



November 10, 2020

Mr. John Barsa
Acting Deputy Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Acting Deputy Administrator Barsa:

At USAID's request, the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) examined issues around agriculture and food security in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, including issues around displacement and its effects on food systems, during a public meeting on October 15, 2019. I am pleased to transmit to you a set of findings, conclusions, and recommendations from BIFAD based on the meeting presentations and deliberations.

Today, addressing food insecurity means operating amidst conflict and fragility. Last year, every country in a protracted food crisis was also engaged in violent conflict¹. There is an urgent need to understand the unique challenges of improving the agricultural sector and food security in conflict-affected and fragile contexts—including those in which large populations are displaced—in order to strengthen investments in evidence-based food and agriculture programming tailored for these contexts. The BIFAD public meeting addressed this need by bringing stakeholders and sector experts together for a timely discussion on the subject. The event specifically addressed the following questions:

- What is the state of knowledge on the relationship between conflict, fragility, and food systems? What are the implications of this relationship for food security?
- How can food security and agricultural investments be most effective in preventing conflict or accelerating recovery in post-conflict settings?
- What are the unique needs of affected populations?

A desired outcome from the meeting was a clear statement on the importance of (1) understanding the relationship between food systems, conflict and fragility for food security goals, and (2) ensuring that food security programming is tailored to the unique needs of these contexts, with a special focus on how food security can prevent conflict and accelerate recovery from conflict. The public meeting was open to all stakeholders and the general public, but was anticipated to be of particular relevance to development practitioners and NGOs; private sector entities; faith-based organizations; donors;

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2018. Food security and conflict: Empirical challenges and future opportunities for research and policy making on food security and conflict. Online at <http://www.fao.org/3/CA1587EN/ca1587en.pdf>



government stakeholders; and multilateral organizations working in agriculture, food security, and nutrition in conflict-affected and displaced population contexts. The event [recording](#) and [minutes](#) are available on the USAID web site.

Detailed guidance for practitioners is listed below, and I would like to highlight the recommendations:

1. **Recognize that conflict zones are always food insecure.** Focus on agriculture, food systems, agriculture-linked livelihoods and resilience as essential determinants of survival and recovery in conflict-affected areas.
2. **Promote conflict sensitivity.** Understand the context and the dynamics that fuel conflict, especially as they affect agriculture, the food system, and different groups. Then design and adaptively manage interventions accordingly.
3. **Develop technical guidance and research for conflict-affected and fragile settings.** Use a systems lens to assess conflict-affected contexts in order to (1) understand the relationship between conflict and key factors in building and maintaining food security (e.g., seeds, supply chains, crop management, storage, and markets) and (2) identify related opportunities for research, programming and technical guidance.
4. **Work with and through local food systems.** Build capacity and engage with diverse local partners—from farmers, community leaders, women, men, and youth to government officials, traders and the private sector—with special attention to strengthening social cohesion and the relationship between citizens and their government.
5. **Leverage formal and informal markets.** Scan for inclusive and creative opportunities to leverage what is working well despite challenging conditions. Explore opportunities to engage the diaspora and regional efforts.
6. **Seek Humanitarian-Development-Peace coherence.** Maximize the impact of agriculture and food security investments by coordinating across other development sectors as well as humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts from across the interagency—in pursuit of collective outcomes when possible.

BIFAD hopes these findings, conclusions, and recommendations can support decision making by USAID and its partners and stakeholders working to advance food security, nutrition, and resilience at global, regional, and national levels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Keenum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark E. Keenum, Chair, Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) and President, Mississippi State University

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations
BIFAD 180th Public Meeting
Agriculture and Food Security in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts
October 15, 2019

The public meeting findings, conclusions, and recommendations can be approached with the following frame:

- What is known about fragile and conflict-affected situations and the incidence of food insecurity; (Findings 1-3)
- How investments can be effective in increasing resilience in vulnerable populations, preventing protracted conflict, and facilitating recovery from conflict; (Findings 4-5)
- How external humanitarian and development assistance initiatives can be tailored to the specific needs of affected populations. (Conclusions and Recommendations)

