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Rapid assessment of the hunger-climate-conflict nexus

Food and nutrition security in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan

Leigh Mayhew, Sarah Opitz-Stapleton, Teddy Atim, Mary Allen Ballo and Muzzamil Abdi Sheikh

Key messages

The drivers of household vulnerability to food and nutritional insecurity are multifaceted. Conflict and climate hazards are among these. At the same time, humanitarian responses are being hampered by a lack of basic services and infrastructure which increases people's vulnerability. Programming therefore must adopt a holistic approach – it needs to target improvements in fragile systems in order to build household resilience to climate and non-climate shocks.

In response to recurrent climate shocks and protracted conflict, households end up exhausting whatever options are available to them and resort to negative coping strategies which reduce their available assets. Supplying material benefits can provide immediate relief. Yet the responses need to consider how to build longer-term resilience. This will require targeting systems – i.e. creating options within the local economy and helping to relieve blockages which halt economic activity during crises.

The trends that influence vulnerability and exposure to climate and non-climate shocks are not static. Therefore, programming needs to be risk-informed – it must consider how environmental, social and conflict dynamics interact and create risks to current activities, both now and in the future. Failure to do so may cause further vulnerability.

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Introduction: project aims

This policy brief brings together findings from two rapid assessments on food and nutrition security within the context of climate and conflict, in Somalia, Mali and South Sudan.

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', funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO). The project aims to improve the nutritional status of crisis-affected populations in seven countries, including South Sudan, Somalia and Mali. It seeks to generate evidence to better shape and scale up approaches for tackling impacts of layered crises, including those influenced by climate change and conflict.

As part of this regional project, Action Against Hunger commissioned two rapid assessments to inform and bolster its humanitarian programming and interventions. 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 finding ways contribute to enhancing resilience (such as training around early warning, help with agricultural inputs or flood control measures). The assessments support strengthening the evidence base around the following: how people experience the impacts of layered humanitarian challenges; what assistance they would like to build better lives for their families; and uncovering the 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 mobilise more support for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and anticipatory humanitarian action in these areas.

Each of the two rapid assessments is thematic. The first assessment focuses on how people's nutritional status and livelihoods are being impacted by fragility, conflict and climate shocks; on household and community coping mechanisms; on how existing interventions are reducing hunger and acute malnutrition; and on the 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 in the context of the first assessment to explore how such interventions are anticipating and mitigating layered impacts of conflicts, climate and non-climate stressors.[1] 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.

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

First assessment

The first assessment (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2023a) covers the findings of interviews and focus group discussions at three sites each in Somalia, South Sudan and Mali (see Figure 1). The sites are: Baidoa, Barawe and Elbarde (Somalia); Thokchak, Mankuac and Rumameth (South Sudan); and Arnassaye, Hondo bon Ababer and Tintelout (Mali). The first assessment captured narratives and perspectives on the challenges that people are facing in their food security and livelihoods, what is most important to them, how they cope with challenges and what they are seeking to adapt or change (Box 1). The assessment situates their lived experiences within broader conflict dynamics, market fluctuations and climate trends for each country. Historical and ongoing conflicts have impacted the socioeconomic development and livelihood choices for people in all three countries. Various humanitarian and DRR actors have programmes and interventions at each site; this report seeks to understand the impact of these in terms of supporting food security, nutrition and livelihoods in the face of complex and protracted humanitarian crises.

Box 1: Lived experience and needs

The first assessment has the objective of elevating the voices of vulnerable internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities. Their contributions are disaggregated by gender, age and disability. Through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with both aid recipients and those who haven't received aid, the following topics were explored:

- Current state of food security as compared to the previous year. Whether particular household members are eating less than others. The impacts of costs of purchasing food and/or farm and livestock inputs, household debt and borrowing on food security.
- Types of disputes and violent conflict, and their impacts on food security and nutrition, livelihoods and displacement. We sought to understand what types of conflict were disrupting lives, food security and nutrition the most, and what the gendered impacts were. We also asked about coping and conflict mediation mechanisms.
- Types of climate shocks and other non-climate or conflict stressors impacting lives, livelihoods and food security. We asked what climate shocks and other stressors most affect livelihoods and food security, how people were coping and sources of information about these shocks.
- Access to internal assistance (community support structures, remittances) and external assistance (humanitarian, DRR or other). How people were reporting their food security and nutrition in relation to access and type of assistance.

