



Second assessment

Rapid assessments of the hunger–climate–conflict nexus

Second assessment: analysis of existing practitioner and organisational experience in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan

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Acronyms/Glossary

BRCiS	Building Resilient Communities in Somalia
CSRF	Conflict Sensitive Research Facility South Sudan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	USAID Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FSL	food security livelihood [cluster]
HDP	humanitarian–development–peace [nexus]
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
INSO	International NGO Safety Organisation
IPC	integrated phase food security classification
KII	key informant interview
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRM	natural resource management
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene services
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This rapid evidence assessment is the second of two assessments on the hunger–climate–conflict nexus. The first of these assessments focused on the lived experiences of communities across interview sites in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. The evidence collected documented how communities were attempting to navigate the impact of both climate and non-climate shocks on their livelihoods and on their food and nutritional security. This second assessment focuses on the experiences of practitioners and organisations in responding to these needs and when implementing programming.

The experiences of communities documented in the first assessment were not lost on those interviewed as part of this assessment. Practitioners acknowledge that the recurrent nature of these shocks means that humanitarian action needs to move beyond short-term response and look for ways in which programming can help to build community resilience to future shocks. Evidence indicates that internal discussions and programming are attempting to realise this transition. However, practitioners' experience also demonstrates the existence of barriers – both internal to the humanitarian system and external contextual factors.

1 Introduction: project aims

Action Against Hunger is implementing a regional project entitled ‘Multisectoral humanitarian response to the deteriorating nutrition situation focusing on severely affected crisis contexts in sub-Saharan Africa’ and is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO). The project aims to improve the nutritional status of crisis-affected populations in seven countries, including Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. It also aims to generate evidence to better shape and scale up approaches to tackle impacts of layered crises, including those influenced by climate change and conflict.

As part of this regional project, Action Against Hunger has commissioned two rapid assessments to inform and bolster its humanitarian programming and interventions. The assessments focus on Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. Current interventions of Action Against Hunger programming range from meeting acute needs (for example, nutrition and health services, food and cash transfers, water and sanitation), to those that can contribute to enhancing resilience – for example, training around early warning, help with agricultural inputs or flood control measures. The assessments support strengthening the evidence base around how people are experiencing the impacts of layered challenges and what assistance they would like to build better lives for their families. They also uncover entry points where Action Against Hunger interventions and programmes might be better targeted or modified to meet humanitarian needs and support resilience. The results will be used to inform the project’s global, regional and national advocacy

activities to better mobilise support for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and anticipatory humanitarian action in these areas.

Each of the two rapid assessments is thematic. The first assessment (see Box 1) focused on how people’s nutritional status and livelihoods are being impacted by fragility, conflict and climate shocks; on household and community coping mechanisms; and on how existing interventions are reducing hunger and acute malnutrition including any gaps that remain. The second assessment is a review of existing interventions by Action Against Hunger and other humanitarian, development, peace-building and climate change adaptation actors to explore how such interventions are anticipating and mitigating layered impacts of conflicts, climate and non-climate stressors;¹ and opportunities for collaboration across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Both assessments interrogate how well existing policies and programmes (local to national, NGO and donor-led) are strengthening community food security resilience; where there are gaps or unintended consequences that could increase various climate or conflict risks; and how these policies and programmes should be modified to avoid maladaptation over the short to long term.

¹ Non-climate stressors are those which are unrelated to changes in climate, such as inflation and commodity shortages as cascading consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Box 1 First assessment – lived experiences relating to food and nutrition security in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan

Evidence for the first assessment was generated via interviews and focus group discussions at the community level across interview sites in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. The critical finding is that the combined impacts of climate hazards and conflict are leading to the loss of livelihoods and to food and nutrition insecurity. Droughts and floods have resulted in destruction of crops and the death of livestock. Climate hazards are occurring within the context of protracted conflict, which results in displacement, the disruption or cessation of livelihood activities, destruction of property and asset loss. Gender-based violence can also mean that women face specific risks when conducting livelihood activities and accessing food and medical aid.

As a result, across the three countries, household members spoke of reducing their daily food intake, with adults forgoing meals so that children and vulnerable adults could eat and of the lack of variation in their diets. Households would have to forage daily to find enough to eat, while in some contexts households were taking on more debt in order to buy food. These impacts were felt not only by those directly engaging in agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, but also those with livelihoods that rely on the availability of money in the local economy, in order for people to buy their goods and services.

The impacts of climate hazards and conflict are both occurring within fragile systems. This means that people lack the systems which they depend on for their livelihoods and well-being (such as basic services, safety nets, infrastructure, economic development). Furthermore, the impacts of climate hazards and conflict are occurring against the backdrop of multiple previous shocks and stressors, including political instability, COVID-19, price rises, locust plagues. As a result, households will have to find coping mechanisms on multiple occasions, exhausting their options, while also increasing their exposure and vulnerability to future climate and non-climate shocks.

Source: Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2023)

This report analyses interview data from 29 key informant interviews (see Box 2) and existing literature. Interviews were carried out with individuals with the following profiles: international and national NGO staff working on food and nutritional security, WASH, climate change, livelihood programming and livestock and individuals responsible for organisational security. Interviews were also carried out with representatives of government departments

focused on agriculture, environment and climate change. Interviewee selection was based on initial lists provided by Action Against Hunger country offices in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. During initial interviews with Action Against Hunger country offices, key individuals on these lists were identified for prioritisation. The research team also used ‘snowballing’, whereby those interviewed recommended other key individuals to be interviewed.

Box 2 Existing practitioner and organisational experience

The second assessment has the objective of capturing the experiences of those involved in programming interventions within the context of climate and non-climate shocks. It seeks to understand how programming by both government and non-government staff is addressing the needs of communities affected by conflict and climate shocks. It also aims to understand the barriers to a more coherent approach to addressing climate and conflict-related shocks. Semi-structured interviews probed these areas:

- How both climate hazards and conflict were impacting the communities in which the interviewees are implementing programming. This included understanding what types of climate and conflict shocks affect their programming; and their capacity to analyse the impacts of these shocks on the programming and their ability to respond.
- How their programming is addressing the combined impacts of climate hazards and conflict on food and nutritional security in the areas in which they work. In particular, interviews focused on how their programming is able to address this as a combined issue; and how their programming is able to adapt to the impacts of climate and conflict.
- Building on the findings and recommendations from the first assessment, what opportunities exist to move programming beyond being focused on emergency response, to building resilience within communities. This includes opportunities for – and barriers to – more collaborative approaches across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

2 Practitioner and organisational programmatic experience within the contexts of climate hazards and conflict

2.1 Analysis that informs programming

2.1.1 Conflict analysis

Protracted conflict affects each of the three countries. These conflicts range from national to sub-national levels and involves control of areas by both state and non-state actors. The impacts of violence on people's livelihoods and food and nutritional security were raised by communities interviewed as part of the first assessment (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2023). In both Mali and Somalia, interviewees reported having to pay a tax to non-state armed groups and their movements being restricted due to the groups' presence. This restricted households' ability to conduct pastoral and agricultural livelihood activities. In South Sudan, violence at the communal level, cattle raiding and past conflicts had resulted in displacement and asset loss, increasing household vulnerability to climate hazards. Having access to accurate conflict analysis can provide practitioners with information to inform staff safety and security and conflict-sensitive approaches to aid delivery. Thinking longer term, it could provide them with a means to address drivers of conflict, which can also be the drivers of vulnerability to climate hazards (Ibid.). However, practitioners noted that analysis can lack the depth needed to design programming to meet longer term aims, such as peace-building.

Conflict analysis can lack depth and consistency

Across the three countries, respondents noted several sources which they would use for conflict analysis. These included: UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) in both South Sudan and Somalia, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), World Food Programme (WFP) historical data in South Sudan; and the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) in Mali and Somalia. Although interviewees in South Sudan referred to INSO, currently it is not operational in that country.

Information gathered as part of conflict analysis from these sources and others does support aid decisions in terms of targeting, project location, human resource hiring and management and safety and security. However, a general concern was that the analysis can lack depth, especially for understanding drivers of violence at the local level, to help inform programming to achieve more longer term aims. Furthermore, at times, conflict analysis can rely on outdated framings which fail to account for shifts in conflict dynamics. This can mean that while basic conflict analysis forms part of humanitarian programming, in-depth analysis of sub-national conflict dynamics – which affect both food security and aid delivery – are not fully articulated or addressed by humanitarian programmes.