Findings

1. *Conflict and Displacement Trends*

- 1.1. Although international conflicts have decreased in absolute terms, civil war (both state and non-state actors), extremist violence, organized criminal violence, political conflict, and communal violence are increasing.
- 1.2. Eighty percent of the world's humanitarian needs—assessed at over \$25 billion dollars in 2018—is driven by violent conflict, which does not include the indirect opportunity costs of lost economic growth, livelihoods, tourism, and youth potential. Women and children bear the brunt of negative impacts from conflict.
- 1.3. Access to people displaced because of conflict—more than 70 million globally—is one of the greatest challenges to humanitarian food assistance providers, and conflict puts humanitarian partners at risk.
- 1.4. Displacement leads to loss of access of livelihoods, greater difficulty in purchasing food, reduced access to health care, greater vulnerability, and greater need for assistance.
- 1.5. Protracted displacement may create problems for host communities (e.g., competition for jobs, land, water, and other resources as well as health and sanitation issues). Most Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) do not live in formal IDP camps, but rather in cities and host communities.

2. *Conflict's Contribution to Food Insecurity*

- 2.1. Conflict consistently drives food insecurity. There is no case in which there is conflict and not food insecurity. It also compromises the nutritional status of children.
- 2.2. Recent increases in hunger and poverty backsliding are primarily attributable to conflict but they are also often compounded by natural disasters such as drought.
- 2.3. Conflict adversely impacts agriculture. Conflict changes farmer behavior; affects production; affects land access; reduces labor productivity, hired labor, and daily wages; destroys agricultural markets; disables agricultural extension services; disrupts agricultural input markets; and discourages farm investments.
- 2.4. Conflict can dramatically reshape local agricultural economies and have large spillover effects for food and livelihood systems far from where fighting takes place.

3. *Food Insecurity's Contribution to Conflict*

- 3.1. Food insecurity alone does not always cause conflict. “Exacerbate”, “contribute to”, “trigger”—all these words are the way to think about how food insecurity relates to conflict.
- 3.2. Factors influencing conflict are locally specific, complex, and dynamic and may include natural resources management, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, purchasing power to meet food needs, access to food and agricultural livelihoods, health care service availability (including reproductive health), unemployment (especially youth unemployment), ineffective governance, corruption, climate-related challenges, the strength of national and local institutions, and physical security.
- 3.3. There are negative feedback loops in which food insecurity exacerbates conflict, which further exacerbates food insecurity and linked economies and food systems. Food insecurity can be a driver of both violent conflict and less violent protest movements.
- 3.4. Food Insecurity as Exacerbating Factor for Conflict and Violence
 - 3.4.1. Food price volatility can have a negative effect on purchasing power and can contribute to protests and violence.
 - 3.4.2. Trade barriers can exacerbate conflict.
 - 3.4.3. Food insecurity is more likely to be a significant driver of conflict in contexts characterized by a high degree of social polarization, in parts of countries where there is relatively weak state presence, and, importantly, where interactions—between, for example, herding groups and farming groups, or between rural dwellers and urban dwellers—are highly politicized and where favoritism exists.
 - 3.4.4. Communal conflicts (e.g., herder-farmer) tend to occur against a backdrop of chronic food insecurity, though the effects of rapid changes in food access are less clear. Communal conflicts can escalate to civil wars when the government is perceived to be supporting, tacitly or otherwise, one communal group at the expense of the other.
- 3.5. Food Riots: Food Insecurity as a Conflict Trigger
 - 3.5.1. There are strong linkages between food insecurity and conflict in rural areas, but increasingly also in urban ones. Conflict dynamics are emerging in urban settings because of both (1) price rises due to conflict-related production cuts and (2) policies (e.g., import taxes and bans) designed to stimulate lagging sectors of the economy.
 - 3.5.2. Urbanites are dependent on local food markets and global food systems for sustenance and are increasingly vocal when their needs are not met. Food prices—and the government’s inability to control them—are central to those mass mobilizations. Higher consumer prices, particularly for food and fuel, are associated with increases in urban protest and rioting. This social unrest can lead to policy decisions that impact the entire country.
 - 3.5.3. It is usually not the most food-insecure that riot, but rather those with comparatively better access. This is partly because of interactions with other variables, such as the political regime (e.g., authoritarian regimes can more easily repress riots), incentives for the government to shield consumers from higher international prices, and weak institutions that can struggle to manage conflict. The resulting instability can cause further price increases, contributing to a vicious cycle and protracted crisis.
- 3.6. Recruitment: Food Insecurity as Motivation

