CONFLICT

Hunger

CONCERN
worldwide

A monthly food distribution in Juba. Each family gets their ration which must last for one month. The distribution takes place over two days to spread out the crowds. Photographer: Steve De Neef

Executive Summary

Concern's commitment to leaving no one behind has increasingly taken the organisation to fragile contexts, where the devastating consequences of conflict and resulting levels of human suffering have soared in recent years. Conflict and hunger are inextricably linked: in 2017, 124 million people faced crisis-level food insecurity, with conflict the key driver in 60 per cent of cases of acute food insecurity.[1]

As the global community strives to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2) of ending hunger, progress is being fundamentally undermined by conflict. This report seeks to understand: i) how conflict affects different individuals', groups' and communities' experience of hunger and food insecurity differently; ii) the different mechanisms by which conflict affects food security across the different pillars; and iii) what opportunities remain for mitigating the impacts of conflict on hunger.

South Sudan is one of the world's most conflict-affected and food-insecure countries. In spite of years of steady progress in the reduction of hunger globally, in 2017, famine was declared in parts of the country.[2] Now entering its fifth year, conflict has had a devastating toll on food security, and its impacts show no signs of abating. An estimated 6.1 million are in need of urgent food assistance; and over one million children under the age of five are affected by moderate or severe acute malnutrition.[3] At current levels, humanitarian assistance reaches less than half of all households in need,[4] primarily due to insecurity. In a crisis of this magnitude, even those areas far beyond the front lines of fighting are suffering immensely and feeling the effects of conflict in their communities.

This study documents conflict's devastating impacts on food security in areas both acutely and less directly affected by violence. In the former, severe insecurity limits movement and in some cases, leads to near-total dependence on food aid. Restrictions on humanitarian access either because of generalised insecurity, or deliberate efforts to prevent access, are deadly weapons of war. Even in areas that appear more stable, conflict profoundly affects communities through localised violence, economic crisis, and as a force multiplier in contexts of natural disasters and climate change.

The research also highlights that although conflict's impacts on food security are devastating and wide-reaching, they are also unequally distributed within households and communities. The gendered dimensions of conflict and hunger are particularly stark. Women and girls are primarily responsible for food collection and preparation, meaning they often put themselves at grave risk when searching for food. They are also more likely to deny themselves (and other female family members) food to meet the needs of men. Finally, they suffer disproportionately from (sometimes violent) power imbalances within the household that are brought into sharp relief in times of crisis. Men's internalised gender roles as financial providers contributes to feelings of shame, powerlessness and helplessness as they struggle to provide the most basic of necessities: food.

Finally, the study outlines ways in which conflict severely disrupts traditional coping mechanisms and mutual support systems, and through these, further exacerbates hunger and food insecurity. At extreme levels, depleted household assets and competition for scarce resources can diminish cooperation, mutual solidarity and systems of reciprocity that are central to community cohesion and resilience. In such contexts, national-level political conflict can indirectly fuel a vicious cycle of poverty and localised violence.

Based on these findings, the report makes five recommendations for those working to reduce the impact of conflict on hunger and food security globally:

1. **Humanitarian and development actors must work in a conflict-sensitive way to support peace at different levels and deliver effective, accountable, quality programming.** Conflict is the primary driver of food insecurity in the world, and the greatest threat to a more stable, prosperous and food-secure future. Organisations must invest in conflict-sensitive analysis and approaches to ensure that their programmes do not further exacerbate conflict drivers or divisions. This is absolutely vital in sites of acute conflict, but must also be applied in areas affected by localised violence. There, conflict's indirect impacts are often less visible, but no less real.

> **Particular attention should be paid to the direct and indirect forms of violence and discrimination that women and girls experience, and the destructive effect of conflict on social solidarity and mutual support systems**

2. **Humanitarian and development actors should implement programmes that are highly attuned to the ways that gender and social relations shape conflict's impacts on food security.** Responses must be grounded in detailed and up-to-date analyses of the indirect consequences of conflict on gendered relations, power and community-level social institutions to understand how these affect food security. Particular attention should be paid to the direct and indirect forms of violence and discrimination that women and girls experience, and the destructive effect of conflict on social solidarity and mutual support systems. Organisations should work in ways that address gendered inequalities, and enhance community cohesion wherever possible.

3. **Humanitarian and development actors should support community-owned resilience-building activities that tackle the combined impacts of conflict, climate change and natural disasters on food insecurity.** Natural disasters, climate change and conflict individually, and collectively, compound communities' vulnerabilities, erode coping strategies, and undermine long-term recovery and sustainable development. Addressing conflict's multi-dimensional impacts on food security demands a genuinely integrated approach to prevention. This should increase investment in innovative agricultural development; take account of the natural environment and reinforce community resilience to complex shocks; and support community-level systems for sustainably and equitably managing resources and non-violently resolving disputes over access if they arise.

