CHAPTER 5

Refugees and Conflict-Affected People Integrating Displaced Communities into Food Systems

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KEY FINDINGS

- More than half of all undernourished people live in countries affected by conflict.
- Food insecurity and dispossession of agricultural assets can both trigger and result from civil strife.
- Most conflict-affected countries are overwhelmingly rural, and rural populations are more vulnerable to climate shocks that often compound conflict situations.
- Refugee host countries must often decide whether to focus responses on preparing affected populations to return home or helping them become economically self-reliant.
- Integrating conflict-affected people into food systems—either in their new homes or the places they fled—can help them rebuild their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide long-term refugees access to land and livelihoods to help them achieve food security while also strengthening local economies.
- Rebuild local agriculture and food value chains to help conflict-affected people move beyond subsistence agriculture, rejoin exchange markets, adopt climate-smart practices, and become resilient to economic and climatic shocks.
- Protect agriculture, food production, and rural livelihoods before, during, and after conflict.

Conflict and climate change have been key factors underlying the recent surge in global hunger numbers. People living in fragile rural contexts are most at risk. Food insecurity inflicted by conflict, climatic, and economic shocks, often in combination, is a main driver of forced migration and refugee flows. Such movements of people, whether within the borders of their own countries or crossing borders, often have adverse effects on food availability and access in host communities and areas left behind. Integrating conflict-affected people into food systems—either in their places of origin or the locales to which they have fled—could help them substantially to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, strengthening food systems and food security would remove at least one potential source of competition and conflict.

This chapter examines approaches and innovations to more fully include forcibly displaced and conflict-affected people (including host communities) in food systems, and the benefits of inclusion for these populations and society more broadly.

CRITICAL FACTS AND CHALLENGES

CONFLICT IS A MAJOR DRIVER OF FOOD INSECURITY.

The recent rise in global hunger has resulted mainly from protracted conflicts: more than half of all undernourished people live in conflict-affected countries (Box 1).¹ Conflict is not the sole factor driving food crises. Drought, other climate shocks, and economic disruptions often are compounding factors. These same factors have also contributed to recent increases in forced migration. Every minute, 25 people flee their homes. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, estimates that 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced in 2018, the highest number in decades (Box 1). Of these, 41.3 million were internally displaced, that is, they were forced to move to other localities within their own country, while 29.4 million were international refugees and asylum seekers (see Box 2 for definitions).

BOX 1 EIGHT INCONVENIENT FACTS

- 1. CONFLICT IS THE NUMBER ONE DRIVER OF FOOD INSECURITY.** In 2016, 489 million of the world's 815 million undernourished people lived in conflict-affected countries.^a Conflict, often compounded by climate change impacts, is also the main cause of food crises.^b
- 2. CONFLICT IS ALSO A MAJOR CAUSE OF THE GROWING REFUGEE CRISIS.** At the end of 2018, an estimated 41.3 million people were identified as being internally displaced because of armed conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations, and 29.4 million as refugees or asylum seekers (see Box 2).^c
- 3. MOST REFUGEES MAINTAIN THIS STATUS FOR PROLONGED PERIODS.** In 2018, 15.9 million people had been refugees for five years or longer. Of this number, 5.8 million had been refugees in their host country for more than 20 years. Almost 3 million refugees currently live in camps.^c
- 4. AN ESTIMATED 600 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE LIVE IN FRAGILE OR CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS.** 10- to 24-year-olds often comprise the largest group of the total affected population, yet little attention is paid to their needs or capabilities.^d
- 5. CHILDREN UNDER 18 REPRESENTED ABOUT HALF OF THE TOTAL REFUGEE POPULATION IN 2018.** The countries with the highest shares of young refugees are the Democratic Republic of the Congo (63 percent), South Sudan (62 percent), and Uganda (62 percent).^e
- 6. THE SHARE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE WORLD'S REFUGEE POPULATION WAS 48 PERCENT IN 2018.** However, the proportion varies from context to context. For instance, women make up well over half the refugee populations located in Africa south of the Sahara, while their share is smaller among refugees who have fled to Europe and South America.^e
- 7. IN MOST CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES, THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION IS RURAL AND LARGELY DEPENDENT ON AGRICULTURE.** Agriculture's share in GDP averaged 37 percent in affected areas, two to four times higher than in developing contexts not affected by conflict or fragility.^f
- 8. UNDERNOURISHMENT IS HIGH IN CONFLICT ZONES.** In developing countries affected by conflict and crisis, the prevalence of undernourishment is almost three times higher than in other developing countries.^{a,d,f}

FIGURE B1 Global forced displacement, 2009–2018

Source: UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018* (Geneva: 2019).

