

2021

Synopsis

GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

HUNGER AND FOOD SYSTEMS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

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A Dire Hunger Situation amid Multiple Crises

The 2021 Global Hunger Index (GHI) points to a grim hunger situation fueled by a toxic cocktail of the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasingly severe and protracted violent conflicts. Progress toward Zero Hunger by 2030, already far too slow, is showing signs of stagnating or even being reversed.

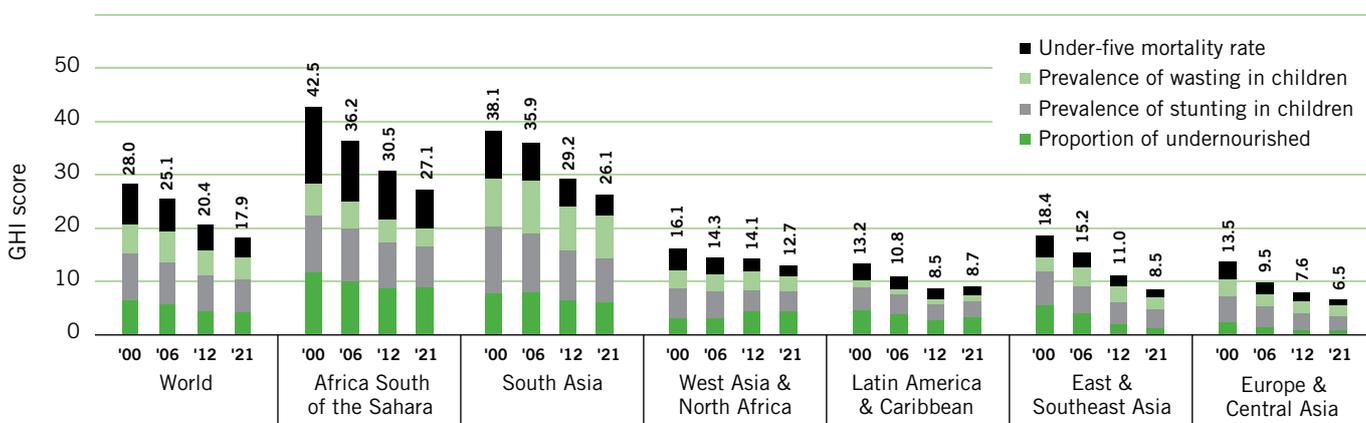
The Fight against Hunger Is Dangerously Off Track

Based on current GHI projections, the world as a whole—and 47 countries in particular—will fail to achieve a *low* level of hunger by 2030. Conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic—three of the most powerful and toxic forces driving hunger—threaten to wipe out any progress that has been made against hunger in recent years. Violent conflict, which is deeply intertwined with hunger, shows no signs of abating. The negative consequences of climate change are becoming ever more apparent and costly, but the world has developed no fully effective mechanism to mitigate, much less reverse, it. And the COVID-19 pandemic, which has spiked in different parts of the world throughout 2020 and 2021, has shown just how vulnerable we are to global contagion and the associated health, social, and economic consequences. As a result of these factors—as well as a host of underlying factors such as poverty, inequality, unsustainable food systems, lack of investment in agriculture and rural development, inadequate safety nets, and poor governance—progress in the fight against hunger shows signs of stalling or even being reversed.

Global Progress Is Slowing, and Hunger Remains Stubbornly High in Some Regions

Evidence shows current setbacks in the fight against hunger and suggests trouble ahead. Although GHI scores show that global hunger has been on the decline since 2000, progress is slowing. While the GHI score for the world fell 4.7 points, from 25.1 to 20.4, between 2006 and 2012, it has fallen just 2.5 points since 2012 (Figure 1). After decades of decline, the global prevalence of undernourishment—one of the four indicators used to calculate GHI scores—is increasing. This shift may be a harbinger of reversals in other measures of hunger. In both Africa South of the Sahara and South Asia, hunger is considered *serious*. Africa South of the Sahara has the highest rates of undernourishment, child stunting, and child mortality of any region in the world. South Asia's high hunger level is driven largely by child undernutrition, particularly as measured by child wasting. In the regions of Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia, and West Asia and North Africa, hunger levels are *low* or *moderate*.