At each site, around 15 to 18 interviews and four to six focus groups were conducted. The focus groups were separated by gender, age and those living with or caring for someone with a disability or illness, to capture different perspectives.

Figure 1 Location of the interviews and focus groups in the three case study countries.

Mali Arnassaye, Commune of Ber, Tombouctou region; Hondo Bon Ababer, Commune of Bourem Inaly, Tombouctou region; Tintelout, commune of Alafia, Tombouctou region.
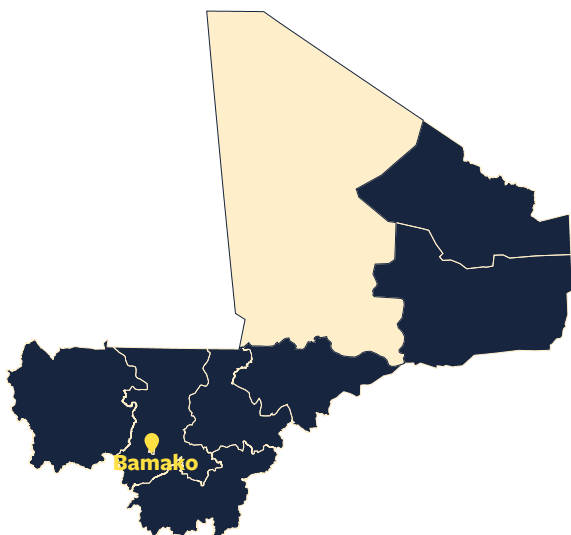
Somalia Elbarde, Bakool region; Baidoa, Bay region; Barawe, Lower Shabelle region.
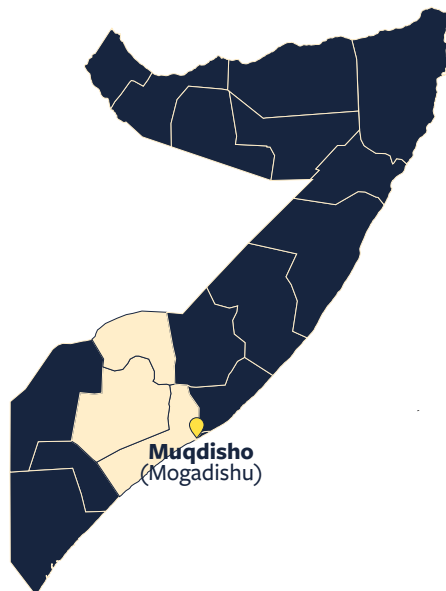
South Sudan Rumameth and Mankuac, Gogrial West County, Warrap state; Thokchak, Fangak county, Jonglei state
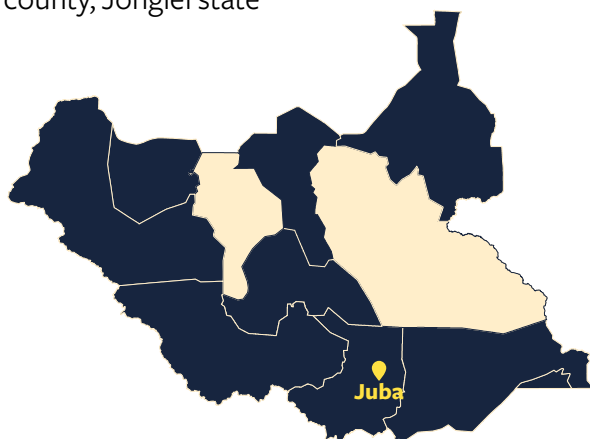
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the authors, Action Against Hunger, ODI or the GFFO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Source: United Nations Maps & Geospatial services

Second assessment

The second assessment (Atim et al., 2024) analyses interview data from 29 key informant interviews as well as existing literature (see Box 2). Interviews were carried out with individuals with the following profiles: international and national non-governmental organisation (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 with representatives of government departments for agriculture, environment and climate change. Interviewee selection was based on initial lists provided by Action Against Hunger country offices in Somalia, South Sudan and Mali. 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 experiences of programming interventions within the context of climate and non-climate shocks. It seeks to understand how programming by government and non-government staff is addressing the needs of communities affected by conflict and climate shocks. It aims to understand the barriers preventing a more coherent approach to addressing these shocks. Through semi-structured interviews we explored the following:

- How both climate hazards and conflict are 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.