For example, in South Sudan conflict is no longer just about the political conflict in Juba or the conflict between different ethnic groups.

Conflict there has now become a complex process that extends to smaller units in the community, even between closely related families or households (South Sudan key informant interview (KII), 2023). Yet in the absence of good conflict analysis, actors continue to recycle or implement the same set of actions that may be ineffective in some contexts. A deeper conflict analysis would require a shift away from the generalised focus to incorporate more localised nuances of the violence that is ongoing between families and households of the same clan or tribe in the community. These conflicts or violence span generations and continue to be carried forward by the young generations who may not have any understanding of the cause or origin. Yet, these localised violence and conflicts continue to affect everyday life including food security in the community. In some locations like Jonglei State, for example, one interviewee noted that household members or families are afraid to go and work on their farms or seek work in other communities for fear of being killed (South Sudan KII, 2023). One interviewee noted that while humanitarian organisations do basic conflict analysis as part of their programme development, in-depth analysis of ongoing localised youth-led violence is never properly articulated or addressed by humanitarian programmes. The interviewee noted that some of the youths end up engaging in organised violence because not participating would have certain social ramifications, partly defined by the local notion of masculinity. Those who do not participate are ostracised. 'If a youth does not participate in defending their community, one is considered a coward, which is a curse and an abomination' (South Sudan KII, 2023). When considered thus, addressing some of the causes of localised violence could mean incorporating approaches that address negative social norms and cultural dynamics that perpetuate violence in the community.

Although not referred to by those interviewed for this assessment, it is important to highlight the role of the Conflict Sensitive Research Facility South Sudan (CSRF). The CSRF was established in order to provide aid actors with a conflict sensitivity resource to understand both the impact of aid on local conflict dynamics and opportunities for aid to contribute to a reduction in violence. While the CSRF is considered to be an essential tool, it is not directly tied to programming (Davies and Mayhew, 2024).

Often the issue is that the analysis capacities are not uniform across organisations, especially where organisations lack the capacity and resources to conduct in-depth conflict analysis themselves. The lack of available funding to conduct good conflict analysis was raised by interviewees (South Sudan KIIs, 2023). Shared analysis across organisations may offer a solution to the varying levels of capabilities between organisations. However, the competitive landscape for donor funding means that trust can represent a major barrier to sharing conflict analysis among organisations. In South Sudan, one respondent argued that access to good conflict analysis means better programming and ultimately greater access to donor funding (South Sudan KII, 2023). This reflects findings in other reports documenting the current state of sharing of conflict analysis, where again both trust and competitiveness over funding undermine attempts to share conflict analysis between organisations (Davies and Mayhew, 2024).

There were, however, examples of platforms which could facilitate a greater sharing of analysis. In Somalia respondents noted the establishment of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) which had the potential to facilitate the sharing of analysis between aid organisations.

Yet not all aid agencies are members and some have not shown an interest in participating (Somalia KII, 2023).

The importance of harnessing local knowledge within conflict analysis

The use of local sources is seen as critical for understanding local conflict dynamics. Local knowledge can provide a more nuanced understanding of local conflict dynamics, a means of mapping actors and early warning signs in terms of immediate or growing risk of violence. In Mali, despite the utility of large safety warning platforms such as INSO, all practitioners interviewed considered the most reliable and useful security tool to be close relations with people in the communities where they work:

INSO only gives out a warning when there is already a real danger in an area. Reporting that someone heard shots means the insecurity is already there. That does not help us for planning... We have our own network of contacts in the community. We would not rely on someone else's analysis. We contact our network discreetly, at markets for example. (Mali KII, 2023).

The importance of building trustworthy networks within communities was also seen as an essential means for aid actors to continue operations in times of high insecurity and to be able to access those living in areas under the influence of non-state armed groups. In Somalia, some aid agencies referred to the use of conflict sensitivity analysis to inform a community acceptance approach in order to maintain access to areas with high levels of violence and under non-state control. Aid actors described collaborating with communities via rapid assessments and conflict mapping. Interviewees highlighted that this form

of analysis provide a more nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics at different levels, such as localised clan dynamics in villages, diverse indigenous clans at higher administrative or political levels and understanding the influence of non-state armed groups.

In conflict zones or areas under the influence of groups like non-state armed groups, we prioritise diversity in our field teams. We ensure a mix of local staff from different backgrounds, not limited to a single clan. This diverse composition helps us establish stronger community connections and gain the trust of the local population, all while minimising as much as possible the risks to the safety of our staff and beneficiaries. (Somalia KII, 2023)

2.1.2 Climate and weather information

In all three countries, climate hazards are impacting livelihoods and food insecurity. Droughts and flooding have led to displacement deaths of livestock and the destruction of crops and left people with little land to cultivate. Practitioners interviewed as part of this assessment described how within the contexts where they work, the frequency and intensity of hazards were complicating the ability to implement programming (see Section 2.2). As highlighted in the first assessment, climate projections indicate that the frequency of floods, droughts and heatwaves is only likely to increase (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2023; see also IPCC, 2022). This makes having the means to account for current and future climate risks within programming essential to build resilience. However, the availability of climate and weather information is not consistent across the three countries and different sets of challenges affect how the information is used.

Why weather and climate information is not translating into effective action

Practitioners revealed that they are trying to make adaptations within programming that account for more frequent and intense climate shocks. In South Sudan, humanitarian actors are adapting some of their programmes to the changing climatic conditions. Actors are implementing a range of livelihood interventions in the community, such as introducing new crop varieties like wetland rice that can grow in flooded areas, sweet potatoes and cassava or short variety crops like sorghum. They are promoting the use of irrigation to manage changing climatic conditions on hunger and food security (South Sudan KII, 2023). To address the recurrent challenges caused by cattle movement in the dry season, some international actors supported the development and implementation of the 2020 Marial Baai Agreement that is signed and reviewed yearly by the state governments of Warrap and Western Bahr-El-Ghazal to regulate cattle movement (South Sudan KII, 2023; also see United Nations Peacekeeping, 2020).

In Mali, one practitioner described a small-scale initiative (in four local government areas) that uses a disaster risk reduction approach to transition communities away from emergency assistance. Climate risks are analysed as part of a broader process to analyse all risks faced by the community. The steps that they (or others) need to take to reduce impacts are then identified. For each type of shock, this may include:

- actions taken in advance to reduce exposure and strengthen resilience to the shock
- anticipatory or early actions to be taken once an alert threshold is reached
- rapid response plans to be implemented after the shock arrives.

The project budget combined longer term funding for resilience-building with ‘as needed’ budget lines for early action and rapid response plans (Mali KII, 2023).

However, the possibility of taking effective action is being hindered by a limited capacity to predict, consider, communicate and respond effectively to climatic shocks.

In South Sudan, access to short- and medium-term weather information was said to be lacking in sufficient quality to enable actors to analyse and predict changing climate patterns. The national meteorological centre located in Juba, although helpful, was inconsistent in providing weather-related information due to logistical and capacity issues. The information it provided was described by some interviewees as inconsistent and untimely, which made planning and preparedness a challenge for many humanitarian actors (South Sudan KII, 2023).

To address the gap, interviewees noted that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is now mandated to pilot and lead early warning information systems across the country. They have established a few weather stations in some regions of the country. However, telecommunications and radio network coverage and road infrastructure are poor across the country, which makes it challenging to access communication equipment, especially to communicate weather information at the local level. An interviewee explained:

The only place where people are trying to provide weather information is Northern Bahr-El-Ghazal with the support of FAO, to see how they can provide some rudimentary weather information. The place has a little bit of

network with a community radio and cell phone connections unlike in Paguir or Fangak with no connections at all. (South Sudan KII, 2023)

Good radio and telecommunications networks are mainly available in Juba and major towns, but most parts of the country, especially rural areas, still lack these infrastructures. For example, most counties in Jonglei state have no telecommunications or radio network, affecting actors' access to relevant weather information and their ability to communicate it downwards to the local community to aid preparedness (South Sudan KII, 2023). This point reflects findings from the first assessment, which highlighted how people were having to make livelihood decisions based on limited information relating to the upcoming rainy season (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2023).

In Mali, practitioners have relatively good access to climate information in the form of seasonal rainfall forecasts (published in early May) and a regional system of river level monitoring and early warning flood alerts, for the Niger River basin. A multidisciplinary technical group (GTP, groupe technique multidisciplinaire) led by the Malian meteorological service, publishes 10-day bulletins throughout the rainy season to track progress, update forecasts for rainfall, river levels, pests, diseases and provides targeted advisories by sector. However, a key information gap identified by practitioners was the lack of officially sanctioned information about long-term climate trends (temperature, rainfall) that they would feel confident to use for planning purposes (Mali KII, 2023).

