

BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CONFLICT THROUGH FOOD-SECURITY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS: AN OVERVIEW

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FOOD INSECURITY AS A CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF CONFLICT

“Most wars of the late 20th century and early 21st century are ‘food wars,’ meaning that food is used as a weapon, food systems are destroyed in the course of conflict, and food insecurity persists as a legacy of conflict.”¹

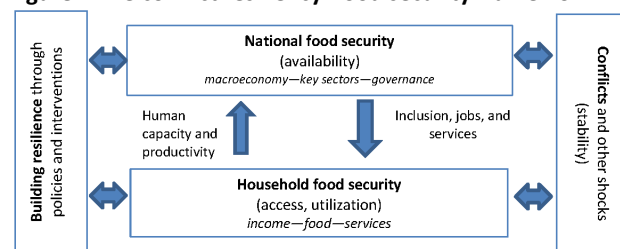
One and a half billion people still live in fragile, conflict-affected areas. People in these countries are about twice as likely to be malnourished and to die during infancy as people in other developing countries.² This outcome is often a direct consequence of conflict: conflict reduces food availability by destroying agricultural assets and infrastructure. Conflict also often destroys physical infrastructure and increases the security risks associated with accessing food markets, thus driving up local food prices. This negative impact on food availability is accompanied by conflicts’ detrimental impacts on household-level food security, particularly on key determinants of food insecurity such as nutrition, health, and education.

Food insecurity is not only a consequence of conflict but can fuel and drive conflicts, especially in the presence of unstable political regimes, a youth bulge, stunted economic development, slow or falling economic growth, and high inequality.³ In particular, increases in food prices have greatly increased the risk of political unrest and conflicts. The 2007–2008 global food crisis sparked rioting in 48 countries, and food insecurity at the national and household levels is a major cause of conflict in Arab countries, which supports the widely held view that food insecurity has been among the crucial causes of the Arab awakening.⁴ One of the key explanations for this “Arab exceptionalism” is that all Arab countries are *net food importers* and the vast majority of people in them are net food consumers.

To conceptualize these links between conflict and food security, Figure 1 presents a framework for building resilience to conflict. Such resilience is defined as “helping countries and households to prevent, anticipate, prepare for, cope with, and recover from *conflicts*, and not only bounce back to where they were before the *conflicts* occurred but become even better off” (adapted from the IFPRI 2020 policy consultation definition).⁵ In this framework, conflicts are one type of shock that hits food security at both the national and household levels. The framework emphasizes that specific conflicts often occur together with other shocks (for example, other conflicts, natural disasters, price shocks, and so on). The

interdependencies between shocks (such as droughts occurring in the context of conflict) often lead to “complex emergencies.” Resilience at the national level is mainly built through policies and interventions and is a precondition for household-level resilience. Household resilience can be further enhanced through programs sponsored by governments or international partners.

Figure 1 The conflict resiliency–food security framework



Source: Authors’ illustration based on Ecker and Breisinger (2012).⁶

Given that resilience-enhancing food-security policies and programs are highly context specific, we have chosen four conflict-affected countries as case studies. One country is a lower-income country (Somalia) and three are lower-middle-income countries (Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen). Yemen and Egypt are examples of “complex emergencies”—that is, both countries have experienced a series of economic shocks that may have contributed to conflict. In those two cases, we focus on describing conflict’s impact on food security and present selected policy reform options. The other two countries (Sudan and Somalia) have been in conflict for many years. In those cases, we focus on the local-level causes of conflict and program-level interventions for enhancing conflict resilience.

YEMEN: BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CONFLICT THROUGH BETTER GOVERNANCE AND IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY

Yemen has seen a variety of conflicts over the past decade, including the Houthi insurgency in the north of Yemen, Al Qaeda–linked activities, and a movement in the former South Yemen demanding more autonomy or even independence. As a consequence, an estimated 41 percent of Yemenis were directly affected by conflict in 2013.⁷ The country was also hit by a series of economic shocks, including the triple global crises in 2007–2008 and the food price spike in 2011. The positive relationship—mainly resulting from the influx of

internally displaced people, price surges, and severe fuel shortages—between the levels of conflict in 2011 and food insecurity in Yemen has been confirmed.