4. **Donors should provide sufficient, rapidly dispersible and flexible funding to support conflict-sensitive, multi-year, integrated responses to conflict and hunger.** Humanitarian responses that save lives and meet mounting needs without further aggravating conflict depend on donor investment in conflict-sensitive approaches that can adapt as the context evolves. Beyond this, they require sustained commitment to long-term support to ensure life-saving assistance is delivered in an effective, accountable and sustainable way. To date, the majority of donors continue to work in 12-18 month funding cycles. Inadequate, inflexible, and short-term funding cannot effectively address complex needs that require long-term engagement and adaptive responses.

5. **All parties to conflict must abide by, monitor and continue to advocate for compliance with, international humanitarian law, including law concerning the use of food as a weapon of war.** The use, and threat, of violence to restrict population movement, access to food and livelihood activities is widespread in conflict. In some cases, it is accompanied by targeted efforts to prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching those most in need. The recently passed UN Resolution 2417 (2018) is an historic milestone in the global community's recognition of the way food is leveraged as a weapon of war. But it is only a first step. It is vital to ensure systems for monitoring and reporting on violations are established, fully implemented and clearly linked to accountability mechanisms. Humanitarian and development actors can lend their weight to this agenda by disseminating evidence of these practices, coordinating collective efforts to push back against humanitarian access restrictions, and crucially, giving a platform to the voices of those most affected by conflict and hunger.

Contents

Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
CAR	Central African Republic
CHD	Country Health Department
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Directorate General
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSIN	Food Security Information Network
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
PoC	Protection of Civilians
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHACDO	Shabelle Community Development Organisation
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1 | Introduction

Concern's commitment to 'leaving no one behind'[5] has increasingly taken the organisation into fragile contexts where the devastating consequences of conflict and resulting levels of human suffering have soared in recent years. Concern's presence in many of the world's most conflict-affected contexts calls for new thinking on how its programming can evolve to include some form of conflict response. This report is one in a series of papers exploring the humanitarian consequences of conflict, aimed primarily at humanitarian actors, and suggests ways to improve action to break the conflict cycle.

The eradication of 'calamitous' famines and consistent progress over the last two decades in addressing global hunger have been justly celebrated as enormous achievements globally.[6] However, in spite of years of steady progress, in 2016, the immense toll of violent conflict contributed to the first increase in the number of chronically hungry people in over a decade. In 2017, famine was declared in parts of South Sudan and alerts were issued for Northern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen – all experiencing devastating violent conflict.[7] An estimated 124 million people faced crisis-level food insecurity, an increase of 11 per cent on the previous year.[8] It is clear that conflict is a central factor in explaining this decline. Decades of gains in addressing hunger have stagnated or deteriorated in most countries experiencing violent conflict. Today, an estimated 489 million of 815 million undernourished people live in conflict-affected countries.[9]

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Almost all conflicts result in food insecurity and hunger. Conflict destroys agricultural land; restricts transport and trade; disrupts markets; and forces people to flee their homes and means of production. In some cases, food insecurity and famines are actively used as weapons of war.[10] This can involve the targeting of food production, transport systems and markets; forced displacement combined with land-grabbing or destruction; limiting humanitarian access; and/or restricting food imports.[11] In other cases, conflict's impacts on hunger are less direct, through disrupted markets, inflation, limited food diversity, and/or distress coping mechanisms that undermine long-term resilience.

The nature, duration and intensity of conflict are important factors shaping the impact of conflict on food security. Not all conflicts are equally destructive; and none is consistently violent over the duration of a conflict, nor across the entirety of a country's territory. Similarly, some conflicts involve very high-intensity violence resulting in mass casualties; while others are characterised by lower-intensity or targeted violence. The nature of conflict also often changes over time, and in many cases, countries experience multiple forms of insecurity in different sub-national regions simultaneously.[12]

Conflict and Hunger

Women carry firewood through the swamps of Leer County in Unity State, South Sudan. Photographer: Kieran McConville

While there is robust evidence of the general detrimental effect of conflict on food security, these variations serve as a reminder that the precise relationship is highly context-specific. Not all conflicts result in the same levels of hunger; nor are all households or individuals equally affected. For this reason, this study seeks to understand:

1. How conflict affects different individuals', groups' and communities' experience of hunger and food insecurity differently;
2. The different mechanisms by which conflict affects hunger and food security across the different pillars of food security; and
3. What gaps or opportunities remain to address or mitigate the impacts of conflict on hunger.

1.1 Overview of conflict

Concern defines violent conflict as 'Protracted violence between groups resulting in significant human suffering.'[13] This definition encompasses large-scale, national or international armed conflict and localised conflict systems, both of which can result in significant humanitarian suffering. Globally, violent conflict is increasing in frequency and intensity. After a period of relative gains in global peace, violent conflict has significantly increased in the past decade.[14] Recently, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reported that the number of countries involved in violent conflicts is the highest in three decades.[15]

The nature of conflict has also transformed in several ways in recent decades. First, contemporary conflict is increasingly transnationalised, involving extensive networks of international actors. This has particular implications for food security: neighbouring countries are frequent trading partners and cross-border mobility can be a vital coping strategy to sustain livelihoods.[16] At the same time, in many fragile states, multiple conflicts with different perpetrators and victims of violence co-occur in different parts of the state.[17] This contributes to a complexity that puts more civilians at risk, hampers humanitarian access, and undermines political and diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving peace.