FIGURE 1 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL 2000, 2006, 2012, AND 2021 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX SCORES, AND THEIR COMPONENTS



Source: Authors.

Note: See Appendix C in the full GHI report for data sources. The regional and global GHI scores are calculated using regional and global aggregates for each indicator and the formula described in Appendix B. The regional and global aggregates for each indicator are calculated as population-weighted averages, using the indicator values reported in Appendix D. For countries lacking undernourishment data, provisional estimates provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) were used in the calculation of aggregates only, but are not reported in Appendix D. Appendix F indicates which countries are included in each region.

Hunger Remains *Serious, Alarming, or Extremely Alarming* in Nearly 50 Countries

According to the 2021 GHI, one country, Somalia, suffers from an *extremely alarming* level of hunger. Hunger is at an *alarming* level in 5 countries—Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, and Yemen—and is provisionally categorized as *alarming* in 4 additional countries—Burundi, Comoros, South Sudan, and Syria. Hunger has been identified as *serious* in 31 countries and is provisionally categorized as *serious* in 6 additional countries. Since 2012, hunger has increased in 10 countries with *moderate, serious, or alarming* hunger levels, in some cases reflecting a stagnation of progress and in others signaling an intensification of an already precarious situation. Fourteen countries have achieved significant advances in the fight against hunger, with a reduction of 25 percent or more between their 2012 and 2021 GHI scores.

Inequality in Nutritional Status within Countries Is Pervasive

Wide variations in child stunting, wasting, and mortality, even within countries' borders, are pervasive and can be obscured by national averages. The reality is that children are suffering from inadequate diets and suboptimal health in all corners of the world. Although the prevalence of undernourishment is not regularly calculated at the subnational level, nascent efforts to do so reveal significant variation within countries. This persistent inequality within countries has been made more urgent by the movement restrictions and service disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable is widening the gap between rich and poor.

BOX 1 ABOUT THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels over recent years and decades. GHI scores are based on a formula that captures three dimensions of hunger—insufficient caloric intake (undernourishment), child undernutrition, and child mortality—using four component indicators:

- **UNDERNOURISHMENT:** the share of the population that is undernourished, reflecting insufficient caloric intake
- **CHILD WASTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are wasted (low weight-for-height), reflecting acute undernutrition
- **CHILD STUNTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are stunted (low height-for-age), reflecting chronic undernutrition
- **CHILD MORTALITY:** the mortality rate of children under the age of five

In 2021, data were assessed for the 135 countries that met the criteria for inclusion in the GHI, and GHI scores were calculated for 116 of those countries based on data from 2016 to 2020. The data used to calculate GHI scores come from published UN sources (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Health Organization, UNICEF, and Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation), the World Bank, and Demographic and Health Surveys. Of the 135 countries assessed, 19 did not have sufficient data to allow for the calculation of a 2021 GHI score, but provisional designations of the severity of hunger were assigned to 12 of those countries based on other published data. For the remaining 7 countries, data were insufficient to allow for either calculating GHI scores or assigning provisional categories.

The GHI categorizes and ranks countries on a 100-point scale: values of less than 10.0 reflect *low* hunger; values from 10.0 to 19.9 reflect *moderate* hunger; values from 20.0 to 34.9 indicate *serious* hunger; values from 35.0 to 49.9 are *alarming*; and values of 50.0 or more are *extremely alarming* (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 NUMBER OF COUNTRIES BY HUNGER LEVEL



Source: Authors.

Note: Of the 128 countries tallied, 12 were assigned GHI scores on a provisional basis: 1 as *low*, 1 as *moderate*, 6 as *serious*, and 4 as *alarming*.

2021 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX BY SEVERITY



- Extremely alarming ≥ 50.0
- Alarming 35.0–49.9
- Serious 20.0–34.9
- Moderate 10.0–19.9
- Low ≤ 9.9
- Not included or not designated (see Appendix A and Box 1.3 in the full GHI report for details)

* Provisional severity designation (see Box 1.3 in the full GHI report for details)



Source: Authors.

Note: For the 2021 GHI, data on the proportion of undernourished are for 2018–2020; data on child stunting and wasting are for the latest year in the period 2016–2020 for which data are available; and data on child mortality are for 2019. GHI scores were not calculated for countries with insufficient data and for certain high-income countries, countries with small populations, and non-independent territories; see Appendix A for details.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by Welthungerhilfe (WHH) or Concern Worldwide.