Note: "UN refugees" includes UNRWA refugees (Palestine refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and UNHCR refugees (all other refugees as counted by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency).

Source: (a) C. Holleman, J. Jackson, M. Sanchez, and R. Vos, *Sowing the Seeds of Peace for Food Security: Disentangling the Nexus between Conflict, Food Security and Peace*, FAO Agricultural Development Economics Technical Study No. 2 (Rome: FAO, 2017); (b) FSIN (Food Security Information Network), *Global Report on Food Crises 2019* (Rome: 2019); FSIN, *Global Report on Food Crises 2019 Mid-Year Update* (Rome: 2019); (c) UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018* (Geneva: 2019); (d) FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017* (Rome: 2017); (e) UNHCR, "Refugee Statistics," accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>; (f) FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2018: Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development* (Rome: 2018).

BOX 2 WHAT IS FORCED MIGRATION? WHAT ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS? WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

Forced Migration: A migratory movement in which there is an element of coercion, including threats to life and livelihood from natural or human-made causes. Forced migration can include movements of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), but can also include people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, or famine, or as a result of large-scale infrastructure projects such as the construction of dams, roads, ports, or airports.^a

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): People who have been forced to flee or leave their homes or places of residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed-conflict situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.^b

Refugee: Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside his/her country of nationality or former country of residence and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to that country or avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.^c

Source: (a) FAO, *FAO Migration Framework: Migration as a Choice and an Opportunity for Rural Development* (Rome: 2019); (b) United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (New York: 1998); (c) UNHCR, "Article 1A Refugee Convention 1951."

MOST CONFLICT-RELATED FOOD CRISES LAST MORE THAN 3 YEARS.²

Likewise, internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees typically remain in their new locations for prolonged periods. This creates a dilemma for host countries: should they focus responses on preparing affected populations to return home or on helping them become economically self-reliant and integrating them into their new communities? In most cases, security concerns limit options for safe and voluntary return and resettlement, while local integration may face significant resource constraints and opposition from host communities. These challenges are greatest for developing countries affected by conflict or their neighbors, as this is where 84 percent of refugees and IDPs are found.³

BOTH CONFLICT AND MASS DISPLACEMENTS OF PEOPLE DISRUPT FOOD SYSTEMS AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN COMMUNITIES OF ORIGIN, TRANSIT, AND DESTINATION.

The impacts of conflict are felt across the entire food value chain, from production to marketing. Large influxes of people can also strain local food markets and basic services in communities hosting migrants.

CONFLICT, FORCED MIGRATION, AND FOOD CRISES

THE NUMBER OF CIVIL CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED SINCE 2010.⁴

Food insecurity can exacerbate feelings of deprivation and dispossession that underlie the recent rise in civil strife. In 2017, conflict in South Sudan caused famine in several parts of the country. In Yemen, home to today's worst humanitarian crisis, some 3.7 million people have been forcibly displaced since 2015, leaving more than 20 million food insecure and nearly 10 million on the brink of famine and starvation.⁵

AGRICULTURE-DEPENDENT PEOPLE AND RURAL DWELLERS ARE AFFECTED THE MOST, AS MOST OF TODAY'S CIVIL CONFLICTS TAKE PLACE IN SUCH CONTEXTS.

Rural populations make up 60 percent of the total population of countries affected by conflict and protracted crises.⁶ Rural populations are also more vulnerable to drought and other climate shocks that often compound conflict situations, destroying livelihoods and causing food insecurity. Syria's civil war, for example, has crushed the once-vibrant middle-income economy, leaving roughly 85 percent of the population

impoverished, with more than 6 million people suffering from chronic hunger.⁷

In pastoral areas of Africa, protracted crises are harming livelihoods and disrupting longstanding livestock migration and trade routes.⁸ Conflicts in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda have contributed to the breakdown of traditional systems governing the mobility of herds seeking pasture and water.