Accompanying this proliferation of conflict is an increasingly complex network of conflict actors: alongside state and clearly identified armed opposition forces, contemporary conflicts are often host to more diffuse, decentralised forces, including paramilitaries and communal militias.[18] Finally, conflict is becoming more protracted, with recurring cycles of violence creating a 'conflict trap' from which countries struggle to escape.[19] This pattern condemns many populations to repeated cycles of conflict and poverty. This attests to the fact that underlying conditions need to be addressed to build lasting peace and empower resilient communities to build a more stable and prosperous future.

1.2 Overview of hunger and food insecurity

'Hunger' is defined as a lack of food, and measured by 'the proportion of the population whose dietary energy consumption is less than a pre-determined threshold.'[20] Hunger is usually a consequence of food insecurity. The concept of food security refers to a condition in which 'all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'[21]

Food security is a multidimensional concept. It is undermined when any or all of its constituent dimensions are significantly disrupted: availability; accessibility; utilisation; and stability (see Table 1). Food security is not a function of food production alone. Food availability nationally or even locally can still fail to translate into household-level food security if people lack the resources to purchase food, for example, or food is only intermittently available.

Table 1: Dimensions of Food Security[22]

Dimension	Definition
Physical **availability** of food	The level of food production, stock levels and net trade.
Economic and physical **access** to food	The ability to gain access to food produced, for example, through purchase or trade.
Food **utilisation**	The way the body makes the most of various nutrients in food. It is the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of diet and household distribution of food.
Stability of the other three dimensions over time	The regularity and predictability of the other three dimensions of food security. Unreliable food availability, access or utilisation can contribute to food insecurity.

Widespread, extreme food insecurity can lead to famine. The most widely accepted definition is that famine exists where three criteria have been met: first, at least one in five households face an extreme lack of food; second, that more than 30 per cent of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition; and third, that deaths exceed two out of every 10,000 a day.[23]

Alleviating hunger is a fundamental component of the humanitarian imperative to save lives, and the longer-term vision of supporting people's access to a decent standard of living and the opportunities and choices essential to a long and healthy life. The importance of this is reflected in the international commitment to ending hunger and achieving food security for all by 2030 (SDG 2).

The global community has reasons to be hopeful about the state of food security in the world: in 2017, the average Global Hunger Index score was 27 per cent lower than in 2000.[24] The twenty-first century appears to have heralded the end of 'calamitous' famines,[25] while significant gains have also been made in reducing the prevalence of undernourishment, child wasting, stunting and mortality.[26]

However, progress has been uneven both across – and within – countries. In 2017, over 20 million people were declared at risk of famine.[27] Moreover, while 14 countries' Global Hunger Index scores dropped by more than half since the turn of the century, almost twice as many (27) saw a fall of no more than 25 per cent, and one (Central African Republic), made no progress at all in two decades of crisis.[28] Just as conflict-affected contexts have struggled to meet other development goals,[29] conflict-affected countries have systematically made the least progress in addressing malnutrition.[30] In other words, conflict-affected countries are falling further and further behind, precisely when action is most needed.

There are also substantial variations *within* countries: even where national level statistics suggest recent improvements at the aggregate level, countries like Afghanistan are home to pockets of profound hunger and food insecurity.[31] This reflects the fact that violent conflict, and its interaction with local food systems, as well as household livelihoods and coping strategies, is extremely context-specific. For this reason, first-hand accounts of local conditions are vital to enriching our understanding of the drivers and consequences of food insecurity, and the responses it requires.

1.3 Research methodology

This report seeks to understand: i) how conflict affects different individuals', groups' and communities' experience of hunger and food insecurity differently; ii) the different mechanisms by which conflict affects hunger and food security across the different pillars of food security; and iii) what opportunities remain for mitigating the impacts of conflict on hunger.

This study is based on a combination of desk-based secondary research and primary qualitative research in select case study countries. Primary qualitative research was carried out in November and December 2017 and March 2018 in South Sudan; in March and April 2018 in Somalia; and in April 2018 in Afghanistan. During this time, 13 interviews, and 12 community-based focus group discussions were held across three countries. In addition, 16 key informant interviews were held with external stakeholders including NGO staff; local, national and international policy makers; and national and international researchers.

Qualitative research methods were prioritised because a number of organisations already collect and disseminate quantitative data on the levels and patterns of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition.[32] This data provides vital, life-saving and actionable information. However, it does not and cannot provide an insight into the lived experience of conflict and hunger, which can shed important light on the less visible drivers and consequences of conflict and food insecurity. Sites for qualitative research were selected based on their profile of violence, and subsequent patterns of food insecurity in communities. Both Aweil North and Bentiu in South Sudan experience different levels and dynamics of conflict. In spite of this, both areas are classified as facing similar phases of food insecurity and malnutrition.[33] This presents an opportunity to explore how divergent profiles of violence can lead to similar food insecurity outcomes.