Building resilience to conflict in Yemen will mean the country not only bounces back from the 2011 conflicts but becomes better off than before. To support this process and enhance conflict resilience in Yemen, the country has a National Food Security Strategy (NFSS) in place with the following seven-point action plan:

1. Reform petroleum subsidies to benefit the food insecure
2. Improve the business climate to foster economic growth and job creation
3. Reduce the production and consumption of *qat*, a stimulating drug, and foster agricultural growth
4. Improve food-security risk management
5. Implement the water sector strategy
6. Target public investments and improve service provision
7. Launch high-level awareness campaigns

Implementing the NFSS will require not only financial support from international partners but also strong Yemeni institutions capable of managing and coordinating multisector policies and investments. Positive steps in that direction were recently taken with the establishment of the Yemeni Food Security Supreme Council in May 2013 and the related Technical Food Security Secretariat in September 2013.

EGYPT: BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CONFLICT THROUGH FOOD POLICY REFORM

When the revolution in Egypt started in January 2011, “bread,” “dignity,” and “social justice” were among the widely chanted slogans on Tahrir Square and beyond. While few observers had anticipated a revolution, the economic and food-security situation, which had been deteriorating since 2005 because of worsening poverty and a succession of crises, may have indicated looming upheaval. One key government response in Egypt (and other Arab countries) has been scaling up subsidies. While food subsidies play an especially important role in protecting the poor from even steeper poverty increases, they also contribute to rising fiscal deficits and may have contributed to the double burden of malnutrition.

Given the current economic climate and fragile security situation, in which government resources are constrained and rising poverty has meant growing food insecurity and nutrition challenges, politically feasible subsidy reform options may include the following:⁸

1. Improve supply chain efficiency
2. Improve targeting
3. Use targeted transfers and nutrition interventions to complement and substitute for subsidies

Increasing the subsidy system’s efficiency can free up urgently needed resources that can be invested in more targeted food-security and nutrition interventions as well as job-creating initiatives in poorer areas. This in turn may help create more opportunities, especially for young people, thus reducing the motivation to participate in conflict. However, Egypt’s history and that of other countries suggests that changing the subsidy system can meet significant resistance

and stir conflict and uprisings. Therefore, educating the public and managing expectations about subsidy reform could be critical for success. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation system is needed to inform decisionmaking, and policymakers need to learn and adjust accordingly during the reform process. Finally, subsidy reform is likely to be most successful when viewed in the broader context of resilience and integrated into a national strategy for development and food security.

SOMALIA: DROUGHT, LIVESTOCK PRICE SHOCKS, AND CIVIL WAR

Somalia has been frequently described using such terms as *state failure*, *anarchy*, and *warlord economy*. Although violent conflicts have occurred all over the country over the past two decades, the most recent conflict outbreaks have taken place in the central and southern parts and in particular in the Bay and Hiiraan regions. Those regions, where the Islamist Al Shabab militia has been active, are also where food insecurity reportedly has been most acute after the intense and destructive droughts of 2011. Research confirms that droughts fuel conflict in Somalia. An increase in temperature anomalies and drought length by 1 within-region standard deviation increases conflict likelihood by 62 percent.⁹ At the same time, people’s motivation to participate in conflict in Somalia is often driven by economic forces. An increase in temperature and drought by 1 within-region standard deviation decreases cattle prices (a major income source for many households) by about 4 percent, which in turn results in a 72 percent increase in the likelihood of conflict. The expected change in climate will worsen the situation.

Improving households’ resilience to conflict in Somalia requires urgent action to strengthen people’s resilience to extreme weather shocks. Climate change adaptation needs to be considered an integral part of conflict-prevention strategies. Alternative income sources and therefore economic growth and diversification are needed, in addition to social protection mechanisms. Yet the lack of national governance currently limits the range of feasible policy options, particularly options for public safety-net measures through national income redistribution. Feasible short- to medium-term resilience-building options may include improvements in the functioning of local livestock markets, for example through expansion of communication networks and services, realized by the private sector with the support of international development partners. Better integrating and diversifying Somalia’s meat supply chain through investments in road infrastructure, slaughterhouses, and cold-storage warehouses is another option. Introducing and expanding credit and insurance markets may also help herders cope with droughts. Finally, herders may need financial and technical support to acquire more drought-resistant and earlier-marketable animals in order to be better prepared for more frequent and intense droughts in the future.