Synthesis of findings from the two assessment reports

Finding 1: Conflict and climate are interacting as part of a 'fragile system' and are driving food and nutritional insecurity

People rely on systems such governance, education, healthcare, for their well-being and livelihoods. In fragile contexts these systems are patchy, as a result of factors including weak governance, corruption, sociopolitical marginalisation and inequality, and insecurity regarding land and natural resource tenure. This combination creates vulnerabilities and increases exposure to climate shocks for individuals, households and communities. As a result, the impact of a climate hazard like a drought can then become a disaster (Wisner et al., 2003; see Box 3). Conflict is linked to the same fragilities. It also influences drivers of vulnerability and exposure to the hazard, by further eroding fragile systems (Collinson, 2003; Nigel, 2009; Wiggins et al., 2021). Conflict pushes people further into poverty, destroys people's assets and social networks, disrupts local and national economies, and causes displacement (ibid.).

The impact of climate and conflict can also coincide with other sudden shocks such pandemics and price inflation (Mayhew et al., 2020). Food systems are often hardest hit as they may already be hampered by weak investment, poor infrastructure and low productivity (Wiggins, 2022).

The experiences of households in South Sudan, Somalia and Mali emphasise the need to analyse the drivers of food and nutritional insecurity as part of a fragile system (see Figure 2) rather than as impacts of single hazards. In all three contexts researched, people described how their livelihoods and food and nutritional security are affected by the combined effects of climate hazards and conflict.

In South Sudan, interviewees from across the three interview sites described how flooding had ruined pastures and caused the death of livestock. Interviewees spoke of how their households were forced to reduce their daily meals, and of adults forgoing meals for their children. Their diets shifted from food items such as milk, meat and cereals, to items considered of little nutritional value (such as water lilies, wild fruits and berries). Some said they could supplement their daily meals through buying food. However, this relied on having access to a non-agricultural wage, selling off cattle, and (rarely) the availability of remittances. While flooding was the key driver of household vulnerability in South Sudan, previous conflicts had already caused displacement and asset loss, both of which had undermined people's ability to cope with the more recent impact of flooding.

In Somalia, interviewees reported that they are unable to grow crops or keep livestock due to drought. This has resulted in a lack of variation within their diets, with many resorting to buying

the cheapest food option available. The lack of nutrition has made household members more prone to contracting illnesses. However, people reported that changes to their daily food consumption were not recent – i.e. within the past 12 months. Instead, households have seen their daily intake of food and diversity of food reduce over multiple years. Despite the fact that drought has limited the amount of food households can cultivate, interviewees stated that they were still expected to pay a tax to non-state armed groups (NSAGs) that control the areas. Outbreaks of conflict also forced the markets to close, preventing the buying and selling of goods.

In Mali, the presence of NSAGs means that people are too afraid to cultivate fields or tend to livestock too far away. At the same time crop yields have been reduced due to the impact of flooding and conflict has forced up the price households are expected to pay for farming inputs. This means that re-cultivation of land is becoming harder each year. Due to financial insecurity, households are reducing the amounts of food they eat each day and report a lack of variety in their diets. Even when households try to diversify their incomes, conflict has reduced the availability of jobs within the local economy.

While acknowledging that climate and conflict are creating humanitarian needs, practitioners interviewed described further complications due to limited access to basic services (for example, health, education, water, safety nets) and poor infrastructure (roads, irrigation perimeters). The data collected as part of the first assessment illuminates these difficulties, showing that the shocks that households are experiencing are multifaceted and prevent them from building up resilience from one event to the next.