2

Conflict and Hunger

Conflict accounts for an estimated 60 per cent of cases of acute food insecurity, affecting 74 million people globally.[34] It can have a direct impact on food security through the destruction of crops, and forcing people to abandon their land, livestock and livelihoods; or an indirect impact through its effects on rising prices, deteriorating health systems and the fragility of wider institutions.

Extensive research shows the detrimental impact of conflict on food security and nutrition.[35] Much of this focuses on conflict's impact on child nutrition, given children's particular vulnerability in conflict, and the fact that early life exposure to conflict can have long-term effects on health and wellbeing. For example, in Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, exposure to armed conflict has been shown to affect height-for-age scores among children.[36] Research also highlights conflict's negative effect on school grade completion and adult stature 30-40 years after the end of hostilities.[37] The dynamics of conflict also matter: evidence shows that both the long duration[38] and cumulative effect of successive rounds of conflict[39] negatively impact on nutrition.

Beyond these points of broad consensus, two significant gaps remain in our understanding of conflict and food security: the first, concerns the specific causal channels through which conflict affects food security, and how these effects differ according to the nature and geography of conflict. The second gap relates to the specific vulnerabilities of individuals, groups and communities, and the social transmission of conflict and food insecurity's impacts.

2.1 Pathways of impact: How and where conflict affects food security

While there is clear consensus that conflict drives food insecurity, the precise nature of this relationship, and how it varies in different conflicts, remain poorly understood. As outlined above, there are four main pillars of food security: food availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability.

Food availability is affected when food production is interrupted. Conflict can destroy agricultural produce, productive assets and infrastructure. Changes in households' livelihood strategies can also affect food supply: many households reduce production during conflict to reduce their risk of being targeted by armed groups, meaning overall stocks of food can suffer.[40] Limited mobility may also mean farmers cannot travel to their fields, and livestock owners face restrictions on seasonal movement. The combined effects of these disruptions can be extremely severe. Globally, between 1970 and 1997, conflict-induced losses of agricultural output in lower-income countries amounted to an estimated $121 billion.[41] The effect of conflict on food production is also cumulative, with more significant declines the longer a crisis continues.[42]

A woman holds up grains distributed by Concern, this is part of the support provided to over 135,000 people living in the protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Bentiu, South Sudan. Photographer Steve De Neef.

Food accessibility is a second pillar of food security, determined by people's ability to purchase, trade, or work for food. Ongoing insecurity can result in market closures and trade disruption, reducing access. For example, in DRC, local currency depreciation has resulted in reduced cross-border trade and imports, with some areas registering a recent doubling of prices of staples such as maize and cassava.[43] It is estimated that an average of 56 per cent of the population of conflict-affected countries live in rural areas, where agriculture is the main livelihood; this rises to an average of 62 per cent in protracted crises.[44] Consequently, conflict-related declines in food production affect not only the absolute stock of food in a country. They also affect income, purchasing power and access, with a particular impact on the poorest households.[45]

Even if food is available and households can access it, poor *food utilisation* can still affect food security. Utilisation refers to the way food is used, including processing, storage, and nutrient absorption.[46] Conflict-related damage to infrastructure destroys storage facilities; damaged wells and boreholes lead to poor sanitation; and conditions in displacement, for example, can undermine safe preparation and storage. The impact of conflict on overall health, which in turn affects the body's ability to absorb food, is also important. In Yemen in 2017, an already dire food security situation was compounded by the fastest growing cholera outbreak ever recorded, exacerbated by damaged infrastructure and sanitation facilities.[47]

Finally, food security can be affected even when each of these pillars is met, if *food stability* is not also ensured. Stability refers to the predictability and regularity of availability, access and utilisation. Conflict by its very nature is volatile and undermines predictable production and trade. Even if availability and access are adequate at a given moment, if those conditions are highly changeable, this leads to food insecurity. Concern research has highlighted how the experience of violent conflict can shorten planning horizons and affect future investment in assets and production.[48] Volatile prices as a result of conflict may also feed into a vicious circle of panic-buying, hoarding, and rising prices.[49]

Importantly, none of these impacts occur in a vacuum. Violence and insecurity often exacerbate other factors – such as natural disasters and climate change – that render people vulnerable to food insecurity. Violent conflict erodes state capacity to respond to disasters; damages infrastructure, which renders people more vulnerable; and exposes people to successive shocks, which undermine resilience (see Concern case study, page 16). Consequently, over half of all disaster deaths occur in the world's most fragile states, and many of these countries experience multiple hazards in a single year.[50] Climate change also has the potential to be a driver of conflict, although evidence suggests this is unlikely to be through a direct, linear mechanism. Instead, climate change is an additional stressor, the effects of which are typically mediated through local-level capacities to adapt to and anticipate climate change's effects and reduce its impacts.[51]

While the evidence above illustrates key dynamics, it also shows that conflict's precise impacts on food security depend on local conditions. Most research examines the relationship between conflict and food security cross-nationally. However, within a country, both conflict and food systems vary across locations. This makes analysis at the sub-national level extremely important, and raises the question of how conflict's impacts on food security differ within a single country. Research suggests that national-level conflicts over control of an entire country tend to have a larger impact on food security than those over control of a particular region. This is attributed to the fact that these conflicts are more likely to disrupt all aspects of food systems, from production, to trade and utilisation.[52] Beyond this, our understanding of how and in what ways conflict's impacts shape hunger in areas indirectly affected by violence, remains limited.