Practitioners and communities also struggle to translate climate information into effective anticipatory actions. Challenges relate to the timing, quality and reliability of the climate information available. The 2023 seasonal

forecast for the Timbuktu region for example, was for higher-than-average rainfall but seasonal monitoring shows many areas in fact had below-average rainfall, impacting both crop and grassland biomass production (WFP, 2023). Flood alerts are localised and relatively accurate but again arrive too late to be of much use to farmers:

In Sept 2022, when people got the warning, including from villages upstream, that very high flood levels were expected, the rice fields were already planted. (Mali KII, 2023)

Investment in building, rehabilitating and reinforcing village irrigation perimeters was considered essential, to strengthen resilience to climate shocks and increase food security. However, two practitioners raised concerns because the root causes of problems are not always fully analysed. Why is there inadequate maintenance of the motor pump or canals? What role does deforestation play in soil erosion and siltation? If the trends continue, might it not be better to move the perimeters well outside the flood zone? Resilience programmes will need to investigate such issues at the action planning stage to avoid maladaptation (Mali KII, 2023).

Growing scepticism, cultural beliefs and a failure to utilise local knowledge

As identified in the first assessment, households in Somalia highlighted that they had relatively good access to weather information via social media platforms and their mobile phones. However, due to the impact of multiple climate shocks and the extended period of drought, some practitioners noted that there was a growing sense of scepticism among some people regarding the weather information that they receive. Instead, people choose to focus on what they see as more immediate concerns, rather than dwell

on information that they do not trust (Somalia KII, 2023). Cultural barriers can also play a role in the lack of faith among people towards weather forecasting. The ability to predict the weather or future climate projections is for ‘divine knowledge’ and beyond human capabilities (Somalia KII, 2023).

Although cultural barriers can hinder effective responses to climate-related shocks, experienced elders with traditional weather forecasting knowledge hold valuable insights into natural cycles like El Niño. However, the potential of these local capacities is frequently disregarded by aid agencies in favour of formalised data, leading to missed opportunities for early action.

Efficient early warning systems, including insights from local experts and elders, are crucial for anticipating events like heavy rains. Despite their valuable knowledge, local capacities are often overlooked. Trusting and prioritising simple warnings from local authorities and community leaders is essential. However, donors tend to prioritise formalised data, missing opportunities for early action and questioning local sources’ honesty. (Somalia KII, 2023)

Caution must be taken not to over-romanticise such local knowledge. While it can provide ‘natural indicators’ in terms of the onset of rains, these forecasts are limited in terms of indicating intensity or how good the rains will be (Levine et al., 2023).

2.2 Current response to humanitarian needs

There are established famine early warning systems across the three countries. In both South Sudan and Somalia, food security early warning

systems are informed by the USAID Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) food security information and analysis. FEWS NET produces regular food security updates and reports that are based on information and data on factors that affect food security, such as weather conditions and climate hazards, crops, pasture, nutrition, markets and trades. Every four months, FEWS NET estimates food security outcomes for the coming eight months, which are used by humanitarian agencies to inform their response.

In South Sudan, FEWS NET reports are complemented by the joint inter-agency and cluster food security assessments conducted by actors – government and humanitarian partners – as part of the food security and monitoring system and crop assessment missions to establish key factors responsible for food insecurity in their areas of operation (South Sudan KIIs, 2023). The information generated from these assessments or reports is used to trigger responses in line with the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) that guides agencies’ response to the acute needs of crisis-affected people in the country (OCHA, 2023b).

In Somalia, the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), managed by FAO, also serves as the primary source for early warning information on food security, nutrition and livelihoods (Somalia KII, 2023). These systems are supported by a community-based response system that gets community entities to monitor crucial indicators, ranging from depleting water sources to community migration relocations. The approach integrates investments in early warning systems with initiatives to provide communities with tools for monitoring their environment. This anticipates the impacts of changes, like drought,

on markets and livestock prices, leveraging insights from historical data and local knowledge in order to activate response (Somalia KII, 2023).

Planning for the humanitarian response in Mali is based on the Harmonised Framework (CH, Cadre harmonisé) – a regional food security early warning system developed in response to widespread drought and famine in the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s. Data collected from each local government area is transmitted to the national early warning system (SAP, système d’alerte précoce) and is enriched by reports from UN agencies, donors, national and international NGOs and online geographical information systems.² The Harmonised Framework grew out of FEWS NET and in Mali both processes are combined. Forecasts of the food security situation by district are published up to six months in advance and government and humanitarian agencies prepare their response with a focus on the pastoral and agricultural lean seasons (April to June and July to September respectively).

Across the three countries, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan, existing food security early warning systems and response were initially established to prevent famines caused by regular or occasional slow-onset climate shocks (seasonal droughts). While the early warning system components remain relatively effective at assessing needs and targeting the response, the response system can struggle to respond to those needs. Responses can struggle to address the effects of multiple and persistent climate shocks and prolonged exposure to violence and insecurity. Rapid-onset climate hazards (floods) and conflict-related shocks (for example, those that cause displacement or prevent food from reaching markets) may require an immediate response, which falls outside the

scope of established food security early warning system needs assessment and response planning cycles (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

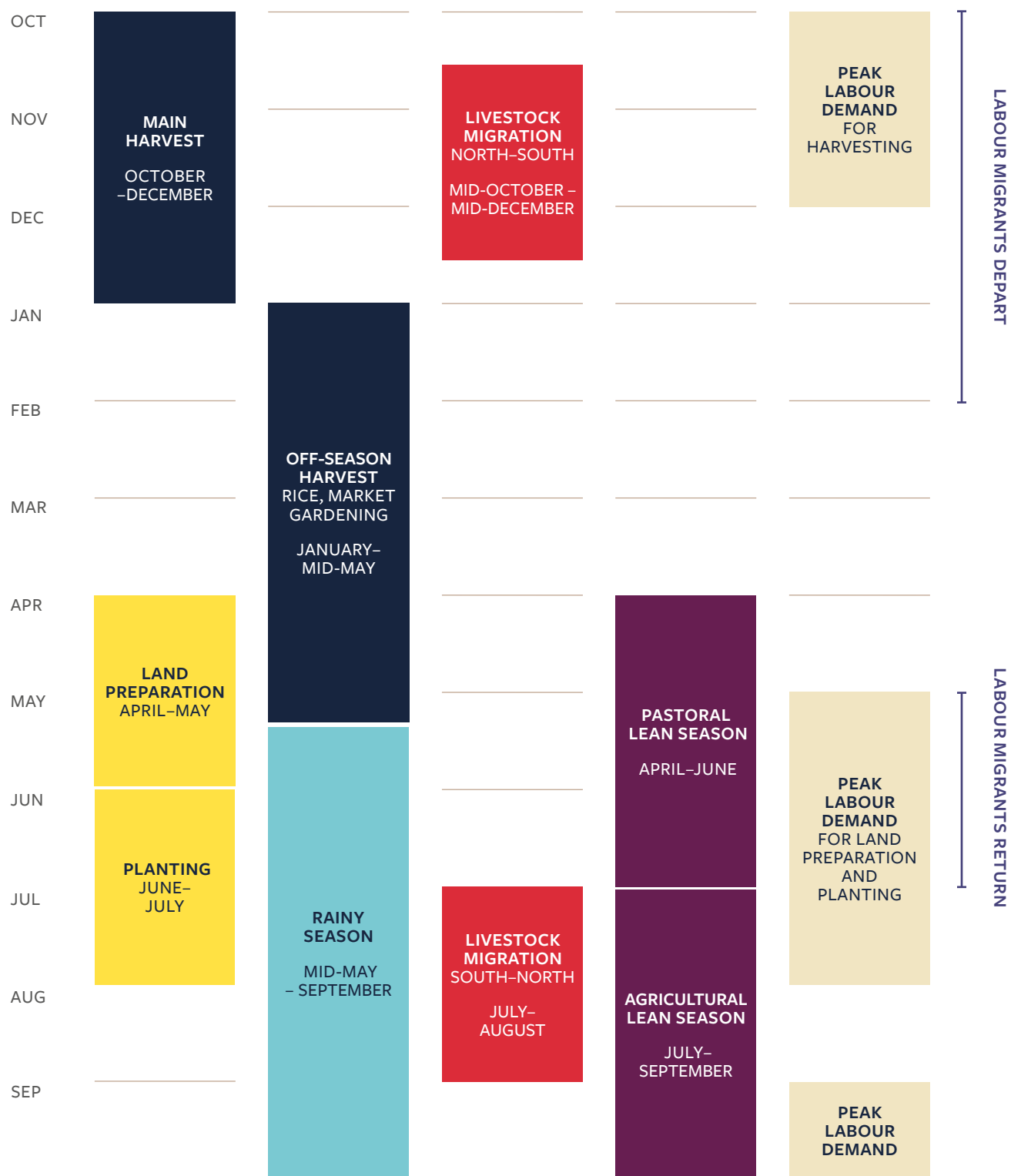
The challenge is further compounded by a reduction in overall funding and factors that increase the vulnerability of populations, such as limited access to basic services (e.g. health, education, water, safety nets) and poor infrastructure (e.g. roads, irrigation perimeters).

