

IT'S TIME TO BREAK THE GLOBAL HUNGER PARADIGM

THE ISSUE

FIGHTING AGAINST HUNGER: A HUMANITARIAN LENS



Dried Kasava at Marie Senegale's Kasava stand in Yaloké on 23/2/22 © Photo: Ed Ram/Concern Worldwide

“Conflict and hunger together exacerbate inequalities, creating life-changing dangers, leaving women and girls particularly vulnerable, shouldering the responsibility of keeping their children alive, with fewer resources and coping mechanisms. These multiple and compounding shocks erode people’s ability to recover, causing long-term setbacks.”

2021 was a year of summits, commitments and pledges: the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Humanitarian Forum, the Food Systems Summit, the Nutrition for Growth conference, and more.

A clear message emerged from them: bold, transformative action is needed to end hunger and allow every person to attain their right to nutritious food.

The spirit that galvanised the world to face the COVID-19 pandemic gave a sense of hope and possibility. Now, our fragile global food system is enormously challenged by the conflict in Ukraine, compounding existing protracted conflict and increasing numbers of climate emergencies.

Economic instability, food and fuel prices, and global recession are pressuring already-overstretched government budgets. The growing gap between humanitarian needs and funding is evidence of this. The World Bank has warned that it is unlikely to meet the 2030 target to end extreme poverty¹, so we must also question the likelihood of ending hunger by 2030.

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/05/global-progress-in-reducing-extreme-poverty-grinds-to-a-halt>

FAMINE IN 2022?

"Famine is conquerable." It is almost 25 years since Alex de Waal opened, *Famine Crimes*, with this simple statement. In a more recent book, *Mass Starvation*, he emphasised how political decision-making was central to every famine.

Perhaps it should be obvious that famine is person-made, preventable, and political, but there is a stubborn belief that famine is a natural phenomenon. The presence of famine indicates the absence of political will or, worse, the active desire to deliberately starve people. It is this reality that gave rise to UNSC Resolution 2417 in 2018, which sought to prevent the starving of civilians as a method of warfare, and to prevent the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to vulnerable civilian populations.

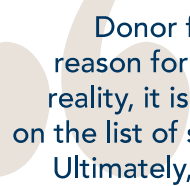
The latest UN projections are that nearly 50 million people are experiencing 'crisis' levels of hunger. The next shock that affects their access to food and livelihoods may well push them into famine. It is unconscionable that we now face the distinct possibility of a new declaration of famine in Somalia, where at least 600,000 people are currently on the brink of starvation.

The increase in the number of people needing humanitarian assistance from 235 to 274 million people in just one year, is deeply alarming. More than ever, we need our governments and leaders to unite to prevent and end conflict and crises. Instead, geopolitical interests are fuelling conflicts and proxy wars. Climate change is compounding the challenges created by conflict and vice versa. Cyclical crises mean that needs outstrip both humanitarian and development investments, year on year, and the sustained under-funding of humanitarian appeals is contributing to the steady increase in the number of people in acute need.

IN CONFLICT, NOTHING KILLS LIKE HUNGER

Conflict is the biggest driver of food insecurity, affecting more than 100 million people in 2021. The Global Report on Food Crises 2021² estimates that over 70% of people in crisis levels of food insecurity live in countries affected by conflict.

For people living in conflict-affected areas, war is not only a threat to their lives, but also to their livelihoods. Conflict destroys people's ability to provide for their most basic of needs, restricting movement, and access to



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markets, farmlands and employment. Often, services are cut, facilities destroyed, and banking systems blocked. Conflict prevents people from accessing humanitarian assistance and denies humanitarian actors access to affected populations – this denial is often deliberate.

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For example, 10 million people are projected to be in crisis levels of food insecurity or worse in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger in 2022. Armed conflict is the main driver of hunger in each country. If you compare a map of food insecurity in the Sahel with a map of its conflict severity, the two will almost perfectly overlap.

In too many places, conflict has been allowed to fester. One crisis is forgotten, under-resourced and ignored, as another takes priority. Donor fatigue is often cited as the reason for inadequate funding but, in reality, it is about where a country sits on the list of strategic political priorities. Ultimately, this leads to a decline into de-development, eroding communities' resilience and driving up the human and financial cost of recovery.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

States hold the responsibility and means to try to prevent conflict, and to promote adherence to international humanitarian law. But geopolitical interests too often override the political responsibility to promote and protect peace.

The politicisation of debate on issues of peace and security in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and elsewhere is harmful to us all in this new era of global instability.

2. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-report-food-crises-2022>

An encouraging development aimed at addressing this self-interest was seen this year in the use of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) framework, United for Peace. To bypass Russia's veto against a UNSC resolution condemning its actions in Ukraine, the majority of UNSC members used the framework to call on the UNGA to act instead – which it did. The Emergency Special Session of the UNGA passed the resolution with 141 votes in favour and only five against.

More progress is needed. In particular, Member States should support the suspension of the veto in the UNSC in cases of mass atrocities so that the Council can effectively respond to the world's most severe crises. They should also support the criminalisation of starvation as a weapon of war in all situations of armed conflict.

'BUSINESS AS USUAL'

Humanitarian assistance is not the answer to the world's crises. As they deepen, becoming more protracted and complex, fundamental changes are needed.

A break from 'business as usual' would see Member States fulfil the commitments made at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, not with fanfare announcements of new alliances or coalitions, but with the hard, painstaking work of cooperative, substantive policy reform, including in the area of trade.

EU Member States and other donors, must take concrete steps to implement the Humanitarian Call for Action that they signed. It is time to deliver on the rhetoric of Good Humanitarian Donorship and The Grand Bargain and fully fund global humanitarian appeals. It is past time to ensure that restrictive measures include standard exemptions for humanitarian actors to enable us to continue to reach those in hard-to-reach areas, and ensure that we are not further constrained by bank de-risking.



Dead livestock in Qaranri. ©Photo: Yusuf Ibrahim Ali/Lifeline Gedo International/Concern Worldwide

Governments must tackle the problems that give rise to extreme poverty, conflict and hunger. Beyond grand statements that name and shame, states must take bold steps to bring conflict to an end. More and braver investment in humanitarian diplomacy, conflict prevention and resolution, is required.

HUMANITARIAN AID CANNOT REPLACE POLITICAL WILL

Can anyone say that the impending famine in Somalia is a surprise? That it was not flagged months ago, or that the calls for support were not made by agencies working on the ground? The hand-wringing that will follow this crisis is more business as usual. We need to deliver on what we know would make a difference – early and sufficient funding to stop people from falling into acute crisis.

Beyond anticipating emergencies, and taking early action to prevent disaster, we must address the root causes of crises. In many instances, such interventions are beyond the capacity of humanitarian and development actors. Governments must tackle the problems that give rise to extreme poverty, conflict and hunger. Beyond grand statements that name and shame, states must take bold steps to bring conflict to an end. More and braver investment in humanitarian diplomacy, conflict prevention and resolution, is required.

The humanitarian imperative requires us to save lives and reduce suffering. Surely the political imperative is to prevent those lives from being endangered in the first place.

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