For example, in South Sudan, while secondary livelihood activities can provide an important source of income when flooding occurs, various factors can make this difficult. Low levels of education due to a lack of money or an inability to travel long distances to school means that individuals do not have the skills needed to diversify their incomes. Poor road access makes it difficult for households to reach markets to sell goods. Access to remittances may be limited due to a low penetration of mobile banking services and the expense of canoe travel to large towns to receive money. In Somalia, households with children suffering from malnutrition face a choice between ensuring their children receive adequate medical care and needing to give up a day's income in order to travel to reach that care.
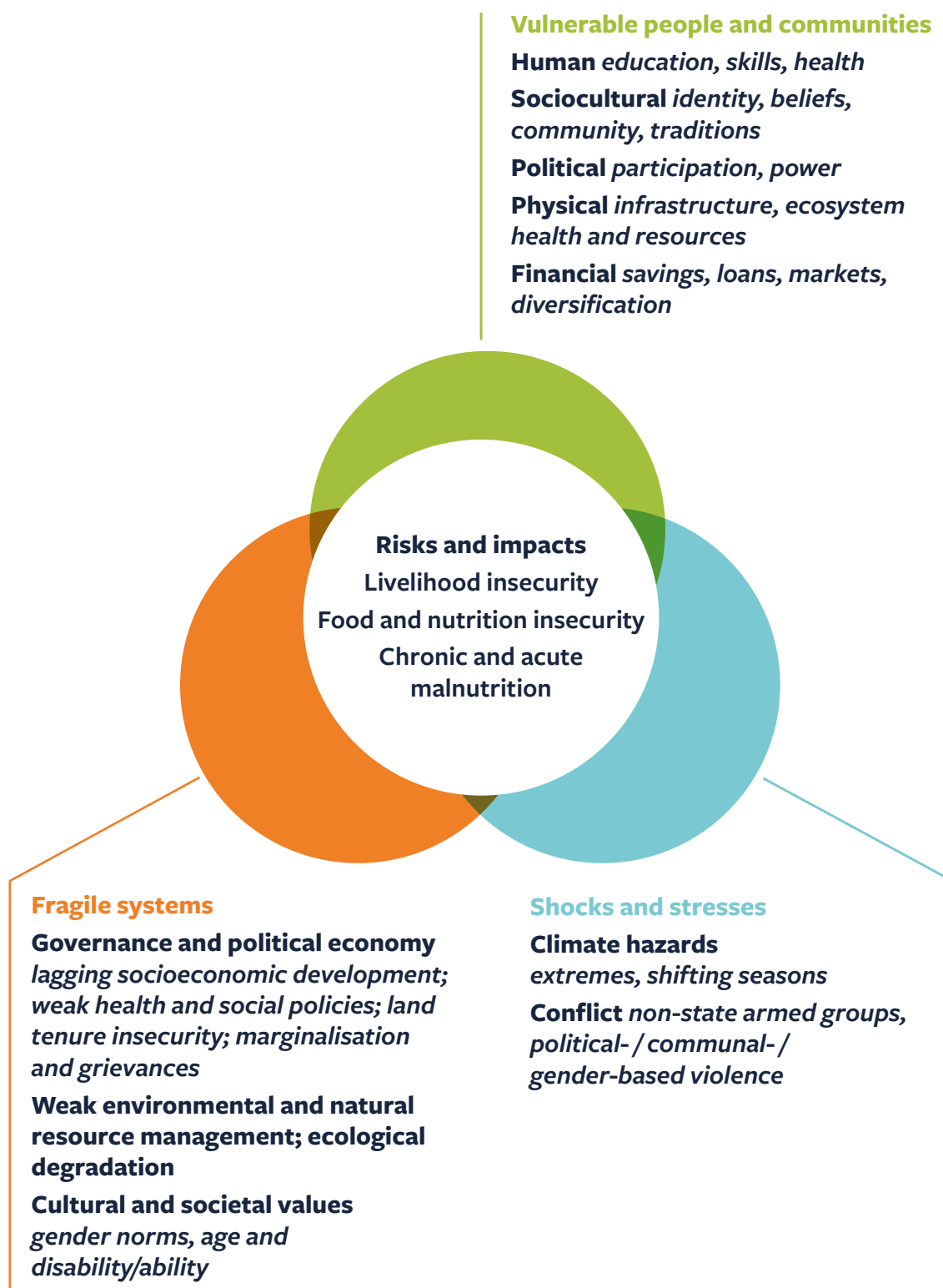
These impacts are felt not only by those with agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, but also people who rely on money being available within the local economy. Business owners reported that people lacked money to buy their goods and services. Rapid-onset events like flooding also make it harder to obtain items needed to run their businesses and push up the prices.