PROTRACTED CONFLICTS ARE A MAJOR CAUSE OF THE RISE IN FORCED MIGRATION.⁹ People living amid violence often must choose between the possibility of experiencing harm if they stay where they are or a highly uncertain and insecure future if they leave. Both options can be risky to survival itself. In Syria, conflict and drought have contributed to forced migration and displacement from rural areas, leaving fewer workers available for livestock-rearing and crop production. Many Syrian households have sold their livestock to generate income, as often to fund migration as to buy food, leaving them poorer and less resilient and weakening the local food system.¹⁰

FOOD INSECURITY AND DISPOSSESSION OF AGRICULTURAL ASSETS CAN ALSO TRIGGER CONFLICT.¹¹ While sudden food price spikes or loss of assets or harvests do not single-handedly cause conflict, they can stoke civil strife by compounding other grievances and discontent. In Yemen, for instance, overall economic decline, worsening living standards, and the government's failure to address these economic and social challenges have helped escalate political unrest into violent conflict.¹²

Food insecurity and outmigration also tend to disrupt social cohesion in local communities. Where governance is weak, rising food prices and food insecurity may result in perceived marginalization and exclusion, aggravating existing grievances.¹³ Grievances formed along ethnic or religious lines (or other forms of social cleavage) increase the probability of civil unrest.¹⁴

THE REALITIES UNDERLYING CONFLICT, DISPLACEMENT, AND PERSISTENT FOOD INSECURITY TEND TO BE COMPLEX. Developing effective responses therefore requires a robust understanding of the root causes, and programs and support measures must address those root causes. Protecting agriculture, food production, and

rural livelihoods before, during, and after conflict is crucial in most contexts. As food insecurity and conflict often feed one another, lasting solutions will be difficult to achieve if humanitarian, development, and peace-building responses do not come together.

ENGAGING DISPLACED AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED PEOPLE IN FOOD SYSTEM ACTIVITIES

Existing responses still consist mostly of patchy humanitarian and emergency actions supporting agricultural production, expanding social protection programs, and aiding displaced people in refugee camps and other areas of settlement. Yet policy assessments suggest the need for multiple well-coordinated responses that look beyond immediate emergency situations.¹⁵ Accordingly, key actors have started reformulating their response frameworks along the "humanitarian-development-peace nexus."¹⁶ That said, there is neither a prescription for how to address these problems nor any guaranteed remedy. But there are examples of promising responses that focus on strengthening food systems while helping to sustain peace by improving food security and resilience and allowing forcibly displaced people to take part in social and economic activities.

CLIMATE-SMART AGRIFOOD SUPPLY CHAINS CAN ENHANCE RESILIENCE TO CONFLICT AND OTHER SHOCKS.

Any solution should take into consideration the needs of those who stay in affected regions, those who flee, and those belonging to host communities. Rebuilding local agricultural and food economies can help affected people to move beyond subsistence agriculture, rejoin exchange markets, adopt resilience-enhancing measures such as climate change adaptation, and stay in their community when it is safe for them to do so.

The post-conflict recovery in Uganda's Northern Region is a good example of how sustained investments in peace, recovery, and household resilience can lead to substantial improvements in food security and nutrition. Two decades of conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and government forces resulted in mass displacement and a surge

in poverty and malnutrition, particularly among the Acholi people. Forced to live in camps, the Acholi became almost entirely dependent on international food assistance.

After the LRA's retreat in 2006–2007, IDP camps closed, with most residents returning to their places of origin in the following years. The Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for the region facilitated peacebuilding efforts and prioritized investments in agriculture to cement post-conflict recovery. Multiple organizations have helped ex-combatants and returning IDPs get back on their feet through the provision of agricultural tools and inputs, including climate-resilient seeds, support for livestock restocking, and the introduction of cash- and food-for-work programs. These measures brought major improvements in food security and nutrition in the region; the Acholi have not needed any food assistance since 2011.¹⁷

PROVIDING LONG-TERM REFUGEES ACCESS TO LAND AND LIVELIHOODS CAN BENEFIT BOTH THE REFUGEES AND THEIR HOST COMMUNITIES. However, post-conflict political conditions often limit or preclude the possibility of third-country refugee resettlement or voluntary return and repatriation. For example, the many Rohingya refugees from Myanmar currently face bleak prospects in their new location in Bangladesh, given their severely limited income-earning opportunities (Box 3).

