute to tension and conflict when populations correctly assert that equal food allocations do not accurately reflect differing levels of need based on food security status. In Timor-Leste, resentment was created by a prioritization of food assistance for IDPs residing in urban areas. Similarly in South Sudan, host communities in border states often claimed bias in the decision to focus food assistance among the massive number of IDPs returning after the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In Pakistan, allocation of resources through FFA and CFW caused tension due to perceptions of political and/or tribal favouritism among implementing NGOs. In these complex environments, a commitment to equitable targeting often dilutes the impact of food assistance in a failed effort to maintain peace and stability. If it is clear that distribution of food aid cannot avoid the creation of tension that could lead to conflict, food assistance agencies and **their government counterparts should adhere to the “do no harm” principle** by carefully considering whether food assistance is justifiable. These complex, sensitive, and context-specific issues related to food aid modalities and targeting highlight the caution with which food assistance agencies, governments, and other institutional stakeholders must approach decisions regarding allocation of food assistance.

Reflecting the objectives of the original study, this paper has primarily focused on the means through which food assistance can help to establish and rebuild local institutions, restore essential services, support development of productive infrastructure, and provide much-needed social safety nets in protracted crisis situations. While it acknowledges the potential adverse effects of inappropriately conceived food assistance in any situation of protracted crisis, the paper has presented insight gained from analysis of secondary and primary data in Pakistan, South Sudan and Timor Leste. It concludes by outlining the following general management considerations for overcoming challenges to using food assistance as a vehicle for building peace and social stability.

### *1) Context-specific conflict assessments and analysis*

Given the highly complex nature of conflicts at the national and sub-national level, food assistance agencies are unlikely to formulate durable solutions without an understanding of the local drivers, participants and consequences of conflict. Humanitarian agencies should seek means of collaborating with local partners on context-specific conflict assessments and analysis. Such analyses should examine local political economies and inform the selection of effective approaches to addressing root causes of conflict in order to achieve greater consensus and coordination among donors engaged in statebuilding. This recommendation is consistent with the **“fragility assessment” component of the New Deal, described as “a periodic country-led assessment of the causes and features of fragility and sources of resilience as a basis for one vision, one plan.”**<sup>37</sup>

### *2) Theory of Change and institutional framework*

International food assistance agencies and local implementing partners must reach a consensus on whether or not peace and stability will be explicit goals of their food assistance programming. If so, they should develop a clear strategic articulation through a logical framework or Theory of Change that demonstrates the relevance and alignment of food assistance in relation to national development goals. At the same time, donors and implementing partners at the national level should establish institutional frameworks that clearly delineate specific roles and responsibilities for food assistance and peacebuilding based on the comparative strengths of individual organizations.

### *3) Establishment and maintenance of productive infrastructure*

Investments in infrastructure (roads, communication, health posts, water systems, markets) enabled through food assistance have several important multiplier effects on peace and stability in protracted crisis situations. Especially when supported through FFW/CFW and FFA interventions targeted toward unemployed young men, these activities give food and income-earning opportunities to a population that is often a key protagonist in violent conflict. Road construction in particular also aids stability in that it lays the foundation for greater access by security forces,

greater provision of social services, and greater mobility in support of livelihood activities. Likewise, water, health and communication infrastructure contributes to human capital by improving household health status and enabling greater participation in social and economic activities. In these ways, provision of roads and other basic infrastructure often proves a critical building block for transition towards greater peace and stability.

### *4) More effective use of food assistance in support of livelihood recovery*

Research suggests that in many protracted crisis situations, under-educated and unemployed youth, combined with ready access to weapons, are significant contributors to conflict and instability at the national and local levels. In light of the increasing scarcity of natural resources (agricultural land, water) and continued dependence on agro-pastoral livelihoods, young men often become increasingly desperate and willing to engage in criminal and violent activities due to their inability to secure income through other means. Over the longer term, food assistance has the potential to contribute to greater peace and stability by enhancing the knowledge and skills of vulnerable populations, particularly male youth. Evidence collected through the case studies shows that the most effective means of doing so has been through school feeding programs, Food for Training and Food for Assets activities, and creation of productive infrastructure (roads, markets). By targeting these and other livelihood diversification activities specifically at vulnerable youth populations, food assistance programs can make significant contributions to longer-term livelihood security and resilience in conflict-affected countries.

### *5) Investment in human capital*

Several important benefits are to be gained from applying food assistance to investments in human capital. Through implementation of Food for Education and Food for Training programs, food assistance agencies can contribute to the long-term livelihood security and resilience of crisis-affected populations by transferring specific skills and knowledge to youth. In situations characterized by widespread crime and inter-communal violence, such opportunities can also provide safe havens for youth and give them a viable alternative to participating in conflict. Finally, by making investments in school feeding programs and basic health services, food assistance agencies can also create an enabling environment within which government can establish broader social protection strategies.

### *6) Provision of transitional safety nets*

In protracted crisis situations entailing vast numbers of IDPs and households whose means of income generation have been disrupted by conflict and/or other disasters, food assistance can directly contribute to stability by providing transitional safety nets. In such situations, it is critical that such safety nets (via general food distribution, Food for Education, Food for Assets, etc.) are provided for adequate duration to enable recovery of food and livelihood security (at least 6-12 months). The specific modality and transition for transitional safety nets should be appropriate to local social and economic conditions including the severity of the conflict, the periodicity of weather patterns, and the predominant livelihood strategies of beneficiary populations.

### *7) Supporting good governance*

In situations of protracted crisis, it is particularly important that international food assistance agencies develop and implement coherent strategies for promoting and actively supporting institution building and good governance. Each of the three case studies demonstrates that a key step in achieving good governance is avoiding compartmentalization of roles among international food assistance agencies and their government partners. As mentioned earlier, in instances where

fragile governments are constrained by limited capacity, food assistance agencies involved in providing social protection can, over time, acquire indefinite responsibility for providing basic social services. This scenario underscores the importance of using food assistance activities to constantly build the technical and logistical capacity of government and other local institutions to play more central roles in service provision and social protection. In protracted crisis situations characterized by violent conflict, it also entails the promotion of greater access to equitable, transparent and timely judicial systems, and greater accountability among government and civil society organizations. Findings from the case studies demonstrate that food assistance can be used to bring conflicting parties together to negotiate solutions, and in chaotic post-conflict situations it can create space for government to reassert its authority and restore civil control. As capacity for good governance improves, it is important that food assistance organizations work with government and other institutions to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities regarding provision of infrastructure, security, and enabling conditions for peace and stability.

### *8) Adherence to “do no harm” principles*

In order to maximize the effectiveness of limited food resources and instil confidence in local implementing partners, it is important that food assistance agencies achieve greater transparency regarding their intended objectives and targeting criteria. In doing so, however, it is critical that they and their government partners **adhere to principles of “do no harm.”** This can be especially difficult in protracted crisis situations where perceived favouritism and/or marginalisation of certain groups is often a catalyst for civil unrest and armed conflict. While targeting decisions can and should be made based on assessments of relative need, external agencies should not inadvertently **exacerbate underlying tensions by “over-targeting”** food assistance at the household level. Rather, they should seek to involve traditional authorities and community leaders in selecting beneficiaries at the local level. This approach has the advantage of accounting for context-specific conflict dynamics while building the capacity of important informal institutions. In protracted situations, greater participation of local actors in selecting assistance modalities can also help avoid creating dependency among beneficiaries.

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