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TABLE 1 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX SCORES BY 2021 GHI RANK

Rank ¹	Country	2000	2006	2012	2021	Rank ¹	Country	2000	2006	2012	2021
2021 GHI scores less than 5, collectively ranked 1-18. ²	Belarus	<5	<5	<5	<5	67	Gabon	21.0	20.2	18.6	16.6
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	9.3	6.7	<5	<5	68	Philippines	25.0	20.4	20.5	16.8
	Brazil	11.5	7.4	5.5	<5	69	Cambodia	41.1	27.1	24.2	17.0
	Chile	<5	<5	<5	<5	69	Eswatini	24.5	23.2	21.8	17.0
	China	13.3	9.0	<5	<5	71	Myanmar	39.8	31.6	22.9	17.5
	Croatia	<5	<5	<5	<5	72	Gambia	29.0	27.5	22.1	17.6
	Cuba	<5	<5	<5	<5	73	Indonesia	26.1	29.5	23.0	18.0
	Estonia	<5	<5	<5	<5	74	Cameroon	35.7	30.9	23.1	18.6
	Kuwait	<5	<5	<5	<5	75	Solomon Islands	20.0	18.2	20.2	18.8
	Latvia	5.5	<5	<5	<5	76	Bangladesh	34.0	28.9	28.6	19.1
	Lithuania	<5	<5	<5	<5	76	Nepal	37.4	30.9	23.1	19.1
	Montenegro	—	6.5	<5	<5	78	Lao PDR	44.1	31.9	25.7	19.5
	North Macedonia	7.5	7.7	<5	<5	79	Guatemala	28.4	24.6	22.0	19.6
	Romania	7.9	5.9	5.0	<5	*	Tajikistan*	—	—	—	10-19.9*
	Serbia	—	6.1	5.3	<5	80	Namibia	25.3	25.8	26.6	20.2
	Slovakia	6.0	5.3	<5	<5	81	Malawi	43.1	33.5	26.2	21.3
	Turkey	10.2	6.5	5.0	<5	82	Benin	34.0	27.7	24.0	22.2
	Uruguay	7.4	6.7	5.0	<5	82	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	14.6	11.2	7.4	22.2
19	Argentina	6.4	5.6	5.2	5.3	84	Côte d'Ivoire	33.3	37.1	30.0	22.3
19	Costa Rica	7.0	5.5	<5	5.3	85	Mauritania	31.9	28.9	23.6	22.6
21	Uzbekistan	24.3	16.6	9.5	5.9	86	Iraq	23.9	23.9	27.5	22.8
22	Tunisia	10.3	7.8	7.0	6.0	87	Kenya	36.7	31.2	25.4	23.0
23	Bulgaria	8.6	8.1	7.8	6.1	88	Botswana	26.7	26.2	24.3	23.2
23	Mongolia	30.2	23.4	12.8	6.1	89	Togo	39.1	36.5	25.3	23.7
25	Albania	20.7	15.9	8.8	6.2	90	Ethiopia	53.5	43.4	33.5	24.1
25	Russian Federation	10.1	7.1	6.4	6.2	91	Burkina Faso	44.9	35.8	29.7	24.5
27	Georgia	12.3	8.8	<5	6.3	92	Mali	41.7	36.8	24.8	24.7
28	Kazakhstan	11.2	12.3	8.1	6.4	92	Pakistan	36.7	33.1	32.1	24.7
29	Saudi Arabia	11.0	12.1	8.2	6.8	92	Tanzania (United Republic of)	40.6	33.6	29.1	24.7
29	Ukraine	13.0	7.1	6.9	6.8	95	Sudan	—	—	29.8	25.1
31	Algeria	14.5	11.7	8.9	6.9	96	Korea (DPR)	39.5	33.1	29.1	25.2
32	Armenia	19.3	13.3	10.4	7.2	97	Angola	65.0	46.9	27.8	26.0
33	Azerbaijan	25.0	15.9	10.6	7.5	98	Rwanda	49.3	38.3	31.0	26.4
33	Paraguay	11.7	11.6	9.5	7.5	99	Djibouti	44.3	36.9	35.4	27.4
35	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	13.5	8.9	8.1	7.7	99	Lesotho	32.5	29.6	24.6	27.4
36	Dominican Republic	15.1	13.2	10.2	8.0	101	India	38.8	37.4	28.8	27.5
36	Peru	20.6	16.4	9.2	8.0	102	Papua New Guinea	33.6	30.3	33.7	27.8
38	Jordan	10.8	8.1	8.5	8.3	103	Afghanistan	50.9	42.7	34.3	28.3
39	Mexico	10.2	8.6	7.8	8.5	103	Nigeria	39.5	32.5	30.4	28.3
40	Fiji	9.6	9.0	8.1	8.6	105	Congo (Republic of)	34.9	34.6	28.5	30.3
40	Jamaica	8.6	9.0	9.1	8.6	106	Mozambique	48.0	38.2	31.5	31.3
40	Kyrgyzstan	18.3	13.9	11.7	8.6	106	Sierra Leone	57.7	52.7	34.7	31.3
43	Morocco	15.5	17.5	9.6	8.8	108	Timor-Leste	—	46.1	36.2	32.4
44	Colombia	10.9	11.4	9.3	8.9	109	Haiti	42.0	43.6	35.2	32.8
44	El Salvador	14.7	12.0	10.4	8.9	110	Liberia	48.1	40.0	35.0	33.3
44	Panama	18.7	15.0	10.1	8.9	*	Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe*	—	—	—	20-34.9*
