HLPF 2020 session: Ending hunger and achieving food security

<u>**Answers to guiding questions- Ms. Caroline Delgado**</u>

1: areas and socio-economic groups especially vulnerable to poor nutrition and food insecurity; the way to ensure that food systems transformations leave no one behind?

Countries experiencing armed conflict or are in the post-conflict transition phase, and the population living there within, are among most vulnerable areas and population groups to poor nutrition and food insecurity. This is evidenced not least by armed conflict being identified as the primary driver of the increasing levels of world hunger in recent years.[1] Indeed, all nineteen countries classified by FAO as under ''protracted crisis" conditions in 2017 were also experiencing violent conflict at that time. Many conflict-affected countries also suffer from climate change induced weather extremes, which has been found to be the second driver of increasing levels of food insecurity. Violent conflict and climate change undermine food production, livelihoods, markets and food consumption. Violent conflicts (and especially spikes of violence) are also a driver of forced displacement, further weakening food security in both countries of origin (where labour may be in short supply and rural markets collapse) and many host communities (which may face pre-existing strong pressure on limited arable land).[2] Moreover, it has been concluded that conflict exposure in early life, including nutritional deficiencies and other adverse experiences, may pre-determine detrimental long-term impacts, which threaten food security as an adult.[3] Therefore, the conflict and peacebuilding environment is of particular importance, given the strong correlation between armed conflict and increased food insecurity, at a point of time when armed conflicts are on the rise and the subsequent humanitarian crisis produced by armed conflict affect more people and last longer than a decade ago.

However, conflicts are very different from each other. The same conflict can have highly variable impacts across different population groups, across time or across space. Research has found that when it comes to food security, high-intensity intensity conflicts, in terms of battle-related fatalities, and conflicts involving issues about government power may be more disruptive, as illustrated by larger reductions in the average dietary energy supply. In contrast, conflicts where the territory is the main incompatibility may have little to no effect on the average dietary energy supply at the country level.[4]

While certain socio-economic population groups are generally considered more vulnerable to food insecurity, it is important to nuance such generalization and explore how certain groups are more vulnerable in certain contexts at certain times. For example, research conducted by SIPRI and WFP found that due to extremely high levels of gang violence in urban areas of El Salvador, youth residing in marginalized urban areas were more vulnerable to food insecurity

[1] *2020 Global Report on Food Crisis* (Global Network against Food Crisis, 2020), https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-report-food-crises-2020.
[2] Tilman Brück and Marco d'Errico, *Reprint Of: Food Security and Violent Conflict: Introduction to the Special Issue* (Elsevier, 2019).
[3] Charles P Martin-Shields and Wolfgang Stojetz, "Food Security and Conflict: Empirical Challenges and Future Opportunities for Research and Policy Making on Food Security and Conflict," *World Development* 119 (2019).
[4] Brück and d'Errico.

than youth in rural areas.[5] Gang dynamics, which include direct violence, extortion and movement restrictions, result in the destruction of livelihoods and forced migration. Extortion also leads to significant increases in food prices, especially in areas that are more easily controlled by gangs. The emigration of family members due to violence can result in increased precariousness and the potential exploitation of family members who stay behind—especially the women and children. In addition, families that receive remittances from abroad often become victims of threats from and extortion by gangs. However, in recent years the gangs have increased their presence also in rural areas, which will likely cause addition food security stresses also in these areas.

Key message: the conflict and peacebuilding environment and the populations residing there within, are among the key priority areas to consider for reaching SDG2, given that armed conflict is the key driver of increasing levels of hunger and the majority of food insecure people live in countries affected by armed conflict.

2 what fundamental changes are needed to make food systems inclusive

Given the elevated vulnerability to food insecurity in conflict and peacebuilding contexts, a fundamental change needed to make food systems inclusive and contribute to achieve food security for all is to ensure conflict sensitivity in all food security inventions. This requires an organisation to understand the context in which it is operating; understand the interaction between the intervention and the context; and act upon that understanding, to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of interventions. Too often, international actors are not fully informed about what is happening in the areas where they operate and it is often an extremely demanding task to develop an adequately broad, deep and sensitive analysis and keep it up to date. This is one of the key challenges for humanitarianism, development assistance and peacebuilding alike.