Measures taken by households to 'cope' also reinforce household vulnerability. In South Sudan households are selling off assets such as cattle to buy food, reducing their resource base for when future shocks occur. In Somalia, households take on more debt to buy food. Interviewees stated that due to the longevity of the crises, households had run out of assets to sell. Even if they had assets to sell, they said they would struggle to find people with the money to buy from them.

Gender and societal values contribute to household food and nutritional insecurity across the three countries. Interviewees revealed that female household members often face the highest level of burden in terms of domestic duties. Women reported being responsible for ensuring the household has enough to eat that day, while caring for young children, older relatives and those with disabilities. These roles may compete with women having to maintain jobs that may be the only source of income for the household. Women are also more likely to forgo meals so that the rest of the household has enough food.

Women are more likely to experience gender-specific risks such as gender-based violence when accessing basic services and conducting livelihood activities which has a direct impact on their food and nutritional security. They reported being attacked while travelling to and from farmland, attending medical centres and collecting food aid.

Figure 2 How intersecting systems, vulnerabilities and shocks amplify risks and impacts.

Vulnerable people and communities

Human *education, skills, health*

Sociocultural *identity, beliefs, community, traditions*

Political *participation, power*

Physical *infrastructure, ecosystem health and resources*

Financial *savings, loans, markets, diversification*

Risks and impacts
Livelihood insecurity
Food and nutrition insecurity
Chronic and acute malnutrition

Fragile systems

Governance and political economy *lagging socioeconomic development; weak health and social policies; land tenure insecurity; marginalisation and grievances*

Weak environmental and natural resource management; ecological degradation

Cultural and societal values *gender norms, age and disability/ability*

Shocks and stresses

Climate hazards *extremes, shifting seasons*

Conflict *non-state armed groups, political- / communal- / gender-based violence*

Source: S. Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2023)

Finding 2: To shift to more resilience focused interventions, humanitarian actors must work at both household and system levels

Across the three countries, humanitarian action is struggling to respond to the effects of multiple and persistent shocks. Practitioners are often dealing with the impact of one shock, when they have to switch to handling the impact of another shock. Programmes may only be designed to respond to one shock. When another happens, there is not the information or budget available to meet a new set of challenges. This is within a wider context where humanitarian needs are outstripping humanitarian funding, and is being further compounded by a reduction in overall donor funding and a shift in the focus of donors, media and the public (for instance, to Ukraine or Gaza). As a result, affected communities are only receiving a fraction of what they need to survive.

Practitioners agreed that humanitarian response needed to move from simply responding to immediate needs towards a more proactive response. Such a response would align with the ongoing and persistent challenges in the communities where they work, and would address long-term vulnerabilities which are driving food and nutritional insecurity. This message echoed the findings and recommendations from the first assessment, namely that humanitarian action must go beyond crisis management to build resilience within the communities concerned. These views were shared by those attending regional workshops where the evidence from the first assessment was presented.

Households will try to find ways to cope, but these options can be exhausted by multiple and recurrent shocks (Levine et al., 2023). Programmes can support these options by addressing the drivers of poverty and vulnerability which affect people's food and nutritional insecurity. This will mean working at the system level (e.g. food production, markets, public services) (ibid). It will require identifying the local drivers of food and nutritional insecurity, with attention to how local markets function, how decisions about food production are made at the local level and how households manage risk (Pain and Levine, 2024).

Working at the system level should look to create opportunities within the local economy. This will require interventions to consider the wider market forces that disrupt livelihoods during conflict and climate shocks (Levine and Wiggins, 2023; Wiggins et al., 2023). This may mean supporting interlocutors within supply chains, such as traders, who connect producers to domestic and foreign markets. It could involve supporting the development or repair of critical infrastructure like roads and energy networks (Levine and Wiggins, 2023; Wiggins et al., 2021). Other actions may be more policy-oriented, focusing on structural barriers such as policies targeting economic growth, such as skills and training (Levine and Wiggins, 2023).