Box 3 Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS)

BRCiS was established in 2013 and is a consortium of eight national and international members, led by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, n.d.). BRCiS includes short-term response created to address both climate and non-climate shocks, while interviewees also identified it as an example of interventions adopting a more ‘systems’ led approach to integrating food, water and health, by linking activities across different sectors in order to enhance communities’ resilience (Somalia KII, 2023). BRCiS has also established early warning systems at the community level and national level. With regard to the latter, BRCiS has sought to synchronise its information from its early warning systems with the Somalia Disaster Management Agency.

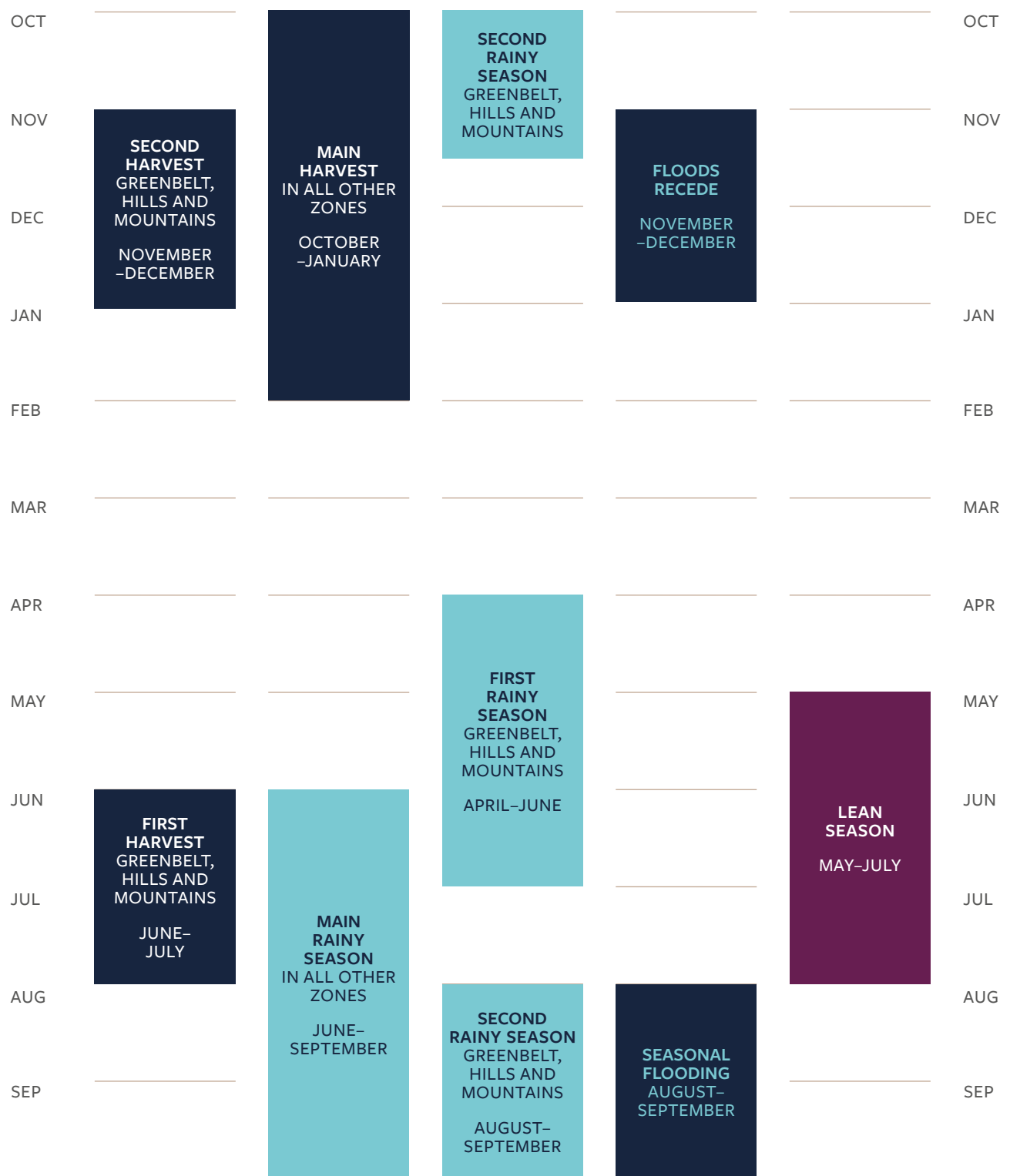
² For example, www.sigsahel.info and www.geosahel.info

Figure 1 Mali seasonal calendar



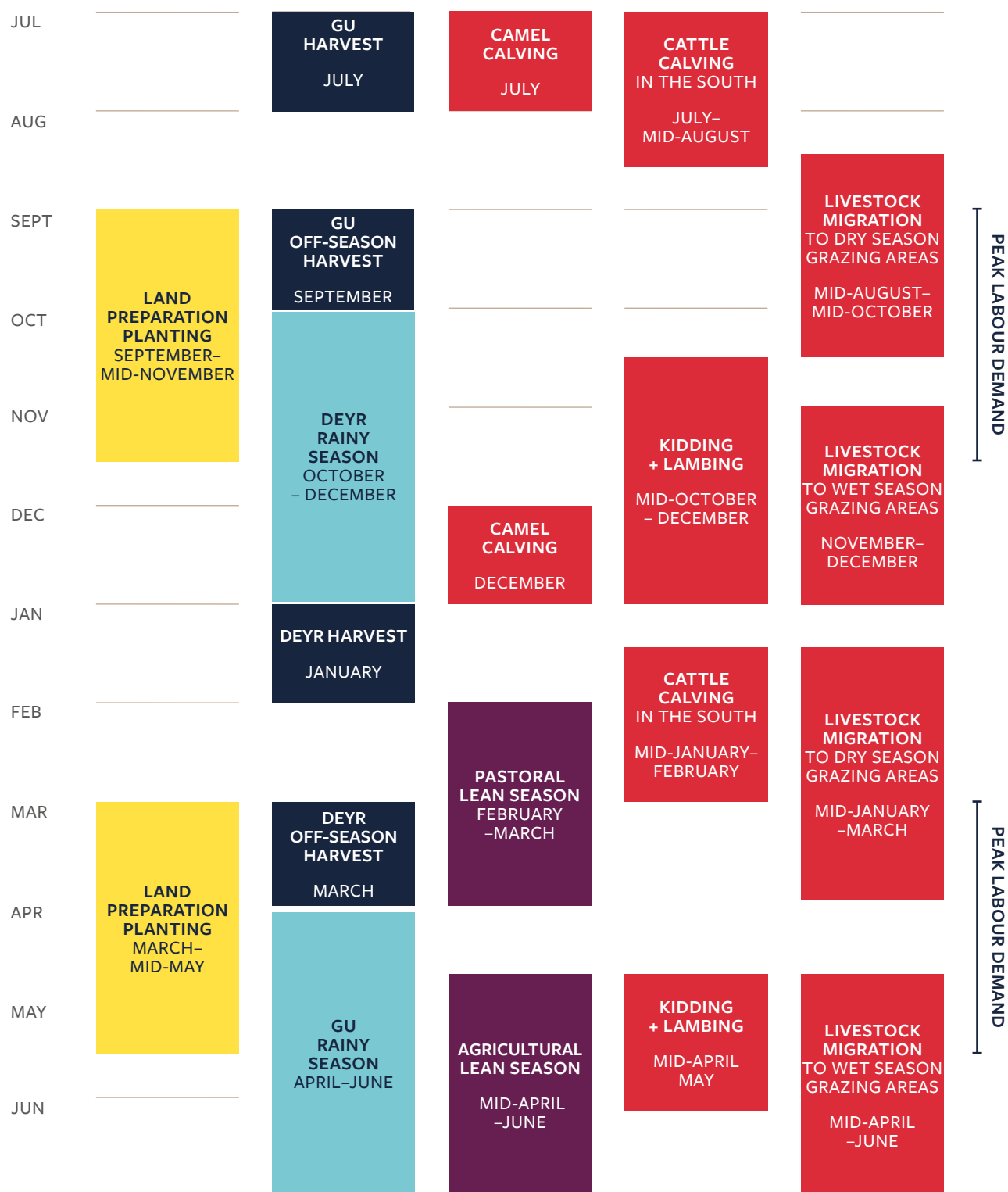
Source: FEWS NET (n.d.a)