- 3.6.1. The promise of food and shelter is a common motivation for joining rebel movements, gangs, and militias—including those with ostensible religious motivations.
- 3.7. Dampening Effect of Acute and Severe Food Insecurity
 - 3.7.1. While increases in food insecurity can be a source of grievances that motivate participation in rebellion, acute and severe food insecurity has a dampening effect on conflict behavior.
- 4. *Agriculture as a Source of Resilience to Conflict Shocks*
 - 4.1. Agriculture, livelihoods, and markets are important sources of resilience to poverty backsliding in the face of conflict shocks. Evidence suggests that agriculture-led growth contributes to resilience in some countries, but the evidence is not yet clear in more fragile spaces.
 - 4.2. Evidence suggests that more mobile assets (e.g., livestock) contribute to greater resilience in the context of conflict.
- 5. *Windows of Opportunity for Interventions*
 - 5.1. Aid is not neutral. Any intervention puts resources into a context and may reinforce power dynamics. These resources will fit into existing hierarchies and conflict dynamics unless the intervention is designed to do otherwise.
 - 5.2. Seed is the first-entry agricultural intervention during stress or disaster and can have many promising aspects for empowerment, raising incomes, and promoting nutrition. Even in conflict settings, farmers often procure seed from their own stocks and from local markets (with negligible seed procured from formal seed sector private companies). Therefore, it is important not to disrupt but to leverage local markets.
 - 5.3. The private sector can be a key driver in investment and job creation in conflict-affected contexts; key successes are robust telecommunication, energy, and financial services.
 - 5.4. The diaspora can play a key role in building social capital in crisis and emergency conditions. Remittances from the diaspora can both alleviate immediate needs and be leveraged for long-term investments in the financial services and productive agricultural sectors.
 - 5.5. A breakdown in the social contract between citizens and their government results in societal fragmentation and grievances that can be exploited by extremists. Social contracts can be repaired by strengthening local institutions and building trust between governments and citizens on shared collective challenges, like food and agriculture. For example, anti-corruption work or building new governance processes such as agriculture extension.
 - 5.6. Many of today's youth, 1.8 billion worldwide, live in areas affected by conflict. Helping youth to become part of positive alternative movements can change a community's trajectory and address political and social grievances.
 - 5.7. It is important to work with and through local systems as much as possible.

Conclusions

- 1. *Conflict and Context Analysis Needs*
 - 1.1. Data and information are needed to understand the drivers and impacts of conflict and to inform mitigating interventions at the local context.

- 1.2. More *ex ante* evidence is needed for places that are likely to be in crisis, as opposed to *ex post* studies of places already in crisis.
2. *Conflict Sensitivity in Programming*
 - 2.1. Because any input into a conflict environment feeds into the existing political and power dynamics and structures and may reinforce a conflict, conflict sensitivity should be a baseline requirement for all programming. Conflict sensitivity means avoiding unintended consequences of interventions by carefully understanding the context and adapting accordingly, as promoted by USAID's guidance on conflict-sensitive programming.
 - 2.2. Conflict sensitive programming requires an ongoing process of understanding the context and dynamics of conflict: the history, the actors, their interests, how they work with populations, and where they are operating, as well as a recognition that interventions, inputs, and even staff can either reinforce or undermine conflict dynamics.
 - 2.3. Understanding the context includes, but is not limited to, understanding the history of a place, the causes and logic of violence, and opportunities for building peace. Steps include: 1) understanding conflict dynamics, (2) understanding the implications for an intervention, and (3) acting quickly to mitigate harm and improve the positive impact of an intervention. Examples for food and agricultural investments could include collecting regular information about the relationship between evolving conflict dynamics and all components of the value chain, creating trust with local communities to mitigate potential harm, and responding quickly.
 - 2.4. Conflict sensitivity depends on getting regular information about the relationship between conflict dynamics and programming, accountability for being responsive to these dynamics, and responsiveness to needs in a context as they are changing through short, quick, feedback loops.
3. *Adaptive Management*
 - 3.1. As violence increases, freedom of movement decreases, and interventions should be focused on the household level to maintain food security (e.g., storage and processing). When there is less violence, freedom of movement can resume, and in these conditions, interventions should focus on systemic impacts on the food system (e.g., land titling, water access, social cohesion).
 - 3.2. Interventions in volatile contexts should be highly adaptable.
4. *Windows of Opportunity*
 - 4.1. Youth must be part of the solution as agents for positive change, through equipping them with the knowledge and skills to enable a secure and prosperous future. The energy, creativity, and resourcefulness of youth need to be engaged to redefine meaningful social compacts and vectors of resilience.
 - 4.2. Programming should leverage the skills of displaced people so that they can contribute to the local economy and/or to develop new skills that they can use when they return home.
 - 4.3. To prevent extremism from taking hold in fragile states, we need an inclusive approach that involves building national and local partnerships with leaders in government, civil society, and the private sector, with women and with youth, who are committed to building peace and governing accountably.