In conclusion, although there is general consensus that the consequences of higher-intensity conflicts last longer than those of lower-intensity violence,[53] there is limited consistent evidence on the relationship between specific conflict typologies (e.g., inter- or intra-state wars).[54] As countries often experience multiple crises in different regions of a state, and these conflicts each have unique profiles, understanding how persistent, lower-intensity and often 'hidden' conflicts affect food security is central to effectively responding to needs.

Conflict, Climate Change and Natural Disasters Eroding Resilience in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the world's most complex humanitarian emergencies. As of December 2017, 7.6 million people, or more than one-quarter of the population, are in need of food, nutrition or livelihood assistance, a significant increase compared to the same period in previous years.[55] For years, the country has been plagued by protracted conflict, but has recently experienced a further deterioration in security reflected in escalating suicide attacks, assaults on military checkpoints and infrastructure, and increased airstrikes. In the face of ongoing conflict and strained state capacity, natural disasters and extreme weather patterns – such as flooding and drought – are deadly force multipliers. Conflict reduces state capacity to respond to natural disasters, undermines community resilience, and dramatically affects the food security of already vulnerable communities that are heavily dependent on agriculture.

The north-east of the country, where Concern works, has some of the highest levels of chronic need in Afghanistan[56]. People in these regions are finding it hard to eke out a living in remote and challenging conditions, with little or no infrastructure or state support. **"In the time of harvesting, we carry the wheat by donkey. We don't have a proper road"**, farmer Ahmad Khan* (50), tells Concern. **"We bring it from the mountain to our houses then we try to bring to the market. We have road problems reaching our lands and the city […] Sometimes the road can be blocked for days"**. Mohammad Rahim* (47), a small landholder farmer, faces the same challenge of getting what little produce he has to market because access, flooding and disasters make the road so difficult to navigate. "**Our country is harsh […] Our dams have been destroyed by flooding and the roads have been blocked […] When we have a problem with the road, we don't have the money to fix it**".

The community's reliance on rain-fed agriculture for income means people are also at risk when cycles of extreme weather result in lower rainfall. Women like Parisa*, a 40-year-old mother of seven, are all too aware of her family's vulnerability to these forces: "**We are also concerned about the lower rain in these two years back […] We need it to rain. Without rain we will not have any produce to feed our families or our animals**". Wajiha* (38), a mother of six, shares Parisa's concerns about water shortages: "**Now we don't have enough water. In the past few years we had more water compared to now. We do not have any safe water for our children**". In addition to affecting food availability, water shortages and poor quality water undermine food security and nutrition through illness and undernourishment, especially in children. Bearing primary responsibility for childcare, Parisa and Wajiha both emphasise the health issues children face, compounded by prohibitive costs and poor road access to the nearest doctor.

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts like Afghanistan, the improvement of infrastructure typically falls on members of the village, after decades of insecurity have reduced state capacity to deliver such services. **"We are working voluntarily to solve our problems"** Mohammad Rahim continues. **"Sometimes we are collecting money from community members to solve our problems. One time we collected 200 AFN [approximately €2.35] from each household to open our road destroyed by flooding"**.

These initiatives illustrate the complex and multidimensional links between conflict and hunger in protracted conflicts. Conflict exacerbates existing vulnerabilities to natural disasters and extreme weather, through damage to infrastructure, erosion of public services, and reduced state capacity to respond to disasters and lead resilience-building. In these contexts, households are particularly vulnerable to shocks, which compound conflict's other stresses and can have a catastrophic effect.

Concern is supporting communities in northern Afghanistan in a two-pronged approach that includes the development of watershed areas to revitalise and stabilise the current agricultural lands and prevent soil erosion that affects farmers' production; and income-generating activities that mitigate the effects of sudden-onset disasters such as flooding, through the construction of protection walls and check dams. As well as protecting the lives of the communities that would otherwise be at risk, cash for work programmes bring much-needed employment. Concern's activities in Afghanistan are funded by Irish Aid and DFID.

* All names have been changed for security purposes

Communities use donkeys to transport goods in remote areas of Afghanistan where there is little infrastructure. Photographer: Rosaleen Martin, Concern Worldwide.

2.2 Conflict and hunger's impact on gender and social systems

While the preceding analysis points to important causal pathways through which conflict affects food security, it is important to recall that the impact of conflict is not borne equally across all sections of society. Inequality is a key dimension of Concern's understanding of extreme poverty, and conditions how communities, households and individuals face different threats in a conflict context.[57] These, in turn, shape their vulnerability to violence, and their capacity to adapt, cope and transform in that context.[58] Even in the same locality, different people are differentially vulnerable to the impact of conflict on food security and hunger.

