

## Food systems for peace and security in a climate crisis



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Two thoughts should shape policy on food and peace. The first is that the worldwide increase in hunger is driven primarily by climate change and violent conflicts, and the second is that the availability of food is foundational for peace. Consequently, policies, programmes, and finances to strengthen food systems need to include climate action and conflict mitigation, but this recognition has been taking place slowly among global security and food system agents.

The Security Council of the UN—the highest organisation tasked with maintaining international peace and security—passed, in 2019, a historic statement, Resolution 2417,<sup>1</sup> acknowledging the link between hunger and conflict. This Resolution recognises “the need to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity”. The numbers are clear: about 490 million of the 800 million people in the world who face chronic food insecurity live in countries affected by conflict,<sup>2</sup> and 74 million of 110 million people facing acute hunger are located in 21 countries affected by conflict and insecurity.<sup>3</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals, harmonised with the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, set up ambitious goals to end poverty and hunger, providing a strategic framework for global development by 2030.

Worryingly, however, growing evidence shows that food systems worldwide are failing. They fail, first, to produce and distribute enough food to feed a growing world population; second, to meet the nutritional needs of that population; third, to benefit everyone equally and equitably, with both overconsumption and underconsumption rife; and lastly, to operate without exerting severe adverse effects on the environment and natural resources.<sup>4</sup> Without adequately addressing the problems of our food systems, any ambitions set by the Sustainable Development Goals will be unreachable; while conflicts produce hunger, hunger can also trigger violence and conflicts.

Approaches that go beyond fixing broken food systems and aim at transforming them need to be designed and implemented. At the policy level, a coordinated vision is needed. A review of the Copenhagen Accord (2009), the Cancun Agreement (2010), and the Paris Agreement (2015) shows that approaches to address climate variability and

progressive climate change stop short of articulating how climate change exacerbates conflicts through its impact on food systems. Harmonised financing is also needed. Five years after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, funding sources to achieve those goals are falling remarkably short, with a gap between funding available and funding required of US\$ 2.5 trillion annually.<sup>5</sup> Instead of policy alignment, we currently find humanitarian, development, and peace objectives competing for primacy and resources. At the operational level, actions must address the root causes of failing food systems, as well as respond to its impact on food insecurity and conflicts. Government debates still favour militarised and securitised responses to, for instance, armed non-state threats. However, research shows that security-centric measures have failed to address the root causes of crises and have, at times, further undermined livelihoods and damaged the social contract, as in the case of Lake Chad.<sup>6</sup> Strengthening the linkages between these security-centric measures, such as the Global Peace Index or the Positive Peace Index,<sup>7</sup> and concrete measures of climate security and food systems<sup>8</sup> would provide a more holistic understanding of how the climate crisis is exacerbating food systems insecurity and could affect peace and security worldwide.

The global community is starting to acknowledge the importance of food systems for peace and security. The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to the World Food Programme. The UN acknowledges the importance of food systems in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and dedicates Action Track 5 of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit to building resilience of food systems to environmental, conflictual, and economic shocks and stressors.

In the context of an increasingly complex climate crisis, science, policy, and geostrategic security imperatives need to connect to deliver a common picture of the situation while there is still time to address them at source, instead of facing the consequences in a not-so-distant future. This combined effort requires closer collaboration between intervenient parties along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to design and implement systemic approaches that aim at transforming food systems and, thus, reinvigorating

rural livelihoods. Food systems research has a vital role in furthering understanding of how climate change is exacerbating existing conflict risk. This research is thus crucial to inform the transformation of food systems to support peace and security, and, therefore, assist policy makers, donors, and international organisations in taking scientifically sound, informed decisions.

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