Finally, working at the system level will need to consider what are the coping mechanisms which communities adopt and how can these be supported. Evidence shows that communities do try to adapt to potential future shocks rather than responding to one event at a time. They can identify the barriers which prevent them from taking preventive action. These include having the financial

capital to purchase construction materials and equipment to build flood defences or storage facilities to store fodder in case of droughts. Communities may lack knowledge and skills to take other preventive steps such as vaccinating livestock or planting drought-resistant crops (Levine et al., 2023).

Finding 3: Longer-term programming will require collaborative partnerships, active use of the HDP nexus and more attention to localisation

The complexity of the humanitarian response in the three countries, coupled with limited funding, calls for greater collaborative partnerships. Individual strategies for addressing food and nutritional insecurity must be designed with consideration of how they fit within a broader plan, complementing existing work to target resilience. This includes work on livelihoods, poverty reduction, education, social protection, economic development and market opportunities. Given the close links between conflict and food insecurity, programming cannot be uncoupled from trying to address local drivers of conflict. Addressing all these areas are beyond the expertise of one organisation, therefore partnerships across different areas of expertise is critical.

Practitioners interviewed for the second assessment were alive to the importance of using the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus to support a transition between humanitarian action and longer-term development strategies. Not only will this facilitate opportunities to draw upon different skillsets and expertise, but it will also enable coordination across different sets of activities to avoid duplication (Quevedo et al., 2023; ICRC et al., 2022). Collaboration could also help to overcome the aversion to implementing development programming in areas affected by conflict. It could bring together those with the skillset for implementing long-term change, but without the experience of operating in high-risk areas, with counterparts working in the humanitarian and peace-building sector who possess this experience. As noted during the closed-door high-level roundtable, the outbreak of conflict can prompt both donors and development actors to withdraw. This causes a lack of basic services which only worsen the impact of food and nutrition insecurity.[2] Greater collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace-building actors during programme decision-making could help to manage risks in areas affected by protracted conflict (ICRC et al., 2022).

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2   High-level roundtable, 'Hungry for climate action: anticipating and addressing climate impacts in conflict contexts', Berlin, 15 November 2023.

The HDP nexus is resulting in some internal reflections and discussions among donors and practitioners on how to shift programmatic response, policy and strategy towards a nexus approach. However, such a shift is currently seen as happening more in theory than in practice. Other studies support this, in finding that discussions are still focused on funding and sequencing between the three sectors (Davies and Mayhew, 2024; Chan and Schmidlin, 2023). Several barriers were identified during the second assessment. Firstly, donor funding still prioritises humanitarian action over development and peace-building activities. Donors were also seen as reluctant to fund development programming in contexts affected by conflict. It was also highlighted that both humanitarian and development actors were continuing to work within silos. Finally, humanitarian actors raised concerns that engaging in peace-building activities could undermine their perceived neutrality.

Localisation is seen as a key component for realising the HDP nexus. As our interviews and other research have found (Chan and Schmidlin, 2023), national NGOs and community-based organisations are often best placed to understand the needs of local communities. Local communities are well placed to advocate for what is needed during a crisis. However, the HDP nexus could reinforce top-down approaches to programming which risks excluding local actors from decision-making on programming (Chan and Schmidlin, 2023). National NGO and government representatives highlighted this danger, when they expressed that they did not feel part of the conversation around the HDP nexus. The second assessment also revealed that despite attempts to ensure a localised humanitarian response, including via partnerships or consortiums with national NGOs, these had not resulted in equal relationships regarding programme design and decision-making.

It is important to note that local contextual factors may have a bearing on the international–local partnerships. Insecurity and conflict can result in a lack of locally elected authorities. This can complicate how long-term changes are maintained at the local level and can mean sudden changes within government. Practitioners stated that over time they are able to gain government buy-in, but that this requires building relationships and trust. Frequent changes within government force the need to foster new working relationships with government departments, which in turn slows down progress.

Moving from crisis management to resilience

Reduced humanitarian funding is resulting in **limited resources to respond** to people's food and nutritional insecurity.

The **complexity of humanitarian needs** is being driven by both climate and non-climate shocks.

Response is complicated by **fragile systems**, lacking the basic services and infrastructure to support people during crisis.