Generally speaking, though not always, armed conflict exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Those who were vulnerable before or as a result of previous cycles of conflict, are typically at a disadvantage in terms of coping strategies, buffers to shocks, and protection.[59] This is evident, for example, in the increased vulnerability of female-headed, minority ethnic or displaced households to food insecurity.[60]

Women also face particular conflict-related challenges to food security. In contexts of wider conflict, levels of sexual and gender-based violence can increase.[61] In most rural settings, women are mainly responsible for household food security, carry out most manual agricultural labour, and at the same time, rarely enjoy the same land rights as men.[62] These inequalities can leave women more vulnerable to disruptions to food production systems, with fewer resources to protect against shocks.[63] Women are also vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, *and* as a result of food insecurity, when food scarcity fuels rising tensions – and sometimes violence – within the family.[64]

Women's vulnerability to violence has implications beyond individual women alone. Research demonstrates that women's economic status and decision-making power is directly related to family health indicators such as child survival and weight-for-age.[65] There are also long-term, and potential inter-generational implications. Conflict often disrupts schooling for young women and girls, and through this, produces cascade effects, as higher levels of female education have been shown to improve the nutrition of all household members.[66]

The patterns above reflect important vulnerabilities and inequalities. However, it is not always the case in conflict that poverty and social exclusion are linked to the physical threat of violence.[67] For example, wealthier households might be targeted for violence precisely *because* they have assets that groups want to seize or destroy. As a result, many households will deliberately reduce production in times of conflict to reduce the risk of predation, looting and targeting.[68] In other cases, individuals, households and communities can be targeted because of indicators of social difference (such as gender, ethnic or religious identity) that can include relatively poorer and wealthier members.[69]

Further complicating these dynamics is the fact that different conflicts will transform, undermine and disrupt wider social relations differently. This means that power relations and coping strategies will differ across conflicts. For example, conflict can disrupt 'transfer-based' access to food,[70] when collective social safety nets that might otherwise function to redistribute food and support those in need are destroyed.[71] Humanitarian access and operations can also be severely restricted in conflict (see Concern case study,). As a result, delivering assistance in a way that does not further fuel conflict, through capture or manipulation, is vital.[72]

Together, existing research provides a solid evidence base for understanding general trends in the relationship between conflict and food security. However, the specific pathways through which conflict has the most pronounced impact, and the characteristics of individuals, households and communities that make them more or less resilient to those impacts, are highly context-specific, and often poorly documented in crisis. For these reasons, first-hand accounts of these local conditions are vital to enriching our understanding of conflict's impacts on food security, and the responses it requires.

A camp for internally displaced people in Somalia, which Concern supports through cash transfers, emergency education and provision of water. Photographer: Marco Gualazzini

Supporting Hard-to-Reach Communities Affected by Conflict and Crisis in Somalia

In 2017, Somalia witnessed one of the largest scale-ups of humanitarian assistance in the world in a coordinated response to deteriorating food security and drought conditions. While these efforts were successful in averting famine, after decades of civil war, an estimated 6.2 million people – or half the population – remain in need of humanitarian aid in 2018. These enormous needs are driven by a combination of ongoing conflict and environmental disaster, compounded by limited humanitarian access in areas under armed opposition group control.

The town of Qoryoley is in Lower Shabelle Region, 95km south-west of Mogadishu. The community's main livelihoods are agriculture and pastoralism, but these have been severely disrupted by conflict and drought. In 2014, internationally-backed government forces regained control of the town after several years under armed opposition group control. Since that time, however, the town has been under siege by armed groups, restricting trade, population movements, and humanitarian response. The situation has triggered large-scale food insecurity. **"In the past three to four years, the town was besieged by the opposition armed group, our community was enormously affected by food insecurity"**, Yusuf Omar*, a 43-year-old farmer and casual labourer with a family of 10, tells Concern. Last year, over a million Somalis were displaced, with many moving to Mogadishu and the nearby Afgoi Corridor in search of safety[73]. In Qoryoley, many people also fled, but as is often the case, some of the most vulnerable households have been unable to travel.

Faduma Ali* is a 36-year-old single mother of four, who stayed in Qoryoley. **"I experience difficult times whenever there is an [armed group] blockade in this village or the entire region because I am the sole bread winner for my family since my husband died,"** Faduma tells Concern. **"When I cannot make a living then my family suffers greatly and struggles to survive"**. Describing the kind of work she took on to support her family, **"I collect firewood and sell it in Qoryoley",** Faduma continues. However, insecurity and armed group control in the area surrounding Qoryoley meant trade was heavily restricted. **"The [armed group] imposes excessive tax on our products which caused me not to earn enough income to feed my children"**.