Figure 2 South Sudan seasonal calendar



Source: FEWS NET (n.d.b)

Figure 3 Somalia seasonal calendar



Source: FEWS NET (n.d.c)

2.2.1 Lack of available funding

Response needs today far exceed the available humanitarian funding. Many affected communities may only receive a fraction of the planned support, certainly not enough to lift them out of extreme poverty and the constant fight for survival. Interviewees described how the changing humanitarian funding landscape is attributed in part to growing global humanitarian needs, the depletion of donor funding and shifts in donors' global geopolitical interests, particularly the crises in Ukraine and Gaza. In Somalia, interviewees noted that in a context of growing humanitarian needs in that country, the increasing funding gap was a growing concern (Somalia KII, 2023). Of Somalia's 2023 HRP, of the \$2.6 billion required under the plan, only \$1.13 billion had been funded (OCHA, 2023a). In line with the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC, see Figure 4) between October and December 2023, it was projected that 4.3 million people would be classified as Phase 3 or worse (IPC, 2023a).

In Mali, at the start of the 2023 hungry season, the response plan was only 67% funded overall and targets were met or exceeded in only one of the seven districts where the situation was critical (IPC Phase 4) or worse. In two of the districts less than 50% of the planned response was funded (Mali Cluster Sécurité Alimentaire, 2023a). Funding is insufficient to meet the emergency response needs identified by this system in part due to the conflict which 'doubles the shock' (Mali KII, 2023). Addressing chronic food and nutritional insecurity and meeting the immediate needs of displaced and vulnerable households remain a priority for practitioners. Seven sub-regional administrative areas (cercles) of Mali have been in food security crisis or worse for each of the five years from 2019 to 2023 (Mali Cluster Sécurité Alimentaire, 2023b) and 31 are expected to require

urgent, coordinated assistance (IPC Phases 3 and worse) over the six months to May 2024 (IPC, 2023b). This includes the entire Timbuktu region (Dire, Timbuktu, Goundam, Gourma-Rharous, Niafunke, Ber).

While humanitarian needs in South Sudan continue to increase significantly, humanitarian funding continues to decline, from \$1.26 billion in 2022 to \$1.06 billion in 2023 (OCHA, 2022; OCHA, 2023b). Of the \$2.06 billion required for the HRP in 2023, only \$1.06 billion was funded by December 2023 (Ibid.). Food insecurity in South Sudan remains extremely high, with just under half the population experiencing crisis under the IPC Phase 3 or worse (see Figure 4) (IPC, 2023c). One interviewee explained that to cope with the growing needs, the emergency food aid response trigger was adjusted, from IPC Phase 3 (crisis/worse food security level), which is standard in all emergencies, to IPC Phase 4 (emergency) to limit the pressure on the humanitarian system (South Sudan KII, 2023).

Figure 4 Integrated Phase Food Security Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Scale

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Minimal	Stressed	Crisis	Emergency	Famine
Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households either: Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; Or Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either: Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; Or Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. <i>For famine classification, an area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.</i>

Source: FEWS NET (n.d.)

2.2.2 Climate, conflict and fragility undermine ability to respond

Although established famine early warning systems can provide information needed for planned humanitarian response, the ability to respond to people's food and nutritional needs is being undermined by the combined impacts of climate and conflict. Moreover, these impacts are being felt in contexts of fragile systems, which undermine access to basic services and infrastructure that people rely on during times of crises (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2023). For example, in South Sudan the ability to carry out response is affected by poor and weak services – availability and access across the country further complicate the humanitarian response to crisis-affected people. In most cases, due to poor road infrastructure across the country, humanitarian actors rely on air transport to deliver food

aid (using airdrops), making the response very expensive (South Sudan KII, 2023). Large parts of South Sudan are only accessible by air, which makes transporting essential goods like food and other supplies unaffordable for most of the population and greatly increases their prices in the community.

...there is difficulty for food to get to the community and to move to the capital, which is only possible by air yet very few people can afford it. Also, only a few traders can transport goods for people in the community because of the difficulty with transport. To get food to the community for those who do trade, they pay a lot for it, making the items very expensive for people to afford in the midst of reduced income. (South Sudan KII, 2023)

Within this type of context, conflict adds another layer of complexity in terms of being able to access populations. In Somalia, in conflict-affected areas, particularly those controlled by non-state armed groups, accessing communities poses significant challenges due to territorial dominance and a history of violence. The resulting restricted access hampers humanitarian efforts, prompting affected communities to seek aid in government-controlled regions. Interviewees did refer to identifying and working with local staff members who were familiar with the areas in order to try to maintain some services, such as WASH (Somalia KII, 2023). However, localised forms of violence can limit the ability of local staff to operate. In South Sudan, some of the local humanitarian staff are reportedly unable to access some project sites for fear of being killed or targeted as part of the reprisal attacks, while some of them are also ‘not completely absolved’ from taking part in ongoing violence, in part, due to the social ramifications of non-engagement (South Sudan KIIs, 2023). A respondent from an INGO elaborated:

...we realised that some of our local staff cannot go to some communities around here due to fear of revenge killings, because a member of their household/community or a relative killed people from that community where we work. They can't go there however much you want them to go there in person as part of the programme, it is impossible.... If one doesn't participate, they are considered cowards, ...so staff will also join to defend their communities. It is seen as a communal action and all the youth take their guns and go to fight for their community. (South Sudan KII, 2023)

The impact of climate and conflict shocks can mean that the context is highly dynamic, with shocks occurring outside planned response.

In Mali, food stocks held in warehouses in the regional town of Timbuktu could not be distributed during part of the 2023 hungry season, because of a blockade imposed by non-state armed groups. Lorries from southern Mali and Algeria were unable to supply local markets (Mali KII, 2023) and by November 2023, there was no imported rice on the market in Timbuktu (Afrique Verte International, 2023). Practitioners must react quickly to secure funding, sometimes in anticipation of the Harmonised Framework results.

No households are doing well. The rainfall this year was poor, plus the blockade on the markets. We are already writing concepts and proposals to respond. (Mali KII, 2023)

Rapid-onset climate hazards, such as the floods in 2022, present another set of challenges. Few Food Security Cluster members are prepared to respond to these types of shock, which arrive in addition to and typically outside the planned response period.

When flood alerts arrive, projects are already in place so we can't take this information into account in our planning. The budgets are not there to respond to these events. Our work focuses on the period of worst hunger, but it is not sufficient to consider everything. (Mali KII, 2023)

Recurrent slow-onset climate hazards within the context of conflict also mean that practitioners are having to respond to evolving needs year on year. Somalia's experience stands out, marked by recurring droughts in 2011, 2016–2017 and 2022. The consequences of these droughts have evolved significantly, expanding from specific regions in

2011 to affecting the nation by 2018 and reaching a peak in severity in 2022. This has led to an increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs), currently estimated at nearly 4 million (Somalia KII, 2023). The cyclical migration of approximately 1 million people to urban centres, every other drought season in the last few years, places a strain on urban areas.

In 2022, our experiences during the drought revealed a concerning trend of increasing numbers of displaced populations seeking refuge in urban centres, such as Baidoa and Mogadishu. Many of these displaced households were particularly affected by the combined impact of the drought and conflict. The influx of displaced people placed tremendous pressure on the few existing nutrition and health facilities. Within a matter of weeks, these facilities became overwhelmed, far exceeding their bed capacity, with daily admissions skyrocketing, especially in places like Baidoa....
(Somalia KII, 2023)

Those who migrate to urban areas face further risk, including forced evictions and susceptibility to aid diversion. Concerns also arise over the potential commodification and control of displaced populations by landowners and business interests (Somalia KII, 2023).