Yet, in some contexts, integrating large refugee populations into local economies generates brighter outcomes. Uganda currently hosts 1.2 million refugees, the third largest refugee population in the world.¹⁸ The country's Refugee Policy (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) grant refugees access to land, freedom of movement, and the right to seek employment. This strategy has helped refugees, mostly from South Sudan, to build independent livelihoods and achieve food security while strengthening local economies.¹⁹

BOX 3 GRIM PROSPECTS FOR THE ROHINGYA IN BANGLADESH

Paul Dorosh (IFPRI) and John Hoddinott (Cornell University)

Between August and October 2017, 671,000 Rohingya fled violence and persecution in Myanmar for the safety of Cox's Bazar District in the Chittagong Region of southeastern Bangladesh. There, they joined Rohingya who had fled earlier violence over the previous 20 years. Fifty thousand of the early arrivals have refugee status, but the vast majority of the other approximately one million Rohingya are designated "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)," with no immediate hope of a safe return to Myanmar or a life outside the camps.

An October 2018 survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and IFPRI found that access to food assistance was nearly universal: 62 percent of the forcibly displaced Rohingya received a general food distribution consisting of rice, lentils, and micronutrient-fortified cooking oil; 34 percent received electronic food vouchers that could be redeemed for 19 different food items; and 4 percent reported receiving both.

Yet despite this international effort, the Rohingya are, at best, merely surviving. By any measure—income, consumption, assets—they are poor. While average caloric availability exceeds minimum required levels, Rohingya households consume very little fruit, vegetables, or animal-sourced foods, and 32 percent of children are chronically undernourished.

The Rohingya's long-term prospects may well be grim. To date, a return to Myanmar is neither safe nor viable, a view shared by both the Rohingya and UN humanitarian agencies. Meanwhile, other competing needs and donor fatigue threaten to reduce the level of support from both the Government of Bangladesh and the donor community. There are no easy solutions. In the short term, continued aid will be essential to avoid a humanitarian crisis. More lasting solutions will require the political resolve to provide the Rohingya the opportunity to rebuild their own sustainable livelihoods.

Source: This box draws on BIDS and IFPRI, *Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) Household Survey, 2018* (Dhaka and Washington, DC: forthcoming).

Zambia and Ethiopia have applied similar policy approaches. The Zambian government has an official strategy for integrating Angolan and Rwandan refugees that regularizes their status and relaxes restrictions on freedom of movement. Likewise, the Ethiopian government recently introduced revised refugee-related laws and policies that extend a wide range of rights to Somali refugees, giving them access to services and land, helping them to establish new agricultural livelihoods, and facilitating social and economic integration into local communities.²⁰

POST-CONFLICT SUPPORT TO RURAL RETURNEES IS CRUCIAL. Reviving the agriculture sector and improving livelihoods in post-conflict settings requires bridging humanitarian, development, and peace assistance.

Stimulating the local economy, particularly in situations of protracted displacement, will help integrate migrants into the economy and the broader social fabric.

Such efforts are underway in post-conflict Colombia, where a half-century of armed conflict has inflicted severe social and environmental wounds. More than 8 million people were registered as victims and 7.8 million are still recorded as being internally displaced.²¹ The conflict occurred mostly in rural areas, causing great loss of land and productivity, especially among small-scale producers.²² The 2016 peace agreement includes a comprehensive plan for rural reform and revitalizing rural economies, providing services and benefits to victims, including land access to dispossessed and displaced farmers; improved infrastructure, agricultural practices, and natural resource

