



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

## BACKGROUND NOTE

# IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN PROTRACTED CRISES

Guidance to implement the Framework for Action for  
Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA)

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# Food insecurity and malnutrition in protracted crises: a vicious circle

Protracted crises are situations in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease, and disruption of livelihoods over a prolonged period of time.

Such crises are extremely challenging contexts in which to fight hunger and malnutrition – the most serious and common consequences – and poverty, and account for over two-thirds of international humanitarian assistance.

Although each situation is different, the recurrent causes include both human-made factors and natural hazards – often occurring simultaneously and reinforcing each other. They include lengthy food crises, the breakdown of livelihoods and food systems and insufficient governance and institutional capacity.

Protracted crises may be localized in certain areas or regions, and do not necessarily affect the whole population of a country.

As these crises become more protracted and frequent, livelihoods, food systems, and resilience are severely undermined, creating a downward spiral. Food insecurity can also be instrumental in triggering or deepening conflict and civil strife.

## The last thirty years

Since the early 1990s the number of hungry people has declined by 21.4 percent globally, despite a 1.9 billion increase in world population. Many countries that have made progress in fighting hunger enjoy stable political conditions and economic growth. However, the number of countries in Africa facing food crises doubled from 12 in 1990 to 24 in 2010. Of these, 19 had been in crisis for eight or more of the previous ten years.

According to the State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) report in 2010, the proportion of undernourished people in protracted crises is three times higher than in other developing contexts, with over 160 million people – approximately 20 percent of the world's undernourished people –

living in protracted crisis situations in around 20 countries and territories, over three-quarters of which are in Africa.

In recent years, new challenges have emerged. Conflicts are becoming more complex and intractable, contributing to an increase in forced displacement. In 2015, over 65 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced – the highest number since the end of World War II.

In 1990, one-fifth of the global poor lived in fragile states. Two billion people now live in countries where development outcomes are affected by fragility, conflict, and violence. While the rest of the world makes progress, extreme poverty will increasingly be concentrated in fragile contexts, rising to almost 50 percent of the global total by 2030, up from 17 percent today. Furthermore, over 90 percent of people living in extreme poverty are living in fragile contexts or at risk of extreme climate events, or both. Over one-third of countries thus classified in 2015 had experienced recent conflicts.

It is often the least developed or most fragile countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. As the magnitude and impact of crises and disasters increase, households, communities and governments are less able to absorb, recover and adapt, making them more vulnerable to future shocks, and to developing into protracted crises.

## From the SOFI 2010 to the CFS-FFA

These trends and impacts were the starting point for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to work on developing policy guidance to improve food security and nutrition, recognising that protracted crisis situations require special attention, and that appropriate responses in such contexts differ from those required in short-term crisis or in non-crisis development contexts.

The CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA) draws on technical work underlying the SOFI 2010 and the outcomes of a High-level Expert Forum on Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises in September 2012. The CFS-FFA was elaborated through an inclusive consultation process, including representatives from governments, UN agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, international agricultural research institutions, private sector associations and philanthropic foundations, as well as international and regional financial institutions. The CFS-FFA was endorsed in October 2015.

## The 11 principles of the CFS-FFA

While the CFS-FFA is voluntary and non-binding, it draws on and is consistent with international and regional instruments and global frameworks, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. It represents the first global consensus on how to mitigate the threat to food security and nutrition during protracted crises.

The CFS-FFA aims to improve the food security and nutrition of populations affected by, or at risk of, protracted crises by addressing critical manifestations and building resilience, adapting to specific challenges, and helping address underlying causes. It is based on eleven principles:

### Address critical manifestations and build resilience

Principle 1. Meet immediate humanitarian needs and build resilient livelihoods

Principle 2. Focus on nutritional needs

## **Adapt to specific challenges**

Principle 3. Reach affected populations

Principle 4. Protect those affected by or at risk from protracted crises

Principle 5. Empower women and girls, promote gender equality and encourage gender sensitivity

Principle 6. Ensure and support comprehensive evidence-based analyses

Principle 7. Strengthen country ownership, participation, coordination and stakeholder buy-in, and accountability

Principle 8. Promote effective financing

## **Contribute to resolving underlying causes of food insecurity and undernutrition in protracted crises**

Principle 9. Contribute to peacebuilding through food security and nutrition

Principle 10. Manage natural resources sustainably and reduce disaster risks

Principle 11. Promote effective national and local governance

## **FAO: building resilience**

The livelihoods of 2.5 billion people worldwide depend on agriculture. Three-quarters of the poor are farmers. These small-scale farmers, herders, fishers and forest-dependent communities generate more than half of global agricultural production and are particularly at risk from disasters that destroy or damage harvests, equipment, supplies, livestock, seeds, crops and stored food.

The impacts of disasters and crises are not merely short-term – they undermine livelihoods and national development gains that have taken years to build, particularly in protracted crisis situations.

FAO advocates for building resilience to be a common objective for all stakeholders in disaster and crisis areas, and for more flexible approaches, bridging short-term humanitarian and longer-term development interventions. Zero hunger, environmental conservation, climate change adaptation and sustainable economic development cannot be achieved without resilient agricultural livelihoods.

FAO believes that the humanitarian and development community must prioritize building this resilience to meet key global policy objectives – the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Climate Agreement, the One Health approach, the Agenda for Humanity of the World Humanitarian Summit, and the CFS-FFA – in order to deliver the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Agenda with its pledge “to leave no one behind” and “to go the last mile.”

## **FAO Guidance Notes**

For FAO, operationalizing the CFS-FFA is a global priority under its Strategic Programme 5, “Increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises”. In July 2016, FAO started developing this series of Guidance Notes on key areas of its work in protracted crisis situations.

The Guidance Notes draw on FAO specialized technical expertise, experience, and knowledge base in the fields of agriculture, support for food security and nutrition, and reducing rural poverty. They cover topics as diverse as analysis and information, gender, land-related issues, nutrition, safe access to fuel and energy, social protection and youth migration, in order to raise awareness of the CFS-FFA, whilst supporting FAO staff and partners in specific areas.

Each Guidance Note explores the role of the topic in the context of protracted crises, and its relationship with the principles of the CFS-FFA. It highlights key messages for decision-makers, provides concrete examples from FAO work, outlines potential practical interventions in protracted crisis situations, presents future perspectives, and lists key resources and tools for further learning.

The illustrations and examples of FAO work include both well-grounded practices and more recent initiatives. Together they show that joint efforts and combined interventions, the use of development approaches adapted to crisis situations, and people-centred initiatives which take agriculture and food security as entry points to sustaining peace and transformational change, can have a significant impact.

We hope that these Guidance Notes will make a key contribution to the common effort to improve food security and nutrition in protracted crisis situations, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

This series has been developed under the coordination and guidance of Julius Jackson and Oriane Turot, at FAO in Rome, with contributions from staff across the Organization.





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