SUDAN: CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND LOCAL CONFLICTS

Sudan has a history of repeated conflict events starting well before its independence. In addition to a national civil war

between the north and the south, local conflict events multiplied within Sudan and South Sudan. Resource exploitation, once a source of warfare financing, became a warfare objective in itself. Ethnic tensions that have evolved into local or regional conflicts increasingly seem to be linked to environmental factors and natural resources, especially oil and gas reserves, Nile waters, hardwood timbers, rangeland, and rainfed agricultural land. Pastoralist and agropastoralist communities have also been increasingly under pressure as a result of dynamic population growth and more frequent and intense droughts. Research confirms the relationship between temperature shocks and interpersonal violence in Sudan. A change in temperature anomalies by 1 standard deviation increased the frequency of violent conflict by 32 percent. Furthermore, the risk of conflict in Sudan is expected to increase by a range of 24 to 31 percent by 2030 due to changes in the climate. Competition between herders and farmers over natural resources, and in particular over water availability, also exacerbates the strong relationship between temperature shocks and violence in Sudan and South Sudan.¹⁰

Building resilience to weather shocks and conflict in Sudan and South Sudan requires investing inside and outside the livestock sector in order to promote sustainable livestock-sector development and income diversification. This includes (1) strengthening the productive sectors, (2) improving basic social services, and (3) establishing productive safety nets. Productive sectors and livelihood diversification can be promoted by government policies or donor interventions that support education and skills training; access to credit; agricultural intensification; and access to markets, especially livestock markets, and to information through transportation, market, and communication infrastructure. Provision of basic services (health, education, security) can contribute to peace building and longer-term resilience. Finally, establishing productive safety nets involves providing predictable income sources to vulnerable households through cash transfers, food transfers, or paid labor within a public works program.

KEY LESSONS FROM CASE STUDIES AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Building resilience to conflict requires country-specific policies and a state that includes its citizens in the decisionmaking processes and provides adequate services. However, several general lessons emerge from the four case studies:

- Conflicts often accompany and are related to other shocks such as economic crises, price shocks, and natural disasters. Such interdependencies among shocks often

lead to “complex emergencies” and need to be considered in policy and program design.

- Increasing subsidies is a favored policy measure in times of crisis, helping keep poverty and food insecurity levels lower than they would otherwise be. However, such measures do not qualify as resilience building because they are not expected to help countries become better off.
- Climate change adaptation should be an integral part of conflict prevention and food-security strategies, partly because climate change is expected to significantly increase the likelihood of future conflict.
- Alternative income sources and therefore economic growth and diversification are crucial to building resilience to conflict in particularly vulnerable pastoralist and agropastoralist areas. Also, price information systems, the introduction and expansion of credit and insurance markets, and geographic targeting of social safety nets may help people better cope with droughts and related price shocks.
- Building functioning and effective institutions is essential to building resilience to conflict. Lack of national governance often limits the range of feasible policy options. Reducing corruption and improving accountability and transparency is critical in addressing issues that exacerbate tensions and lead to conflicts.

Finally, several important knowledge and research gaps remain in the context of conflict resilience. Significant questions related to conflict resolution and the political economy of conflicts are not well understood. Given the high costs to economic development, we need to better understand how to help some countries escape the vicious circle of violence. Further, very little is known on how best to contain the escalation of violence from low intensity to high intensity. The vulnerability of some groups (for example, pastoralist communities) also raises the question of social protection interventions’ efficiency as far as supporting those most in need and strengthening the sustainability of long-term recovery. Additional implementation challenges may relate to integrating returnees (either refugees or internally displaced persons) and ex-combatants. Interventions need to be sensitive to the potential conflicts among these different groups, and they need to be designed in ways that promote reintegration and postconflict reconciliation, rather than contribute to new conflicts.

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NOTES

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- ⁵ More information is available at www.2020resilience.ifpri.info/about/.
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