44	Trinidad & Tobago	11.0	11.3	10.8	8.9	111	Madagascar	42.8	41.6	34.3	36.3
48	Lebanon	11.6	13.2	12.3	9.7	112	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	50.6	45.3	42.3	39.0
48	Turkmenistan	20.1	14.8	11.9	9.7	113	Chad	50.8	51.2	45.7	39.6
*	Moldova (Republic of)*	—	—	—	0-9.9*	114	Central African Republic	48.9	48.0	40.5	43.0
50	Suriname	15.1	11.4	10.4	10.4	115	Yemen	41.0	38.8	38.4	45.1
51	Guyana	17.1	15.6	12.1	10.7	*	Burundi, Comoros, South Sudan, and Syrian Arab Republic*	—	—	—	35-49.9*
52	Cabo Verde	15.4	11.9	12.3	10.8	116	Somalia	58.1	57.9	65.1	50.8
53	Thailand	18.5	12.3	12.4	11.7	— = Data are not available or not presented. Some countries did not exist in their present borders in the given year or reference period.					
54	Mauritius	15.2	14.0	13.0	12.2	Note: As always, rankings and index scores from this table cannot be accurately compared to rankings and index scores from previous reports (see Appendix A).					
55	Oman	14.7	13.8	11.6	12.3	For the 2021 GHI report, data were assessed for 135 countries. Of these, there were sufficient data to calculate 2021 GHI scores for and rank 116 countries (by way of comparison, 107 countries were ranked in the 2020 report).					
56	Egypt	16.3	14.4	15.2	12.5	* For 19 countries, individual scores could not be calculated and ranks could not be determined owing to lack of data. Where possible, these countries were provisionally designated by severity: 1 country is designated as <i>low</i> , 1 as <i>moderate</i> , 6 as <i>serious</i> , and 4 as <i>alarming</i> . For 7 countries, provisional designations could not be established (see Box 1.3 in the full report).					
57	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	27.7	23.3	15.6	12.7	¹ Ranked according to 2021 GHI scores. Countries that have identical 2021 scores are given the same ranking (for example, Argentina and Costa Rica are both ranked 19th).					
58	Honduras	21.8	19.6	13.8	12.8	² The 18 countries with 2021 GHI scores of less than 5 are not assigned individual ranks, but rather are collectively ranked 1-18. Differences between their scores are minimal.					
58	Malaysia	15.4	13.7	12.4	12.8	■ = low □ = moderate □ = serious □ = alarming □ = extremely alarming					
60	South Africa	18.1	17.6	12.7	12.9						
61	Viet Nam	26.3	21.8	16.0	13.6						
62	Ecuador	19.7	18.9	12.8	14.0						
62	Nicaragua	22.3	17.4	14.9	14.0						
64	Ghana	28.4	22.0	17.9	14.9						
65	Sri Lanka	21.9	20.0	20.6	16.0						
66	Senegal	34.0	24.1	19.2	16.3						

HUNGER AND FOOD SYSTEMS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

Guest essay by **Caroline Delgado and Dan Smith**

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Failing food systems and the consequent increase in hunger are among the most pressing issues of our time. In 2020, 155 million people were acutely food insecure—an increase of nearly 20 million people from the year before. Despite the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, violent conflict remained the main driver of global hunger in 2020. The number of active violent conflicts is on the rise, and they are becoming increasingly severe and protracted.