Protracted and recurrent climate and non-climate shocks can exhaust the options open to people to respond during crises

| Recommendations | Moving from crisis management to resilience |

In the short term, humanitarian action needs to respond to people's needs created by livelihood, food and nutritional insecurity. Longer term, humanitarian action needs to consider ways it can support resilience by working at the system level, to support people's ability to respond during crises by giving people a greater number of options.

A broad, long-term plan for food and nutritional security

- Identifying what is already in place targeting resilience; food security, livelihoods, poverty reduction, education, social protection, economic development market opportunities.
- Building partnerships with organisations experienced in delivering programming in these sectors.
- Working with communities, helping them advocate for support and investment that they require.
- Policy-orientated advocacy targeting structural barriers.

Utilising the experience and skillset across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace nexus

- Building cooperation and coordination with development programming, helping to bridge the gap between humanitarian action and longer term development.
- Working alongside peace actors to address the drivers of local conflict, in turn influencing peoples' vulnerability to food and nutritional insecurity.
- Improve coordination of activities and avoid duplication.
- Help to overcome risk aversion among partners inexperienced in working in high-risk environments.

Local partnerships

- Local actors need to be 'in the room', forming equal partnerships with international counterparts in programme decision making and design.
- Local actors have knowledge of community needs, local conflict dynamics and how communities respond during times of crisis.

Targeting barriers within the wider economy

- Supporting interlocutors connecting supply chains
- Supporting the development and repair of critical infrastructure (e.g. roads, energy supply).

Finding 4: Programming must be risk informed, incorporating both current and future risks

Programming must become more flexible and adaptive to contexts where multiple, recurrent and intersecting hazards are creating risks for households (see Box 3). To support more resilient communities, both donors and those implementing programming must ensure that programming is risk-informed – it must consider how environmental, social and conflict dynamics interact and create risks to activities, both now and in the future (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2019; 2023). Projects aiming to build community resilience and adaptation can fail to account for these dynamics (Gulati et al., 2023). Where this happens, programming could be maladapted and lock people into livelihoods which are not resilient to future trends (Gulati et al., 2023; Mayhew et al., 2020).

Being risk-informed requires having the information to make informed decisions. Having access to good conflict analysis is a critical part of this. This can provide programming with analysis that allows it the flexibility to adapt to fast-changing situations. Good conflict analysis can also inform conflict-sensitive programming and may also be able to contribute to longer-term peace-building efforts. Local knowledge is key to improving the conflict analysis that is available to organisations. Given the close proximity of local actors to the conflict, communities can provide a more intricate detailing of local conflict dynamics. This can also mean that data is more timely and can enable more preventive action to be taken. Local knowledge can provide critical early warning information regarding the increased risk of violence. Warning signs can often be based on local customs, symbolism or everyday observations which may not be obvious to outside observers (Davies and Mayhew, 2024).

Collecting such data can be resource-intensive and beyond the capacity of individual organisations. Current conflict analysis can lack the depth and accuracy needed to achieve these aims. Greater collaboration with actors experienced in micro-analysis of local drivers of conflict, such as peace-building actors, could help other organisations that lack this capacity (Davies and Mayhew, 2024). Knowledge platforms could also provide a means to share such information across different sectors and organisations, especially where organisations lack the resources to carry out this level of analysis. Part of this may rely on advocating to donors to fund publicly available data. But this is also about developing trust between organisations. As both the second assessment and other research (ibid.) have found, in a competitive donor funding environment, good conflict analysis equals better programming. Having access to good conflict analysis is only one part of the solution. This analysis needs to be tied to programming. It needs to form part of a system, which allows analysis to feed back into decision-making (ibid.).

Risk-informed programming

To support resilient communities, programming needs to be risk-informed: considering both current and future risks allows informed decison making.

Conflict dynamics | Accessing information relevant to the programme context

Having access to good conflict analysis can support conflict-sensitive programming, allow programming to contribute to longer term peacebuilding aims and provide programming with the information necessary to be flexible and adaptable to fast-changing situations.

Available conflict analysis may lack a focus on local conflict dynamics. Working with those who have experience of carrying out micro analysis of violence, such as peace actors, can generate more nuanced conflict analysis.

