

Policy Brief

Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and Its Impact on Peace in the Region

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Executive Summary

The link between food insecurity and peace and security has become one of the centres of academic policy and political discourses. Particularly, in the Horn of Africa, there is a close link between exposure of countries to external or internal conflicts and the deterioration or long-term stagnation in their food security. Internal conflicts have mostly become the dominant model of mass violence mainly affecting rural areas and their populations. This policy brief presents the causes of food insecurity in the Horn of Africa and looks at how food insecurity affects the peace in the region. Scholars have repeatedly cited that food insecurity in the Horn is the outcome of failure in the rain-fed agricultural economy and poorly developed *pastoralism*. Likewise, rapid population growth, conflict, youth unemployment, climate shocks, *extreme weather*,

economic instabilities, undernourishment, political crises, and outbreak of desert locust are taken as contributing factors to food insecurity in the region. Food insecurity and conflict trigger and strengthen one another. Conflict leads to food insecurity and food insecurity in turn aggravates conflict. Conflicts have destructive and long-term negative effects on food security which would also trigger political instability that could further disrupt the peace situation in the region. Thus, it is necessary to have sustainable food security interventions that enhance resilience to conflict and contribute to conflict prevention and mitigation efforts which could eventually bring about sustainable development in the region. Policy makers and development practitioners have a significant role in creating such situations.

Key Points

- Conflict, climate shocks and economic instability have continued to exacerbate food insecurity in the Horn of Africa.
- Despite the signing of peace agreements and promising government reforms, violence has become a particularly worst problem for Ethiopia and South Sudan particularly in 2020. This has given further intensity to food insecurity.
- Food insecurity in the Horn of Africa is linked to the inability of people to have access to food due to persistent prevalence of poverty in the region.
- Food insecurity is linked to man-made and natural factors that hamper the regular farming and non-farming activities of the community.
- Conflict leads to a significant drop in economic growth, which in turn, exacerbates poverty and food insecurity situation in the Horn of Africa.
- Conflicts have adverse effects on hunger, nutrition, sustainable development and peace and security in the Horn region.

Background

Food security has always been a significant concern in the Horn of Africa. The region is a home to some of the most food-insecure people in the world, largely because of ongoing conflicts, economic instability, high level of poverty and vulnerability to climate shocks (Sleet, 2020). The region has a long history of conflict at local level and across borders. Due to this, the region hosts a large number of refugees and internally displaced people, who experience even greater levels of food insecurity. Food insecurity inevitably worsens when fighting drives large numbers of people from their homes, their land and their jobs. At the same time, it is clear that hunger can exacerbate conflict. The total population of the Horn of Africa is about 160 million. Of these, 70 million reside in areas prone to extreme food shortages, which means over 40 per cent of

the population has been exposed to undernourishment attributable to food insecurity and insufficient livelihoods (FAO, *et al.*, 2017). Further, about 60 per cent of the land of the region is occupied by 22 million pastoralists who practice traditional livestock management (FAO, *et al.*, 2017).

Food insecurity and conflict are strongly interlinked as they trigger and strengthen one another. Food shortage deepens existing fault lines by fueling grievances. Worldwide, 815 million individuals and 155 million children are undernourished and stunted respectively (FAO *et al.*, 2017). Surprisingly, 60 per cent of the undernourished individuals and 79 per cent of the stunted children live in countries where violent conflicts exist (FAO *et al.*, 2017). The livelihoods of the households are affected when the farm and non-farm activities of the area are disrupted by conflict.

Causes of Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa

Food insecurity in the Horn of Africa is associated with the inability of people to have access to food due to persistent prevalence of poverty in the region. World Food Program (WFP) has found that countries with the highest level of food insecurity, coupled with armed conflict, have the highest outward migration of refugees. When poverty is added to the problems, food insecurity would further increase the likelihood and intensity of armed conflicts (WFP, 2019). IGAD (2020) reported that conflict, weather extremes, and economic shocks continued to be the main drivers of acute food insecurity across the region in 2019. Each driver of food insecurity reinforces the other, creating complex situations that are not easily resolved (Sleet, 2020). Armed conflicts, communal violence and other localized tensions continued to disrupt peace and security in the region becoming the primary driver for 8.5 million people facing acute food insecurity (31 per cent of the region's total). The number derives from 7 million people in South Sudan mainly facing inter-communal tensions and violence, and 1.5 million in Uganda, majority of them refugees fleeing armed conflict and war in their home countries (IGAD report, 2020). The food security situation in South Sudan