Concern, which had been supporting the community before humanitarian access was restricted, adopted an innovative approach to cash transfer programming to reach households most in need. Concern and its local partner, Shabelle Community Development Organisation (SHACDO), worked together with a local community committee, which brought together community elders, respected leaders and prominent business people. Through this committee, beneficiaries were identified using criteria to ensure that the most vulnerable households were

Newly displaced family from Lower Shabelle due to the drought. Photographer: Abdulkadir Moallim

targeted, including the elderly, pregnant and lactating women, single mothers, those living with disabilities, and those who were chronically ill. Money was transferred by mobile phone, and Concern and partner staff followed-up by phone call to ensure the targeted beneficiaries were reached. In total, 400 vulnerable households were reached with unconditional cash transfers, an agreed best approach in this context as cash transfers aid livelihood resilience and support beneficiaries to determine and meet their most immediate needs (often food). Mobile money transfer is also very discreet, which significantly reduces aid diversion, security- and protection-related risks.

Faduma has now been able to use the money she received to meet her family's needs: **"When we started to receive this mobile cash, it enabled me to buy food that can last for at least one month and even to buy two goats to provide milk for my family"**. Khadija Mohamed*, a 34-year-old mother of five, also received the cash transfer: **"We were not expecting an organisation would come and take risks for our sake"**, Khadija tells Concern. Khadija and her husband separated two

years ago, and she is currently the only guardian of her five children. Khadija's was among the families that could not leave their home and faced tremendous hardship in Qoryoley. **"I am very happy now; this timely cash support had positively changed our life and saved us from the brink of hunger"**. When asked about what she thinks the future holds, Khadija reflects: **"We hope in the future the security will prevail, the river will flow again, and we will get support that will help us cope"**.

Concern has been working in Somalia since 1986, responding to emergencies and also running long-term resilience-building programmes focused on nutrition, health, education, WASH and livelihoods. Concern's work throughout Somalia is supported by Irish Aid, ECHO, DFID, OFDA, UNICEF, the Somalia Humanitarian Fund, the European Union Trust Fund, and others including foundations and trusts.

All names have been changed for security purposes

3 | South Sudan's Multidimensional Food Crisis

South Sudan is one of the world's most conflict-affected countries. It ranked the most fragile country in the world in 2018's *Fragile States Index*; and 181 out of a total 186 countries in the world in 2016's *Human Development Index*.[74] Tragically, the territory of what is now South Sudan has a long history of conflict and food insecurity. After 22 years of fighting, South Sudan's last war (at that time, a civil war within Sudan) only officially ended in 2005, meaning many people were still in the process of recovering when war broke out again.[75] Previous periods of famine were triggered by extreme weather, but fundamentally driven by conflict.[76] Famine was again declared in parts of South Sudan in 2017, and an estimated 6.1 million people are now in need of urgent food assistance.[77] At current levels, humanitarian assistance reaches less than half of all households in need,[78] mainly due to severely restricted humanitarian access because of insecurity. In early 2018, South Sudan marked the tragic milestone of 100 aid workers killed since the conflict began.[79]

After decades of conflict with the Republic of Sudan, culminating in South Sudan's independence in 2011, a split in the ruling regime led to violence in 2013. Since then, security in the world's newest country has continued to deteriorate. Fighting has in part coalesced along ethno-regional identities, with rebel, militia and opposition groups being formed primarily from among the country's two largest ethnic groups – Dinka and Nuer. The conflict, however, cannot be reduced to a simple ethnic divide. Instead, it is driven by much deeper issues of poverty, exclusion, and control over and access to resources in a context which has known only brief periods of peace in decades of war.

Now entering its fifth year, the most recent round of conflict has taken a devastating toll on food security, and its impacts show no signs of abating. As conflict spread to more parts of the country in the past year, including the traditionally fertile breadbasket of the south-west, predictions for the future are dire.[80] Households that have already weathered years of insecurity and uncertainty may face an even greater crisis in the months to come, while their assets, coping strategies and resilience have been severely diminished by protracted crises.

In a crisis of this magnitude, even areas beyond the frontlines are deeply affected by conflict. Conflict has contributed to a nation-wide economic crisis that has affected inflation, trade, and transport. Most markets across the country recorded a doubling of cereal prices between July 2016 and July 2017.[81] Meanwhile, community-level violence is a persistent source of insecurity at the local level, and severely undermines livelihoods and resilience.

3.1 A war on many fronts – Bentiu and Aweil North

To better understand the lived experience of conflict and its impacts, research was carried out in two sites in South Sudan. The first is Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site, in former Unity State, where high-intensity conflict has led to an acute food security crisis and almost total dependence on food aid. The second is Aweil North, in former Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, which is relatively stable, and yet, is profoundly indirectly affected by national-level conflict and local violence that undermines food security in different ways (see Map 1).