The two-way links between hunger and conflict are well established. Violent conflict is destructive to virtually every aspect of a food system, from production, harvesting, processing, and transport to input supply, financing, marketing, and consumption. At the same time, heightened food insecurity can contribute to violent conflict. Without resolving food insecurity, it is difficult to build sustainable peace, and without peace the likelihood of ending global hunger is minimal.

Confronting the Worsening Problem of Violent Conflict

Peace is more likely to be built and sustained if it is linked to secure livelihoods and food security, and vice versa. Yet current global, regional, and national trends threaten the achievement of Zero Hunger by 2030, and global security has deteriorated significantly since 2010. The pathways from conflict to increased food insecurity—and from increased food insecurity to conflict—are unique to each case and often complex. Breaking the links between conflict and hunger and fully harnessing the potential of food systems to contribute to peace demand good contextual evidence, well-grounded knowledge of the setting, and cooperation between peace, humanitarian, and development actors.

Research from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shows that, especially when working together, actors such as community groups, local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, and states can create conditions for food security and sustainable peace. SIPRI's research on the impact of the World Food Programme (WFP) on the prospects for peace suggests that, even in an inimical global environment, efforts can be made to leverage resilient food systems to help advance peace. Even small-scale interventions can go a long way toward reducing vulnerability and strengthening local pockets of peace. Scaling up these efforts could generate tangible progress, if not fulfillment of the highest ambition.

Tackling Conflict and Hunger Together

The complexities of food systems and of conflict and peace-building environments present many difficulties. If progress is to be made in both stemming conflict and fighting hunger, a food security lens must be integrated into peace building and a peace-building lens should be integrated into the effort to create resilient food systems. To move along that road, we propose four priorities:

- 1. ADOPT A FLEXIBLE AND AGILE APPROACH.** Understanding the local context is crucial. How peace is understood can vary dramatically along ethnic, sectarian, regional, or political lines. New challenges to building peace and achieving food security continually arise and evolve. Thus, action to support peace building as part of food security interventions must be flexible, agile, and able to adapt to changing circumstances and concerns.
- 2. WORK THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS.** In addition to understanding the local context, it is important to know what has worked in other contexts, what has not worked, and what has caused problems. This is where partnerships come in. National governments and international organizations cannot be successful without local partners, and local partners are likewise unlikely to be successful on their own. To be effective, partnerships must involve local partners at the idea stage of strategies and projects, as well as during implementation and monitoring.
- 3. PURSUE INTEGRATIVE WAYS OF WORKING.** If peace is a precondition for food security, while food security is a precondition for peace, and resilience in the face of climate change strengthens both, it makes sense to find ways to work on all three issues at once. One way to do this in a conflict-affected country is through food-and-peace hubs. Such hubs would convene organizations—from communities, from provincial and national governments, and from international actors—that are working to tackle food insecurity, build peace, enable access to resources, and encourage and incentivize cooperation.
- 4. BREAK DOWN FUNDING SILOS.** Siloes in thinking and action persist in large part because of siloes in funding. Governments, aid agencies, and donors that claim to want an integrative approach must try new, more integrated funding models that direct funding precisely toward the points of intersection. To do so, they need a mechanism that is also able to act on those points of intersection—such as the food-and-peace hubs.

With flexibility, agility, and sensitivity to local perceptions and respect for knowledge, with a new emphasis on partnerships, and with integrative action through food-and-peace hubs, backed by financing to match, we can see a way forward to building food security resilience. Transformative changes are made up of immediate concrete steps, structured according to clear priorities. The global context is not helpful, but actions to break the vicious cycle between conflict and hunger are possible.