- 4.4. Reducing vulnerability requires precautionary investments in social cohesion, governance, building trust between people and their governments.
 - 4.5. Agricultural development policies must be conflict sensitive and politically sensitive.
5. *Humanitarian, Development, Peace Assistance Coherence*
- 5.1. A more integrated, multi-sectoral understanding and approach to conflict-affected areas is needed across the humanitarian, development, and peace communities. For example, food and agriculture investments could incorporate trauma-sensitive programming, dispute resolution, psycho-social support, or conflict mitigation.
 - 5.2. In complex ecosystems, a prevention mindset and cooperation across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors will likely strengthen governance, peace, and the ability to resolve conflicts.

Recommendations

Recognizing that USAID has been a thought leader on technical tools and approaches related to conflict, political economy, local systems and adaptive management, these recommendations to USAID build on this strong foundation and emphasize the importance of wholesale adoption/mainstreaming across the Agency.

1. **Recognize that conflict zones are always food insecure.** Focus on agriculture, food systems, agriculture-linked livelihoods and resilience as essential determinants of survival and recovery in conflict-affected areas.
2. **Promote conflict sensitivity.** Understand the context and the dynamics that fuel conflict, especially as they affect agriculture, the food system, and different groups. Then design and adaptively manage interventions accordingly.
 - 2.1. *Analyzing Conflict*
 - 2.1.1. In partnership with relevant USG agencies, support improved conflict analytics and measurement approaches. Explore the potential for satellite data to contribute, given the difficulty in gathering on-the-ground data in a conflict zone.
 - 2.1.2. In partnership with relevant USG agencies, invest in early warning tools and systems to predict conflict and to support national security environment monitoring and societal crisis management.
 - 2.2. *Conflict Sensitivity*
 - 2.2.1. Widely adopt and mainstream conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm approaches among its country partners, implementing partners, and personnel. Design investments with conflict in mind; interventions should be tailored to the context and the unique features of each conflict.
 - 2.2.2. Support approaches that leverage what is working well in a place, including engagement of the private sector, or trusted, local leaders.
 - 2.2.3. Use political economy analysis routinely in conflict settings to identify the key actors and stakeholders in different value chains, leverage community and private sector joint ownership, cultivate accountability, and prevent elite capture.