Available resources and capacity can mean that access to good conflict analysis varies between different organisations. **Knowledge sharing** could help to fill gaps, but may require building trust between different organisations.

The availability of good conflict analysis needs to be tied to programing. Conflict analysis needs to form part of a system, which allows conflict analysis to feedback into decision making.

Weather and climate | Varying availability between contexts presents different sets of challenges

Access to weather and climate information could provide knowledge which helps inform livelihood decision making that impacts food and nutritional security. Longer term climate information could also provide vital information that enables programming to account for future risks.

Accessing reliable weather and climate information can be obstructed by a lack of infrastructure, both in terms of collecting data data and being able to communicate it to rural communities.

In other contexts, it is less about having access to weather and climate information, and more about **being able to translate such information into timely responses** in order for people to take action.

Where programming **fails to account for future climate trends**, programming runs the risk of maladaptation and locking people into livelihoods which are not resilient to future trends.

Caution! Information can frame how people make decisions regarding livelihoods and these changes carry risks. Therefore it is important to communicate risk-informed information as helping people to manage uncertainty, not to make predictions.

Box 3: Defining risk

Risk is the potential for negative impacts – the loss of life or ecosystem services, injury, destruction of or damage to assets – which could occur (but which have not yet actually occurred) to a system, society or a community if one or more hazardous events (including conflict events) happen. However, the types and severity of impacts that could occur often depend more on socially constructed vulnerability (often driven by fragility and historical and ongoing conflicts) and on where livelihoods and assets are located, creating proximate exposure to hazards. As noted in the 2015 Global Assessment of Risk, 'exposure and vulnerability, as well as hazard itself (through climate change and environmental degradation) are socially constructed through underlying risk drivers, including globalised economic development, poverty and inequality, badly planned and managed urban development, environmental degradation and climate change' (UNDRR, 2015: 33).

Across the three countries the climate shocks experienced by communities are likely to get worse. Therefore, understanding and incorporating these trends into programme decision-making is critical. However, practitioners stated that they either lack the availability of information or the capacity to analyse trends and communicate this information to communities in time. This makes it difficult to respond to climate shocks or communicate information in advance to communities. The availability of weather and climate information differed in the three countries.

Having access to weather and climate information is only part of the solution. Such information is only useful if communities have the means to take action. Somalia is a case in point. Although interviewees in the first assessment referred to having access to such information via social media, recurrent drought and protracted conflict have reduced the available options for communities to respond. Therefore, availability of weather and climate information, and early warning systems must be linked to opportunities for local communities to take preventive action to protect their livelihoods.

Being risk-informed requires knowing the risks and translating these to communities, with the aim of helping communities to manage uncertainty rather than of predicting the future. Both our research and that of others (Levine et al., 2023) highlighted the danger that communities can become sceptical in the face of recurrent and protracted climate shocks, especially where previous 'predictions' have not come true. People are often making trade-offs between immediate decisions and those which they see as far-off. Information can lead to adaptations in people's livelihoods and coping strategies, which in turn will have implications for food and nutritional security.

Conclusion

Both climate and conflict are resulting in livelihood insecurity and as a result are contributing to food and nutritional insecurity in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. Fragile systems that exist within these countries are creating vulnerabilities and increasing exposure to climate hazards. Conflict is further exacerbating people's vulnerabilities, compounding the impact of climate shocks. While people try to find ways to lessen the impact of climate hazards, the recurrent and protracted nature of these shocks means that people are having to respond multiple times. These shocks are often felt on food systems already under strain from weak investment, poor infrastructure and low productivity.

As acknowledged by practitioners, in addressing food and nutritional insecurity, humanitarian action needs to contribute to supporting people's resilience and not just responding to immediate needs. This will require working in partnerships – with both international and national partners – across the HDP nexus and situating individual strategies within a broader plan to address food and nutritional insecurity.

Programming will need to be risk-informed. It will need to account for not only single hazards relating to climate or conflict, but must encompass how wider environmental, social and conflict trends are likely to affect the outcomes of programming, in the short, medium and long terms. Access to information, such as climate and conflict data, will be essential. This information needs to form part of a broader system that facilitates its communication to both communities and decision making linked to programming.

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