plummeted in 2013 after conflict erupted and caused human and livestock displacement, early depletion of food stocks, poor access to markets as well as disruption of agricultural activities (Sleet, 2020). According to IGAD (2020), the prevalence of acute food insecurity in the region was 61 per cent in South Sudan, 27 per cent in Ethiopia, 22 per cent in Kenya, 17 per cent in Somalia and 14 per cent in the Sudan.

The frequency and prevalence of food insecurity observed in the Horn of Africa is mainly associated with rain-fed agricultural economy that is characterized by low use of improved farm inputs, low fertility soils, food crop loss at post-harvest, environmental degradation, negligible value addition and inadequate food storage. Moreover, food insecurity is the outcome of rapid population growth, youth *unemployment*, *climate change*, *undernourishment*, *prolonged political crises and wars*. *In addition, poor governance*, inequalities in income, lack of access to farm and range land, and other natural resources *are drivers of food insecurity in the region*. Currently, a severe desert locust outbreak also exacerbates acute food insecurity in the region. *As a result of these factors* there is insufficient national food availability and insufficient access to food by households. The recurrent drought in the Horn of Africa is also one of the natural shocks that leads to the loss of lives

and livelihoods. The solution to the problem is creating means of ensuring food security through planned interventions which would eventually have positive effects on sustainable peace in the region (FAO, 2016). Food security prevents and mitigates violent conflict. Thus, enhancing agricultural production and improving livelihoods play a great role in creating peace.

Effects of Conflict on Food Security

There is a long history of conflict in the Horn of Africa at the local community level and between communities in different countries. As already mentioned, armed conflicts, communal violence and other localized tensions continued to disrupt peace and security in the region exposing 8.5 million people to acute food insecurity. This means conflict causes human migration which in turn triggers food insecurity and then leads to famine. The effect of conflict on food security usually lasts long even after the violence came to end.

Conflict has numerous consequences because it increases food insecurity of both the migrants and the host communities in the region by limiting access to food. Conflict also leads to a significant drop in economic growth, which in turn, exacerbates poverty and food insecurity

situation. This left Africa, especially the Horn region, stagnant in terms of poverty reduction, while the rest of the world has made considerable improvement in this regard. Various studies report that conflict has adverse effects on food security of children in the Horn of Africa (Arcand *et al.*, 2015; Duque, 2016; Nasir, 2016). Effects of conflict on the nutritional status of children start taking toll prior to birth. The reason is that pregnant women residing in conflict-stricken areas are exposed to food insecurity. This makes them give birth to children of low weight and poor health which in turn passes the adverse effects of conflict across generations (FAO, 2016). As a result, conflict consistently presents shock that affects the overall livelihood and well-being of the people living in the region.

According to FAO (2016), a study that used conflict data and improved farm technologies examined the effect of violent conflict on agricultural production, including livestock and different varieties of crops, and found out that production drops significantly in regions affected by conflict. The decline is mainly due to death of workforce, depletion of assets, displacement of people, destruction of environment, devastation of infrastructures such as schools, healthcare facilities, and other social services. Studies theorized that diminished agricultural production and income lead to conflict by

affecting employment opportunities and increasing prices and grievances (ibid). Conflict is one of the push factors that cause migration and forced displacement, and this has adverse effects on food security. Conflict aggravates the vulnerability of poor people by disrupting food supply chains, affecting harvests, disrupting economic activities, dislocating people from their original places and diminishing resources. Conflict increases vulnerabilities and risks; and reduces coping mechanisms among migrants and host communities. All these circumstances negatively impact food security.