Note: The views expressed in the guest essay are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Welthungerhilfe or Concern Worldwide.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit should be judged on how well they generate concrete and transformative long-term action to get to Zero Hunger, to respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to food, and to leave no one behind in light of conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although addressing conflict ultimately requires political solutions and societal change, integrating a peace-building lens into the creation of resilient food systems and a food security lens into peace building can help advance both sustainable food and nutrition security and durable peace.

1 ENHANCE THE RESILIENCE OF FOOD SYSTEMS TO SIMULTANEOUSLY ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CHANGE AND TO ENSURE FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

- Governments and donors must promote interventions in conflict settings that link immediate and long-term livelihood needs and integrate reconciliation and peace building.
- In conflict-affected areas that lack access to wider markets, governments and donors must promote climate-resilient and diversified farming practices and strengthen local markets to generate employment along the food value chain, allowing community members to diversify their production, increase their income, and boost their nutritional intake and food security.
- Social protection measures such as cash and voucher assistance are essential to enhance the resilience of rural food economies and of households affected by shocks and stressors.

2 BASE ACTIONS ON A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTEXT, AND STRENGTHEN INCLUSIVE, LOCALLY LED INITIATIVES

- Humanitarian, development, and peace-building actors must engage in systemic and ongoing analysis of the context. All programs and interventions must identify the causes of and actors in any conflict and must design programming with an understanding of existing power relations, placing affected people at the center.
- Partnerships should bring together local, national, and international actors. All actors should work with and build on local structures, which have the potential to provide the most effective and timely support, are likely to incorporate local understandings of peace, and can increase the legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability of interventions.
- All actors must address the need for transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation of those who are most vulnerable. This includes ensuring meaningful participation by women in all activities, including peace-building efforts.

3 COMMIT TO FLEXIBLE, NEED-BASED, CROSS-SECTORAL, AND MULTIYEAR PLANNING AND FINANCING

- Donors, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local actors should strive to build and maintain cross-sectoral and long-term relationships. This requires multiyear donor investments in long-term development and peace building that are adaptable to the highly fluid and dynamic contexts of conflict and crisis. Funding priorities must follow a flexible and agile approach that reflects local perceptions, aspirations, and concerns.
- All actors' roles across the humanitarian–development–peace-building nexus must be clearly defined and sufficiently supported. Funding must be based on needs and not fall prey to security or political agendas.

4 ADDRESS CONFLICT ON A POLITICAL LEVEL, STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

- States must live up to their responsibility to end protracted crises, but donor countries, key UN agencies, and regional bodies must also address conflict and its consequences, including through a food and nutrition security lens.
- Given widespread violations of the right to food during conflict, the recurring use of starvation as a method of warfare, and denial of humanitarian access, it is vital that the UN and its member states strengthen international humanitarian law and vigorously prosecute and sanction those who use starvation as a weapon of war.

5 LEAD THE WAY TO FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

- Governments must actively follow up on the UN Food Systems Summit by addressing the structural challenges—including inequities, market failures, health risks, and environmental and climate threats—embedded in our food systems. Actions must put vulnerable people at the center of food policies and build on existing responsibilities such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and human rights treaties.
- Multilateral food governance must be anchored in human rights and meaningful participation of civil society and communities.
- Governments must use upcoming opportunities, including the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) and the 2021 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit, to reinforce their commitments to achieving Zero Hunger by investing in nutrition and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e. V.

Friedrich-Ebert-Straße 1
53173 Bonn, Germany
Tel. +49 228-2288-0
Fax +49 228-2288-333
www.welthungerhilfe.de
Member of Alliance2015

Concern Worldwide

52-55 Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel. +353 1-417-7700
Fax +353 1-475-7362
www.concern.net
Member of Alliance2015

Authors:

Welthungerhilfe: Miriam Wiemers (Policy Advisor), Tabea Schiffer (Policy and External Relations), Asja Hanano (Head of Policy and External Relations); **Concern Worldwide:** Olive Towey (Senior Policy Advisor), Réiseal Ní Chéilleachair (Head of International Advocacy), Connell Foley (Director of Strategy, Advocacy, and Learning); **Independent Consultants:** Klaus von Grebmer, Jill Bernstein, Heidi Fritschel, Kierstin Ekstrom; **Towson University:** Seth Gitter; **Guest Authors:** Caroline Delgado (Senior Researcher and Program Director, Food and Security, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), Dan Smith (Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)
A Peer-Reviewed Publication

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