**Obstacles and Opportunities for Confronting Rising Global Food Insecurity**

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Among all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the goal of Zero Hunger—SDG2—is one of the furthest behind (Sachs et al. 2023) . This SDG is bolstered by eight targets, spanning the nutritional needs of children under five, doubling small scale producer incomes, investing in rural infrastructure and agriculture research, and preventing agricultural trade restrictions. Unfortunately, global hunger has not only stalled but increased. In fact, between 2015 and 2022, the number of people estimated to be moderately or severely food insecure rose from approximately 1.65 billion to 2.4 billion, which is equivalent to 30 percent of the global population (FAO 2023; UN-DESA 2023).

Based on the 1996 Rome World Food Summit, food security requires achieving four main objectives. This includes upholding food *availability* to ensure enough food is produced and trade, ensuring economic and physical *accessibility* to food, maintaining *stability* of intake over time, and *utilization* of food by individuals and households in ways that improve nutritional outcomes.[[2]](#footnote-2) Achieving these four objectives also has ripple effects for employment, revenue generation, and government legitimacy. For instance, 1.3 billion people in the world’s labor force work in farming, food processing, wholesale, and retail (FAO 2024a). Revenue from food and agricultural trade—which has risen from $400 to $1.9 trillion between 2000 and 2022 (FAO 2024b)—is an important source of financing for investments in other sectors critical to improving consumption of healthy foods and absorptions of nutrients, including healthcare, sanitation, and education. In addition, food security is often viewed as tantamount to national security and a fundamental metric of state capacity (Eiran, Elias, and Troen 2021).

**Conflict and Fragility as Major Shock to Food Security**

Due to these multiple linkages, disruptions to food security can come from vulnerabilities at multiple levels, including at the production level on the farm, via price distortions within markets, and from income shocks in households, communities, and regions. Conflict and fragility contribute to, and exacerbate vulnerabilities, via all these channels. According to the Armed Conflict and Location Event Database (ACLED), global conflicts have doubled over the past five years, with 1 in 8 people exposed to conflicts in 2024.[[3]](#footnote-3) Conflict is considered the primary cause of acute food insecurity in the 22 countries and territories currently considered by the World Food Programme (WFP) as hunger hotspots (WFP 2025).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Conflict is a driver of food insecurity through multiple mechanisms. Interstate and inter-elite conflict drives farmers from their fields, deters investment in the agrifood system, and decimates agro-industry. The war in Sudan, for instance, has destroyed processing infrastructure and the supply chain for raw agricultural materials, leading to increased food price hikes and a dire humanitarian emergency (Kirui et al. 2023, 2024). In Myanmar, the civil war has resulted in a significant decrease in rice production due to the inability of farmers to access agricultural extension services and afford agricultural machinery (Takeshima et al. 2024).

Food insecurity, driven by other sources of fragility like economic volatility and climate change, is also a driver of conflict. A clear example is the Lake Chad Basin, which spans Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria and supports the livelihoods of 30 million people who depend on the Lake for irrigation, fisheries, and livestock. The Lake has decreased in size by about 90% since the 1960s, and the depleting natural resources and grazing lands are believed to have increased farmer-pastoralist conflicts and contributed to the Boko Haram insurgency.[[5]](#footnote-5) More broadly, several studies demonstrate the linkages between average temperature change increases and the risk of armed conflict (Burke, Hsiang, and Miguel 2015). As both a driver and consequence of food insecurity, conflict contributes to internal displacement and cross-border migration, sometimes generating further negative externalities because of new pressures on food security for host populations.

**Policy Approaches to Enhancing Global Food Security**

Policy options to address global food insecurity must be multi-faceted. In countries already in a food security crisis from conflict or other causes, interventions include humanitarian aid, support for shock-responsive safety net programs, and protecting essential supply chains.In other settings, anticipatory actions are critical, including bolstering early warning systems that incorporate economic, environmental, and political risk factors, expanding national and regional food reserves, and investing in seed adoption and uptake for resilient crops. At the global level, there also is a need for greater policy coherence to sustainably respond to food security crises, ensuring that shorter-term humanitarian efforts create synergies with longer-term investments in food systems and diplomatic efforts to understand the root causes of conflicts and facilitate their resolution.

As one of the world’s biggest exporters of agriculture products, a key source of expertise in sustainable land use management, a leader in seed innovation, and a major contributor to processes such as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus coalition, the Netherlands can play a leading role in enhancing global food security for the world’s most vulnerable populations and thereby help SDG2 get back on track.

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2. The High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on food security and nutrition recently proposed two additional dimensions to this framework—sustainability and agency—that also consider ecological impacts and power asymmetries in the food system (see Clapp et al. 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <https://acleddata.com/conflict-index/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale, acute food insecurity refers to “food deprivation that threatens lives or livelihoods.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/expert-comment/2017/unfolding-humanitarian-crisis-around-lake-chad-un-report-falls-short-naming-environmental-dimensions> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)