Impact of Food Insecurity on Peace in the Horn of Africa

In the Horn of Africa, armed conflicts, inter-communal violence and other localized tensions and conflicts over resources like land, pasture and water continue to affect peace and security of the region. Pastoralist communities such as the Afar, Issa, Somali, Borana and Gebra of Ethiopia and Massai, Borana, Sanburu, and Turkana of Northern Kenya have been roaming in the region in search of pasture and water for their livestock. This created fierce competition over the scarce grazing land and water resources. The competition, in turn, led to violent conflicts among these communities which, in fact, resulted

in devastation of agricultural resources and infrastructures that ended in reduced agricultural production (Deininger and Castagnini, 2006; Kurtz and McMahon, 2015; Rockmore, 2015; Munoz-Mora, 2016). It is unquestionable that violent conflicts have destructive and long-lasting impacts on food security which may further trigger political instability. Conflicts also ruin physical infrastructures and create security risks of using them. Research findings show that there is a positive correlation between the levels of conflict and food insecurity. Food insecurity is not only an outcome of conflict but it, in turn, aggravates conflict. In fragile states, a vicious cycle of instability and food insecurity prevails in that both result from and lead to one another. In severely fragile states, conflict can lead to extensive food insecurity and famine.

The Link between Peace, Conflict and Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa

There is a complex link between peace, conflict and food security. Conflict directly influences food security as it causes forced displacement and loss of resources. Conflict further affects the ability to produce; hampers the regular farming and non-farming activities; and damages infrastructures. In other words, conflict reduces

food availability, disrupts access to food, and undermines all production systems. Conflict has adverse effects on hunger, nutrition and overall development and mainly affects rural areas with its negative impacts on agricultural production and rural livelihoods. Because of conflict, the livelihood of rural community is disrupted and people become food insecure. This further affects the sustainable development of the community. Forced displacement and loss of resources, in turn, lead to conflict which affects the peace and security of the area. Most of the world's hungry live in areas where there is no peace. Thus, food security needs to be part of peace-building efforts as peace reinforces food security. Efforts made to revitalize agricultural activities and enhance food security have positive association with sustainability of peace (FAO, 2016).

One of the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contends that "sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development." (UN General Assembly, 2015, p.8) This indicates the importance of addressing both peace and development for achieving sustainable development goals of the agenda. Food security is considered vital in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs to make sustainable

reintegration of earlier opponents into civilian life and peacetime livelihoods to prevent the threat of returning to conflict for accessing food and other resources (ibid). On the other hand, food insecurity is a factor that can contribute to the worsening of societies and deterioration of political instability. For instance, food protests contributed to the collapse of the government of Haiti in 2008. Food price increase also played a part in the protests during the Arab Spring of 2011. In post-conflict situations, food insecurity had a role in the violence in Central African Republic and Yemen. In South Sudan inter-communal violence has increased by 300 per cent in 2019, worsening an already precarious food security situation and preventing humanitarian access to the most-affected areas (Sleet, 2020). Political unrest has also led to communal violence in Ethiopia, particularly in Addis Ababa and Oromia region, and ethnic tensions remain high. In general, economic downturns, extreme weather and conflict have always been the most serious threats to East Africa's food security and 2020 has seen each of these factors threaten food security in the region to a varying extent. Because of this, East Africa's food security is likely to remain precarious for the foreseeable future, continuing with the downwards trend seen since 2016 (ibid).

Conclusion

Persistent food insecurity in the Horn of Africa is associated with conflict which adversely affects the peace and security of the region. Conflicts destroy farm and non-farm assets and related infrastructures and then lead to drop in agricultural production. This aggravates the food insecurity situation of the region which further affects political stability. In general, food insecurity and conflict trigger and strengthen one another. Both equally need due consideration of policy makers and development practitioners for enhancing food security and peace situations of the region.

Policy Recommendations

It is necessary to have sustainable food security interventions that enhance resilience to conflict and work towards conflict prevention and mitigation while backing sustainable development of the region. This requires the implementation of measures such as ending conflicts, educating children, empowering women, creating job opportunities, enhancing livelihoods in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, improving rural infrastructures and making safety net programs work more on livelihoods development.

Conducting comprehensive study on vulnerable people, creating a strong synergy among actors and engaging them in making integrated responses and providing sustainable solution to the chronic development and peace problems of the region are areas that should be focused on.

Food security needs to be part of peacebuilding process as strengthening resilience to food insecurity contributes towards reducing conflict and creating peaceful situations in the region.

Strengthening the link between local level government representatives and community leaders and building their capacity on dispute resolution should be worked on. Similarly, local communities and their institutions such as religion, local governance and social structures on conflict management should be strengthened.

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