2.3 Moving from crisis to resilience

One of the critical points argued in the first assessment is that humanitarian action must consider how it can complement development or community-led programmes that aim to support the livelihoods and food and nutritional security in the long term, alongside supporting these aims in the short term. Evidence collected from interviews with communities across the three

countries highlighted that people are not only dealing with multiple climate and non-climate shocks, but that these shocks are often recurrent. This means that people are repeatedly having to fall back on finding ways to survive, which over time reduces their options and their resource base. This evidence and arguments are not new to practitioners. As the research team found when presenting evidence from the first assessment at both regional and global roundtables organised by Action Against Hunger, the evidence of the need to change is known, but the difficulties remain in implementing a transition towards more sustainable outcomes.

Those interviewed as part of this assessment were increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress. Across the practitioners interviewed there was a call for a strategic transition away from emergency measures and towards a proactive approach, that aligns with the ongoing and persistent challenges. Some organisations have already begun this shift, tweaking their programmes to address both the short and long term with an aim to address the underlying causes of vulnerabilities in the population. However, interviewees identified that challenges remain in implementing such a shift. Echoing statements from the first assessment, practitioners argued that such a transition requires partnerships across different sectors, effective planning and collaboration with the government to design and implement multi-year, coordinated sets of interventions.

2.3.1 Response must move beyond reacting to emergencies

From the evidence gathered as part of this second assessment, practitioners echoed the critical recommendation that humanitarian action needs to help provide the tools in order for communities to respond to recurrent climate

and non-climate shocks. Interviewees highlighted that in responding to crisis that firstly, basic needs must be met, but then attention needs to turn to thinking beyond the current crisis and to working to rebuild livelihoods. This would require thinking with a systems approach, creating an environment that supports the rebuilding of livelihoods, ranging from interventions that restock animal husbandry to investments that help to support economic growth and demand within the local economy (Somalia KII, 2023). It also included the need to address fragile systems, in areas such as education and health.

Interviews with practitioners emphasised that both thinking within programming and existing activities is already under way. For example, initiatives such as Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) (see Box 3) were highlighted as an example of where humanitarian action is aiming to address both short-term needs and long-term resilience (Somalia KII, 2023).

In South Sudan, international actors also explained that they are shifting their programmes beyond emergency response to those that address immediate and long-term needs to protect livelihoods and build resilience of households and communities affected by crisis, in order to boost crop and livestock production. Some of the programmes that actors mentioned included programmes that increase household food security including fruit and vegetable growing, provision of short-term variety crops and introduction of new crop varieties that can adapt to the changing context (South Sudan KII, 2023). Some local actors interviewed also mentioned the need to provide households and communities with farm inputs, access to capital or saving programmes to boost household incomes as well as those that promote value addition.

Box 4 Food Security Livelihood (FSL) cluster

The South Sudan Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) cluster three-year strategic plan aims to graduate people from food assistance to development. It does so by creating the conditions that enable people to move from dependence on food assistance to their own production through a set of interventions structured around: i) emergency food assistance that provides immediate relief from hunger and food insecurity, implemented alongside a set of programmes on emergency health and WASH services to improve the health of the community and improve household nutrition through the practice of kitchen gardens; ii) livelihood support services in the form of tools, seeds, innovation to adapt to floods through new crops, floating gardens and saving groups; and iii) resilience and asset creation programmes – cash for assets, cash for work, infrastructure development (roads), community health programmes, education and skills training programmes, livestock vaccination and those that include value chain addition and access to the markets or link with the private sector (South Sudan KII, 2023).

Some of the emergency-to-resilience programmes were sequenced or implemented simultaneously rather than iteratively to promote the transition from relief to recovery and development. One interviewee noted that as part of the FSL cluster, it is expected that FAO would implement their programmes in coordination with WFP food aid programmes in order to address the underlying causes of malnutrition and food insecurity by

building the resilience of the affected households and communities. However, it was unclear from interviews to what extent such sequencing of programmes has improved food security and malnutrition conditions in the targeted households and communities and indeed if it is happening at all – given that more people continue to fall into worse levels of food insecurity in the country. As one respondent noted, even though the FSL strategy is in place, it is yet to be implemented (South Sudan KII, 2023).

In Mali, practitioners echoed the demand identified at community level in the first assessment, for programmes that move beyond an emergency response and towards long-term objectives to increase crop and livestock production and to develop agricultural market systems. To strengthen resilience, practitioners also consider it critical to improve access and quality of basic social services such as health and education and to extend and diversify social safety nets – for example, by using cash-for-work schemes to rehabilitate productive infrastructure. FAO (2023) recommends an accompanying shift to more affordable agricultural technologies that also address issues of environmental degradation, including greater use of organic fertilisers to improve soil fertility and assisted natural regeneration, to restore tree cover on agricultural land.

Livelihood support activities (rearing poultry and small ruminants, developing women’s gardens) coordinated by the Food Security Cluster in Mali typically target the most vulnerable households and groups or have a short-term, seasonal objectives (destocking initiatives, donations of animal feed, motor pumps, seeds, fertiliser and fuel). Practitioners interviewed saw opportunities to achieve more sustainable outcomes by implementing livelihood activities in ways that

promote self-reliance, build organisational capacity and strengthen resilience to climate and conflict-related shocks at household, community and administrative levels and within agricultural market systems. USAID is funding the five-year Sene Yiriwa (prosperous agriculture) and Sugu Yiriwa (prosperous markets) initiatives that work collectively to develop the supply and demand side of agricultural production in selected value chains, across 12 conflict-affected districts in central and northern Mali, including Timbuktu, Dire, Goundam and Niafunké in the region of Timbuktu (DevWorks, 2023).

Box 5 Sene Yiriwa

The Sene Yiriwa (prosperous agriculture) initiative led by DevWorks, includes activities aimed at strengthening local mechanisms for community-led natural resource management (NRM) and conflict prevention. It is implemented in consortium with two national NGOs, one based in Timbuktu with deep knowledge of the local communities and the other, based in Mopti, with expertise in participatory land use planning and NRM. The Mopti-based NGO provides training and backstopping using a mix of in-person and online meetings and detailed methodological guides. (Mali KII, 2023)

Although the previous examples indicate that there is a shift towards programming that builds long-term resilience, securing funding to support such initiatives remains a major challenge in all three countries. With the exception of cases such as the USAID-funded Sene Yiriwa project in Mali, it was noted by interviewees that donors can be reluctant to fund recovery or resilience programmes. Respondents noted that it is often

hard to attract donor support for anything other than emergency response in conflict-affected areas.

Contextual factors can also mean that it is difficult to build sustainable outcomes from programming. The impact of rapid-onset events such as flooding can mean that any development gains made in previous years can quickly be eroded. In South Sudan and Mali, recurrent flooding leads to a reduced harvest and smaller plots of land to grow crops, undermining the local economy and weakening the resilience of households, making it harder to restart the production cycle each year (Mali KIIs, 2023; South Sudan KIIs 2023). Relevant to this, one respondent from Somalia stressed the need to incorporate crisis modifiers to protect development gains in programmes which support activities that help them to shift livelihoods and take measures to manage their own risks to support their own resilience to climate shocks and stressors (Somalia KII, 2023).

Protracted conflict can also lead to an erosion of governance structures needed to implement long-term change within local areas. For example, the absence of elected local authorities and government services in many conflict-affected areas of Mali makes it hard to anchor risk reduction and resilience initiatives in local institutions and processes even when built on community-led analysis and planning or on working through local producer organisations (Mali KII, 2023).

Programming may also have to change the mentalities of the long-term assisted populations. Practitioners highlighted that some communities have been receiving assistance since the 1980s. This created an expectation of outside assistance

that could be challenging, but not impossible, to overcome in longer term resilience programming (Mali KIIs, 2023).

2.3.2 The importance of an humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus approach

Some of the changes needed in order to realise a transition away from crisis management to resilience may require skills and knowledge that stretch beyond the experience and mandates of individual organisations. Therefore, the first assessment emphasised the need for partnerships that bring together different skill sets and knowledge.

Those interviewed also acknowledged that utilising the HDP nexus agenda could facilitate a shift to more sustainable development in contexts affected by climate and conflict. International organisations especially are beginning to reflect and discuss internally their programme approaches, policies and strategies to shift towards a nexus approach, to help bridge the gap between immediate humanitarian assistance and longer term development strategies. Interviewees acknowledged that in the face of a decline in humanitarian funding and increased humanitarian needs, the need for an HDP nexus approach is even more critical.