BOX 4 MITIGATING FOOD INSECURITY IN YEMEN

Yemen is in the throes of today's largest food insecurity crisis.^a In January 2019, 16 million people, more than half the country's population, were in need of food, nutrition, and livelihood assistance, even when taking into account the mitigating effects of existing food provision and social protection programs. At that point in time, about 64,000 people in 45 districts suffered actual famine.^b Over the course of the year, the situation for the most vulnerable in Yemen's worst-affected districts improved somewhat, thanks to scaled-up multisector assistance and greater food availability from seasonal harvests.^c However, the food insecurity situation remains alarming in areas with active fighting, areas where internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities face limited access to essential services and livelihood activities, and in the hard-to-reach areas that are home to 6.5 million people.^{a,d}

Yemen's Cash Transfers for Nutrition program, which began in its current form in late 2016, provides cash transfers to pregnant women and mothers with children under two years old, provided they attend nutrition-focused trainings and comply with child nutrition monitoring programs. A recent IFPRI study found that the intervention had a positive impact on a range of intermediate outcomes, suggesting that the program both improved knowledge and increased spending on food.^e In addition, the share of households benefiting from other food distribution programs almost tripled between 2015 and 2017.

During this period, average consumption of staple foods rose by 152 calories per person, despite a 23 percent rise in prices of imported dry staples. Yet dietary diversity decreased, as consumption of locally produced foods like vegetables and dairy declined. The average number of times each day that infants and young children were fed also declined.

While the Cash Transfers for Nutrition program was effective in raising calorie consumption and did contribute to a drop in the share of children diagnosed with moderate or severe malnutrition in the poorest households, it has been far from sufficient. Given the overall worrisome trends of worsening food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen, more pervasive responses along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus will be needed, starting with reaching a peace settlement soon.

Source: (a) FSIN (Food Security Information Network), *Global Report on Food Crises 2019 Mid-Year Update* (Rome: 2019); (b) FSIN, *Global Report on Food Crises 2019* (Rome: 2019); (c) IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification), "Acute Food Insecurity (Hot-Spot) Analysis," July–December 2019; (d) USAID, "Yemen—Complex Emergency," Factsheet no. 7, May 3, 2019 (Washington, DC); (e) S. Kurdi, Y. Ghorpade, and H. Ibrahim, "The Cash for Nutrition Intervention in Yemen: Impact Evaluation Study," IFPRI Middle East and Northern Africa Regional Program Working Paper (IFPRI, Cairo, 2019).

management; agrifood value chain development; employment programs; and social protection mechanisms. These programs aim to help conflict-affected families and returning IDPs to increase food production on family farms and restore local market infrastructure and social cohesion.

RISK-INFORMED AND SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS CAN HELP MITIGATE IMPACTS FROM FOOD CRISES AND ALLEVIATE PRESSURES TO MIGRATE. Such instruments aim to enhance household risk-management capacities and early responses to shocks and crises. Social protection systems are critical not only for short-term post-crisis relief, but also for preventing asset depletion at the household level and supporting asset creation at the community level.²³

Cash transfer programs linked to agricultural production or nutrition-assistance programs (Cash+ programs) have proven effective in many conflict situations, helping affected households maintain access to food, avoid sale of assets, and strengthen household resilience. Although these programs can help avert the worst-case scenario, it is important to recognize that much more is needed to end the vicious cycle of conflict, displacement, food insecurity, and erosion of livelihoods.

Evidence shows that Yemen's cash-for-nutrition program, for example, has counteracted deterioration in food security and nutrition status as civil strife in the country intensified (Box 4).²⁴ Cash+ transfer programs in conflict-affected Mali and Mauritania, meanwhile, have been shown to improve incomes of beneficiary households and reduce the use of negative coping strategies, including selling land, deploying child labor, and begging, in response to adverse shocks.²⁵

None of these examples should be taken as a blueprint for guaranteeing lasting peace, food system recovery, prevention of food crises, or restoration of livelihoods. But they do show that pathways toward such outcomes can be feasible if they build on a clear understanding of the root causes of conflicts, forced migration, and food crises and how they interact with and affect one another.

Most current conflicts are fought in rural areas and cause severe food insecurity. Resulting stresses are likely to fuel further conflict and force people to flee. Humanitarian interventions that have the greatest likelihood of achieving lasting success involve investing in local agrifood systems and including conflict-affected people in strategies and programs for building, reviving, or strengthening these systems.