The targeting process, which determines who does and does not receive resources, is the most common conflict sensitivity flashpoint across all international aid. Even when aid is targeted to the most vulnerable, this can be perceived as bias. Vulnerability often coincides with lines of division among and between communities.

Many people assume that they have not been targeted due to their identity. In Iraq, for example, the SIPRI-WFP research found that there is a wide perception among communities that those who fled to the IDP camps did not face the same hardships as those who stayed and fought the Islamic State (IS), and that IDPs have received considerable amounts of assistance.[6] In some areas where perceived IS-affiliated families have not yet been able to return to their communities, care is needed to ensure that community-based planning of resilience programmes – including those to foster food security - does not result in a consolidation of power and the capture of benefits by specific parts of the population.

Making food systems more inclusive also calls for generating synergies and seeking opportunities. Against the complexities of conflict and peacebuilding environments, it is

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[5] Caroline Delgado, *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in El Salvador* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2019), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/wfp_country_report_el_salvador_0.pdf.

[6] Gary Milante, David Branca, and Rachel Goldwyn, *The World Food Programme's Contribution to the Prospects for Peace in Iraq* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2020), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/wfp_country_report_iraq.pdf.

important that all organisations/actors present adopts a holistic approach. While this is an often-repeated mantra, it is crucial that organisations recognise that all social systems are complex, highly dynamic, non-linear and emergent – meaning that they have the ability to adapt and self-organise. To make food systems more inclusive in these environments, organisations must seek to stimulate processes in a society that enable self-organisation and that will lead to strengthened resilience among the social institutions that manage internal and external stressors and shocks.[7] Engaging with such complex challenges, requires organizations to think and act in integrative ways that cut across traditional boundaries and to see food security not just through the lens of their own core competencies, but in a holistic way that considers the needs of a situation at the systemic level. It requires thinking about inter-connectedness as events and social phenomena do not exist in a vacuum but are connected to other events and social phenomena. Causality does not flow only in one direction, but any causal event touches off a chain reaction that will eventually have an impact on the initial causal event itself (feedback).

For example, the SIPRI-WFP research found in Colombia that food kitchens along the Colombo-Venezuelan border, which purpose is to meet the acute short-term food needs of Venezuelan migrants, are an important entry and connection point.[8] The concentration of migrants there, who for the sheer number and logistical constraints, end up being present in and around the kitchens for several hours, make these spaces a good area for informing on the specific conflict dynamics in the border area. Migrants are largely unaware of, but highly vulnerable to, conflict dynamics in this region. The kitchens are also good points for referring and connecting migrants to other social protection services; and for collecting crucial – though currently largely unavailable - data to support national economic integration strategies of Venezuelan migrants.

Key message: conflict sensitivity is of utmost importance for ensuring food systems are an engine for inclusive growth. However, conflict/food security analysis must not be limited to the national level but account for important variation over time and space at the subnational level.

How might COVID-19 facilitate or complicate the implementation of needed food systems changes
The implications of COVID-19 are likely to be especially serious for people residing in conflict- and peacebuilding contexts, as the pandemic risks disrupting humanitarian aid flows, limiting peace operations and postponing or distracting conflict parties from efforts at diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution. Among crisis affected populations, displaced persons are at particular risk, especially those living in overcrowded IDP and refugee camps. This is at a time when the number of people forced from their homes by conflict and disaster are higher than any time before.
COVID-19 will lay bare the tattered social contract and the inability of states to adequately respond to the needs of its populations – including food needs – opens up opportunities for organized armed groups to fill that void and take on the role of a local (albeit very violent) government. This has been seen already in Mexico, where state activity in the areas where the cartels operate has all but stopped and cartels delivering food aid to the populations in places such as Sinaloa – marked with the image of the drug lord El Chapo.

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[7] Caroline Delgado et al., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2019), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/wfp_global_report.pdf.
[8] Delgado, Caroline, *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Colombia,* forthcoming.

4. What knowledge and data gaps need to be filled

Monitoring food insecurity in conflict-affected countries and understanding the linkages between food insecurity and violent conflict, as well as the positive relationships between food security and stability, is crucial to informing evidence-based interventions from local, national and international practitioners and policymakers.[9] The trends identified in conflict and food insecurity data, and how they change over time, can tell a story about trends in peace. This could be linked to shifts in portfolio, from emergency assistance and general food distribution to livelihoods and resilience.