Given the close links between violence and food insecurity, practitioners identified the importance for the inclusion of peace-building activities as part of their humanitarian response. In South Sudan, one INGO interviewed had started to incorporate components of peace-building in their humanitarian response to address intra- and intercommunal tension and violence, especially situations involving youth and those with a direct impact on its programme.

They encouraged peace-building activities through awareness creation, games and sports as well as income-generating activities, which contributed to reducing tension in the community. One of the interviewees noted that without tackling the underlying causes of localised violence in the community, it will be hard to sustain progress towards addressing food insecurity in the community (South Sudan KII, 2023).

Similarly in Mali, practitioners also recognise the importance of targeting factors which influence localised violence in the area. The move towards the inclusion of peace-building activities is critical. Access to natural resources is a cause of intra- and intercommunity tensions; these are exacerbated by the wider conflict but existed before and most likely will persist after peace is restored. Climate change, drought and declining soil fertility push farmers to bring more land under cultivation in the riverine areas. This may be land that livestock owners need for dry season grazing and access to water and which they are increasingly constrained to stay on all year round, to ensure the security of their families and herds. As more people crowd into this limited space, the potential for tensions to erupt into violence is high.

All projects need peace-building activities even if only a small part [of what they do]. I am talking about peace-building between communities. We need work in consortia to do this, with the people who are specialised in it. (Mali KII, 2023)

However, despite an HDP nexus approach being viewed as important, there was a perception among interviewees that the HDP nexus is still more theory than practice or is not being implemented. This assessment has been shared in other studies, where the suggestion is that the HDP nexus is at the stage of conversations around

funding and synchronisation of the different sectors (Chan and Schmidlin, 2023; Davies and Mayhew, 2024). From the perspectives of those interviewed as part of this assessment, there were several challenges to realising the HDP nexus. There is still a tendency for the different sectors to operate in silos and to specialise in what they know. As one respondent from Somalia stated:

Often, NGOs tend to shy away from peace-building, while peace-building organisations focus solely on reconciliation efforts, leading to a disconnect in providing the essential support required for sustainable peace... (Somalia KII, 2023)

Respondents in both South Sudan and Mali echoed these views. In South Sudan, some humanitarian actors are said to be used to doing ‘business as usual’, thus, may be reluctant to try out new and innovative approaches beyond emergency response (South Sudan KIIs, 2023). In Mali, one interviewee linked to development programming said that they do not participate in the Timbuktu food security cluster, which was identified by other interviewees as a key space for learning as well as coordination. Instead, development actors were said to have their own parallel development NGO forum (Mali KIIs, 2023).

Funding within the HDP nexus was also raised as a concern. Although humanitarian response is underfunded across the three countries, the limited funding that is available still prioritises the humanitarian sector, with donors reluctant to fund recovery/development and peace programmes (South Sudan KIIs, 2023). While the potential of the HDP nexus is recognised, it requires the commitment and resources to ensure that it can function as envisioned:

We need a coordination like OCHA does – but to deepen this approach so that humanitarian and development NGOs can establish a complementary coordinated plan... Development programmes, they can still be affected by climate or security shocks, in which case the emergency programmes could bring short-term assistance. You could also build emergency funding into development projects.... We need a good vision of the zone, mapping, information and coordination so that each partner can play their role. That would provide a good connection between the development and emergency programming and would strengthen the nexus approach. But I have to say, it would need a lot of effort in terms of information and organisation to implement such an approach. (Mali KII, 2023)

Finally, there are associated difficulties regarding the inclusion of the ‘peace’ component within the HDP nexus. The potential tensions between the HDP nexus and principled humanitarian action remain a dilemma, especially in contexts where humanitarian actors may be forced to work closely with state parties to the conflict. The peace component of the HDP nexus especially presented some tensions in South Sudan and Mali among not only humanitarian actors but also development actors, due to fears of becoming engaged with the politics of the country. In South Sudan, one interviewee from an INGO explained:

...we may not do any peace activities, except for some high-level advocacy with the government and community.... Overall, we stay within our mandate. (South Sudan KII, 2023)

In Mali, practitioners from UN organisations and national and international NGOs interviewed echoed this position: ‘The conflict between the

terrorists and the government, that is not our business. We cannot intervene in that.’ (Mali KII, 2023).

2.3.3 Localisation to transfer power and resources to local levels

Utilising local knowledge and partnerships can play a key role in attempts to achieve more sustainable outcomes on food and nutritional security. Local actors may have a better understanding of local needs, given the close connection of some of them to the communities. Furthermore, in terms of sustainability, national NGOs and local and national government will remain in place after the end of programmes and the departure of international actors. Practitioners did highlight that attempts are being made to work with local actors. Practitioners argued that partnerships with national NGOs allow them to use their knowledge to help tailor programmes to local needs and extend their reach (Somalia KII, 2023). Other practitioners noted that through their partnerships with local NGOs, international actors are investing in local skills. For example, the WASH cluster in South Sudan is planning to invest in training local people to repair and fix boreholes in the community for sustainability as opposed to external experts who are costly to hire (South Sudan KII, 2023).

Despite positive cases of attempts to implement localisation in some areas, respondents highlighted that there are still barriers to achieving localisation within the contexts where they work. Local NGOs grapple with limited financial resources, hindering their ability to provide timely and effective responses to urgent humanitarian needs. In addition, the short-term focus of collaborations inhibits local NGOs from engaging in a sustainable way (Somalia KII, 2023).

As well as local NGOs, government departments feel that they are also at a disadvantage. For example, in South Sudan, some interviewees believed that there was a gap in working with local and national government officials, with most of the food security interventions focused on local and national NGOs. There was no investment to build the government's agriculture office capacity – the managerial, technical and logistical capacity to manage humanitarian emergencies (South Sudan KII, 2023). Most government actors interviewed were superficially involved as part of food security coordination and monitoring mechanisms of humanitarian programmes and were not strategically engaged in ways that enhance their capacity to take over when international humanitarian organisations leave (South Sudan KIIs, 2023).

A lack of equal partnership for local actors in terms of programme decision-making was also identified as another barrier to localisation. Local actors (government and NGOs) were not seen as meaningfully involved in humanitarian decision-making processes, limiting their potential to influence critical decisions (South Sudan KII, 2023). This includes the lack of consultation over communities' needs during programme design (South Sudan KII, 2023). One example cited was the low level of participation for government (national, state and county) and civil society organisations in decision-making surrounding the HDP nexus (South Sudan KII, 2023). Even when local NGOs are included as part of a consortium, their role can reflect more of a subcontractor function than as a true partner with equal influence in decision-making:

Our knowledge of the area contributes to our success, but we don't have [a] free hand... They say we go as a consortium with equal responsibility – that helps the INGO get the funding – but as soon as the funds are secured, things change.... If we were really associated, we could contribute more effectively. If you give me a contract to move a table, I will move the table but if you really made us responsible, we'd work with you to solve the problem. The INGOs have their advantages certainly, but they really need to associate national NGOs. (Mali KII, 2023)

3 Conclusions and recommendations

Practitioner and organisational insight 1

There is a lack of conflict analysis that focuses on local drivers of violence to craft interventions that resonate with ground realities and yield tangible results.

Having timely and accurate conflict analysis can help programmes to be adaptive to changing conflict dynamics on the ground. It can also ensure that programmes are conflict-sensitive and contribute to peace-building. What our evidence shows is that conflict analysis lacks the depth needed to support in these areas.

Conflict analysis which captures local nuances and drivers of violence is critical for informing programming but is not always available to practitioners. For example, in South Sudan, conflict analysis was said to focus too broadly on violence at the national level and did not take account of shifts in conflict dynamics. Furthermore, a lack of focus on local drivers of violence has also resulted in organisations overlooking that national staff were unable to work in certain areas, due to their family links and the risk of being victims of revenge killings. The importance of local conflict information was seen as critical in contexts such as Mali for planning programmes, in preference to conflict reporting from larger organisations. The latter may only provide warnings once insecurity is already present, rather than allowing for preventive measures to be incorporated within programming.

Practitioner and organisational insight 2

Weather information and the impact of longer term climate trends need to be both better understood and utilised, in order to inform programming that targets food and nutritional security. However, a number of factors – sometimes different between the three countries – are preventing this.

In Somalia, there has already been a significant investment in early warning systems. But as highlighted in the first assessment, simply possessing the information is not enough: having the means to act upon it is important. In Mali, while there is access to weather information, this data must be analysed in order to inform programming prior to rapid-onset events such as flooding. There have been cases where this information reaches communities too late for them to take preventive measures.