- 2.2.4. Support the involvement of a broad range of actors to reach affected populations, including non-traditional actors.
- 2.3. *Adaptive Management*
 - 2.3.1. In protracted crises, support intervention at the system-level, for longer time frames, and more flexible operational aspects.
 - 2.3.2. Support practitioner development of operational plans and strategies for unpredictable and fast-changing environments over the life-of-project, including tactics for activity management when field sites are not accessible or when working with newly displaced people.
 - 2.3.3. Encourage development partners to think more systematically about displacement of populations during design and implementation.
- 3. **Develop technical guidance and research for conflict-affected and fragile settings.** Use a systems lens to assess conflict-affected contexts in order to (1) understand the relationship between conflict and key factors in building and maintaining food security (e.g., seeds, supply chains, crop management, storage, and markets) and (2) identify related opportunities for research, programming and technical guidance.
 - 3.1. *Technical Guidance for Conflict-affected Areas*
 - 3.1.1. Develop sector-specific technical advice for conflict areas to determine what can be done in what kinds of conflict, for example, in sectors such as seeds, pests management, or storage (e.g., uninterrupted stability for planting or harvesting, or the labor intensity of crop management).
 - 3.1.2. Assess the risks and, when appropriate, invest in commercialization of advanced agricultural technologies and innovations that are adapted to and relevant to conflict and consistent with host government policy.
 - 3.1.3. Refine conflict typologies linked to agricultural interventions (e.g., appropriate pest management approaches or planting and harvesting schedules for existing conditions).
 - 3.2. *Research Needs* Document what is working well, despite the challenging conditions, and why, to learn from the shocks and inform future investments and actions. Continue to fund research and researchers on conflict and fragile settings, to achieve a deeper understanding of the following areas:
 - 3.2.1. The differential impacts of conflict on women and children.
 - 3.2.2. The implications of conflict for agricultural input and output markets, value chains, sales networks, support programs, extension services, internal and international trade, global food prices, and human rights.
 - 3.2.3. The agricultural economy in those places that have been abandoned because of conflict and what future opportunities might exist in those areas.
 - 3.2.4. Consumer demand, especially among vulnerable populations.
 - 3.2.5. Sector-specific advice (e.g., seeds, pests, storage for conflict settings).
 - 3.2.6. High-level evaluation of the impact of interventions.
 - 3.2.7. Resettlement patterns for people displaced by conflict.
 - 3.2.8. Resilience of displaced populations and evidence on how to program to key sources of resilience in a context of displacement.
- 4. **Work with and through local food systems.** Build capacity and engage with diverse local partners—from farmers, community leaders, women, men, and youth to government officials, traders and the private sector—with special attention to strengthening social cohesion and the

relationship between citizens and their government. Explore opportunities to engage the diaspora and regional efforts.

- 4.1. Support capacity development of the public sector and civil society in conflict settings.
 - 4.2. Prioritize interventions that maintain food systems during resurgence of violence; rebuild food systems quickly; and rebuild food systems “better”, i.e., so they are more inclusive and prevent fueling further conflicts.
 - 4.3. While creating employment opportunities is difficult in conflict settings, when violence lessens and opportunities emerge, partner with private sector entities and value chain actors in conflict settings to create employment, build capacity, and introduce new technologies and innovations.
 - 4.4. Focus on youth in efforts to scale up employment and job creation opportunities.
 - 4.5. Understand the gendered dimensions of conflict when addressing the needs of, and opportunities for, men, women, boys, and girls.
 - 4.6. Leverage the private sector and other donor investments through strategic partnerships.
 - 4.7. Explore opportunities to engage the diaspora in conflict environments and leverage diaspora investments.
 - 4.8. Considering how conflicts often spill across borders, support the integration of regional efforts and initiatives, particularly cross-boundary and regional initiatives.
5. **Leverage formal and informal markets.** Scan for inclusive and creative opportunities to leverage what is working well despite challenging conditions.
- 5.1. Select markets with care for inclusivity and increased resilience, understanding who is impacted and to what extent, including displaced and vulnerable groups (women and youth), and selecting and shifting interventions with flexibility and agility based on levels of violence and freedom of movement.
 - 5.2. Avoid commodities that are susceptible to fueling further conflicts and thefts (e.g., cabbages or livestock are more vulnerable to theft and quick sale by militia groups).
 - 5.3. Make greater investments in productive sectors in conflict countries, especially leveraging informal, local markets and large-scale traders, who are conflict savvy² and routinely move large volumes in and out of high-risk areas.
 - 5.4. Leverage formal markets but carefully choose the companies with which aid organizations work. Formal sector companies should have wide crop variety portfolios, routinely serve and be committed to an area, and be conflict savvy.
6. **Seek Humanitarian-Development-Peace coherence.** Maximize the impact of agriculture and food security investments by coordinating across other development sectors as well as humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts from across the interagency—in pursuit of collective outcomes when possible.
- 6.1. Promote an integrated and multi-sectoral understanding and approach to programming in conflict-affected areas across kinds of assistance.
 - 6.2. Support the development of strategies for sequencing, layering, and integration of both humanitarian, development, and peace assistance activities together towards collective outcomes when possible.
 - 6.3. Encourage collaboration across food security and national security experts to explore the potential for food security to prevent U.S. national security problems.

² Intimate understanding of, and ability to navigate, conflict.

- 6.4. Invest in long-term development in fragile or conflict-affected areas that strengthens resilience and eventually moves beneficiaries away from humanitarian assistance.