Many important processes linking conflict and food security take place at the sub-national level, calling for granular and disaggregated data. There are a number of established and high-quality disaggregated conflict dataset, however, sub-national standardized food security data is lacking for many countries.[10] There are many reasons for this lack of data, but the conflict and peacebuilding environment comes with particular constraints on data collection. Not only can it be difficult to access the relevant people due to conflict, but people may be traumatized, it may be difficult to ask questions that are tied to the conflict.[11] But data shortcomings also reflect a state's ability to gather, process and share data. Investments in weak states' institutions of data collection and processing promises high returns for the availability of more complete and better data at the both the national and sub- national levels.[12]

Spatial data and cutting-edge data visualization techniques offer new ways to understand big and abstract data on complex processes. Spatial data affords the ability to visualize patterns, as well as estimate geographic effects. Layering data on to dynamic geographical maps visualizes transformation over time and space. This is especially useful when talking about food security, since violence in one place could have knock-on effects that influence food access farther away.[13] Data visualization in this way allows the communication of thousands of data points in a few single images. Compared to tables, text, graphs and charts, the new data visualization techniques often make new analytical insights possible and make the data accessible to a wider range of users.

Emerging research that seeks to directly measure and survey conflict exposure of individuals, households and communities - including large-scale surveys that allow to match information on conflict exposure with socio-economic information at the micro level– should be implemented more systematically.[14]

For example, in isolated yet highly violent conflict regions in Colombia, the use of drones for monitoring nutrient levels in rivers contaminated by illegal mining helps the development of sustainable livelihood projects for surrounding communities.[15]

Key message: more sub-national level data on conflict dynamics and food insecurity are needed, including GIS data and other visualisation techniques

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[9] Martin-Shields and Stojetz.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Delgado et al.

[12] Martin-Shields and Stojetz.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Delgado, Caroline, *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Colombia,* forthcoming.

What partnerships are needed

The many complex challenges in conflict and peacebuilding environments call for an increased role for partners and partnerships, to help the breaking down of silos and fostering a holistic approach. The SIPRI-WFP research identified a tendency in international organizations to think of partners purely in contractual terms as participants in implementation. More expansive forms of partnership can be important in at least four ways: knowledge, wisdom, credibility and critical distance.[16] Key aspects of partnerships between IOs, NGOs, the private sector, and/or bilateral donor country offices is that it builds knowledge about the broader population that is affected by their activities, and ensures local accountability. While formal accountability to donor countries, international headquarters or the host government is indeed also important, what is often missing is actual local accountability.[17]

First, partners, by virtue of their diverse mandates and experience, have additional technical knowledge that can be informative. Conflict-affected environments are often characterized by incomplete information systems. Different organisations/actors may, for example, have different contacts in different sectors. Bringing these together through expanded partnerships can help organisations navigate the bureaucracy so as to move a project forward. They may be able to identify technical resources that might serve as the foundation for programme design and planning.

Partners may also bring additional perspective to and understanding of the operating environment. This can enhance understanding of the challenges and help to identify workable solutions. Examples include the ability to convene multiple stakeholders to broker agreements, an understanding of deeply rooted grievances that may affect perceptions of targeting, and knowledge of which stakeholders in a complex environment will be allies or obstacles to reform and progress.

Where information is incomplete, triangulation through consultation with partners can provide critical perspectives and help understand the complex political context. Partners can thus serve as a sounding board to provide feedback on analysis and programme design, and advise when an intervention it may be lacking conflict sensitivity or be blind to other stakeholders' objectives.

All of this is predicated on partnerships being developed steadily and sustainably, and on close relationships developing with a degree of strategic alignment and a great deal of mutual trust. The aim should be to include local partners not only in implementation, but also in analysis, planning and assessment. At the same time, when partnerships involve contractual relationships, it is important that the same demands for conflict sensitivity are made of partners as of WFP. Attachment to common standards is one condition for a successful partnership.

Key message: there is a need to take a more expanded approach to partnership to break silos and foment a holistic approach, while ensuring local accountability towards the population where interventions take place.

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[16] Delgado et al.

[17] Susanna P Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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