In South Sudan, those we interviewed highlighted that currently they possess little climate or weather forecasting information to inform programming there. Attempts are being made to pilot early warning systems, but the communication of this information – especially to rural communities – is hindered by a lack of telecommunication infrastructure. These findings resonate with the first assessment, where community-level interviews highlighted that households are having to make livelihood decisions which affect their food security, without information relating to current or future climate trends.

Practitioner and organisational insight 3

The complexities of humanitarian response as experienced in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan illuminate a connection between conflict dynamics, climate hazards, fragile systems and funding gaps.

All three countries are experiencing ongoing conflict and are grappling with environmental uncertainties. Sudden changes in conflict dynamics and rapid-onset climate hazards mean that early warning systems can struggle to keep pace with changing situations. Furthermore, sudden events such as flooding can expose the lack of adaptive capacity to a new set of challenges which may not have been originally envisaged during programme design. The situation is further compounded by a lack of adequate infrastructure, which is exposed during periods of flooding. This complicates the response, making areas difficult to access and increasing strain on limited resources.

A recurring impediment to sustainable progress in these regions is the consistent funding shortfall. The volatile nature of global geopolitics frequently redirects humanitarian resources to emerging crises. Established challenges in contexts like Mali, Somalia and South Sudan inadvertently become sidelined.

Practitioner and organisational insight 4

Addressing the multifaceted challenges in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan demands more than piecemeal solutions.

Among both national and international organisations, a consensus is growing over the need to transition from short-lived relief measures to more holistic resilience programmes. The aspiration is clear: to design initiatives that not only address immediate needs but also empower communities and enhance local capacities, to provide communities with options to respond during crises.

Yet although interviewees recognised this, they highlighted a number of existing barriers which impede such a transition. These included a ‘business as usual’ approach within the humanitarian sector. Notwithstanding sectoral inertia, donors themselves can be reluctant to fund programming that is targeting long-term change in areas affected by conflict. Beyond the existing barriers within the international community, local contextual factors can contribute to a lack of change. The absence of locally elected state authorities, due to ongoing instability, can stymie attempts to realise long-term change. Furthermore, there is the need to consider those communities which have been accustomed to receiving long-term assistance aimed at immediate needs instead of long-term resilience. Programming that encourages long-term change will need to factor in that these communities will require time to adopt different practices than those they have been used to.

As acknowledged within the first assessment, transitions towards interventions that target more long-term change may be beyond individual organisations. Therefore organisations will need to consider how they can be part of a wider change and foster collaborative partnerships with organisations that have the skills and knowledge to implement such change.

Practitioner and organisational insight 5

A pivotal aspect of this transformative vision revolves around the interconnectedness of humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts.

While navigating this triad is undeniably complex, particularly within conflict-affected regions, its potential for catalysing sustainable change was emphasised by those we interviewed. Despite this, it was felt that the current realisation of the HDP nexus is happening more in theory than in practice.

A number of barriers were raised by interviewees. Firstly, among the three sectors that comprise the HDP nexus, humanitarian response is still prioritised in terms of funding, compared with their counterparts within the peace and development sectors. In the eyes of some, engaging in the HDP nexus is not without its concerns. In both Mali and South Sudan, interviewees expressed concern that working on issues related to peace could undermine their perceived neutrality.

Practitioner and organisational insight 6

While attempts are being made to ensure a localised humanitarian response, there is still more work to be done to ensure local partners are included as equals.

Those interviewed did highlight that they work in partnerships with local NGOs or were part of consortiums that included national NGOs. However, local actors felt that these partnerships did not necessarily result in equal relationships regarding programme design and decision-making. This includes discussions around the HDP nexus, where conversations occurred among international actors but excluded local NGOs and government. Government departments also believed that they themselves are overlooked by international actors, in favour of national NGOs.

4 Recommendations

Consider how an individual strategy fits into a broader plan of addressing food and nutritional security

As evidence from the first and second assessments show, the three countries present highly complex situations in which programming must take place. Funding is also limited. Therefore, Action Against Hunger will need to be clear about what it is able to achieve and will need to work in collaboration with other organisations and the state. These partnerships need to be part of a shared plan. The HDP nexus is identified as a way to draw on different skill sets and expertise, while strategically using finite resources. But being part of a nexus is also about being part of a broader, longer term plan for food and nutritional security. This means linking up with what is already in place for targeting resilience: livelihoods, food security, poverty reduction, education, social protection, economic development, market opportunities. It is unrealistic to expect a single organisation to be expert in all these areas. It is therefore about having a mental map of these different things taking place and thinking as an organisation about where Action Against Hunger, for example, fits in.

Programming will need to reflect the local drivers of food and nutritional insecurity and the local barriers to solutions

A regional approach to designing programming will struggle to design interventions that are applicable across different countries. Each context is different politically, economically and, importantly, in terms of the drivers of food and nutritional security. Therefore, analysis of the problem should focus firstly on what are the

local drivers of food and nutritional insecurity; and then what are the different constraints and opportunities that exist within a given context to address this.

The common lesson to learn is to look at processes rather than activities. Given that the drivers or barriers to addressing food and nutritional insecurity are generally local, any activities used in a particular setting may not be applicable elsewhere. Instead, Action Against Hunger needs to think in terms of processes and approaches. This means considering how to analyse what is not working and whether action is being taken to address this. Another point to consider are the successes and lessons learned from having a local understanding of the drivers of food and nutritional insecurity and how this assessment has been able to inform programme design.

Programming needs to be informed by analysis that captures the problem, but what this analysis will and can inform needs to be clear from the outset

A big gap identified in this assessment is that access to in-depth conflict analysis of local drivers of violence is not uniform across organisations. Solving this may involve advocating for donors to fund shared platforms which make this knowledge publicly available. But it is about more than just funding – it is about encouraging organisations to share their analysis. As this assessment and other research have identified organisations might be reluctant to share analysis when it is used to inform programming. Therefore, what change can Action Against Hunger be part of that fosters

trust and encourages organisations that have the capacity and resources to conduct good conflict analysis, to then share that information with others?

However, this is not just about having good analysis, but also being clear from the outset how you intend to use this information. This will ensure that analysis is done in a way that is relevant to the context. For example, conflict analysis is not just about having an overall picture of conflict dynamics. It also entails understanding how conflict affects proposed interventions in specific localities and how interventions in turn will impact these dynamics.

In terms of weather (short-term) and climate (long-term) information, both assessments highlight differences across the three countries. This is likely to be replicated across other countries that form part of any regional programme. In identifying how to address information gaps in a given country, it is important to think first about what people – both practitioners and the people whom Action Against Hunger are looking to support – could do with this information. Other necessary elements are: the information that people would need to know; and what has to happen for people to acquire that information. Having this knowledge will bring to light that different changes or interventions are needed for different places and different people.

Programming should not aim to make predictions, but should help people to manage uncertainty

A starting point of programming can be a prediction of how people are going to behave and respond to information. However, the contexts in which programming is implemented are highly complex and dynamic. Conflict distorts societies. It alters power dynamics within communities and

results in people having to adapt their livelihoods. It also influences people's perceptions of the state and state-run services. At the same time, people must navigate the impact of climate shocks, which has a bearing on people's decision-making. These factors mean that people are having to navigate uncertainty, which means that their responses will be hard to predict and will vary across different contexts. Programming must be reflective and be continually monitored. Action Against Hunger needs to ask which of its initial assumptions are working and which are not. Programming needs to be flexible and adaptive to this information. Being reflective needs to be part of a system within an organisation that facilitates the feedback of this information to decision-makers.

This also requires thinking internally as an organisation about how to engage with people. Information can influence how people make decisions to adapt their livelihoods and these changes carry risks for them. Therefore, careful consideration needs to be taken as to how information is presented to people. This includes information not being presented as a certainty, but instead as a means to help people to manage uncertainty.

Local people need to be in the room, as equal partners

Programming cannot work in a conflict-sensitive way or be prepared for how local people will behave in relation to uncertainty if local people are not in the room. This means that partnerships with government, local NGOs and communities need to be built as equal partnerships in decision-making. Local knowledge of conflict dynamics and the needs of the community must be included during the design of programmes. Working with local actors does present risks; people will not always perceive partnerships with the state as

positive; and power within communities is not equal. Therefore, an initial step to creating local partnerships will have to be assessed for any potential risks to both programming and the wider relationship with the communities where programming is taking place.

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