Map 1: Map of South Sudan with Concern Operating Areas Highlighted.
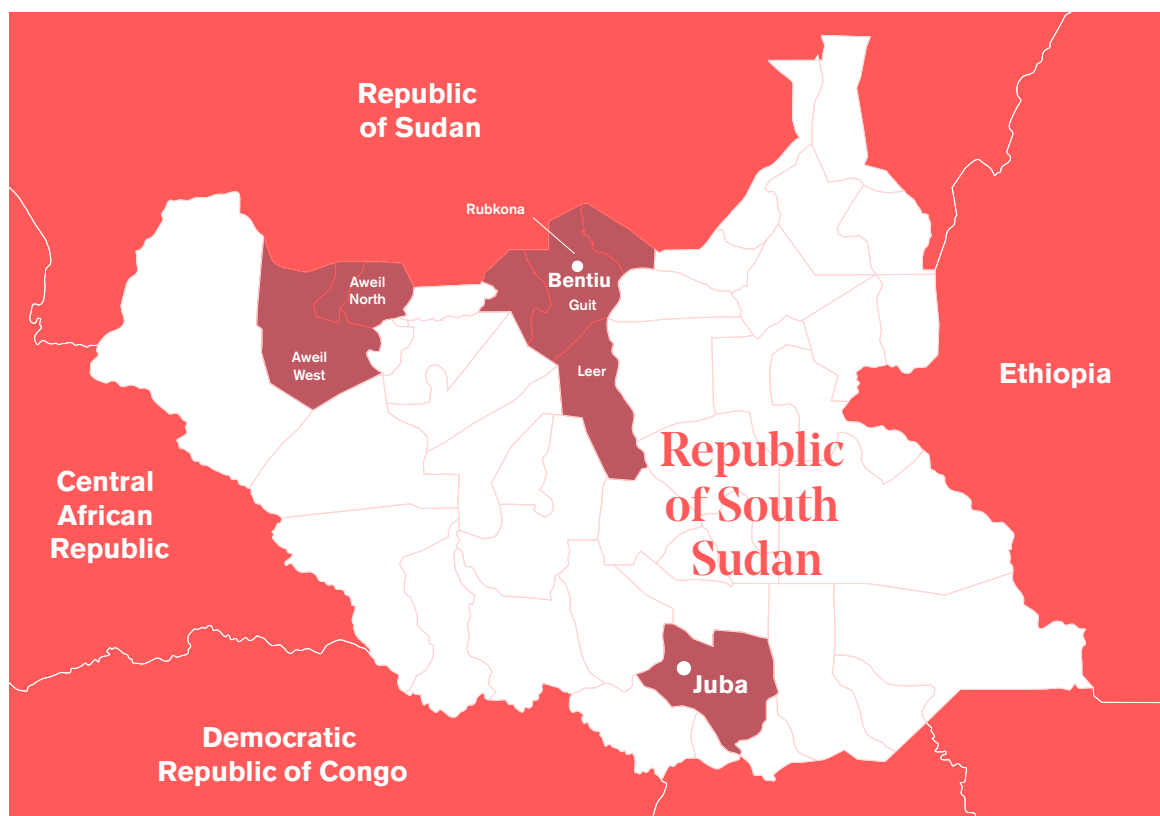
The case of Bentiu highlights conflict's many direct impacts on hunger. The area is dissected by multiple frontlines, where government and opposition forces clash over control of territory and where, more recently, intra-opposition fighting has further divided communities. As a result of this fighting, in December 2013, people began to flee to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) site in Bentiu, in search of protection. This eventually resulted in the largest PoC site in the country – a unique phenomenon of the South Sudanese conflict – with just under 115,000 registered residents in the environs of the UN base.[82] As of February 2018, over half a million people were displaced in former Unity State, an area that has seen some of the most intense fighting in the country.[83]

Recently, some residents of the PoC have been able to return home and humanitarian actors have succeeded in reaching more of the surrounding areas in their response. However, many people remain fearful of insecurity outside the PoC and apprehensive about livelihood prospects if they return. This has had a profound effect on hunger. Production levels are approximately 30 per cent lower in 2018 than the previous year in Rubkona County, in which the PoC is situated.[84] Throughout the state, residents have estimated 2017/2018 harvests will last between one-and-a-half and three months; considerably shorter than the 6.5 months harvests were estimated to last poor households in years prior to the crisis.[85]

While conflict's direct impacts on hunger and food insecurity in Bentiu are clearly apparent, the consequences of insecurity beyond war's frontlines are less well-understood. In Aweil North, where Concern has been operating for twenty years, the impacts of conflict are largely indirect but still devastating for communities.

The region is considerably more stable than Bentiu, and experienced relatively little recent violence. However, former Northern Bahr el Ghazal was a site of large-scale mobilisation in the most recent conflict. High levels of recruitment of young men into paramilitary groups[86] has left many elderly community members, widows and orphans behind with limited capacity to farm. Meanwhile, economic and price shocks have made what food there is available highly inaccessible to most of the population. These impacts attest to the complex and multifaceted ways in which conflict affects food security far beyond the reach of physical violence alone.

In spite of significant differences, both areas have been classified as facing similar levels of food insecurity. As of January 2018, 54.4 per cent of the population in former Unity State and 54.6 per cent of the population in former Northern Bahr el Ghazal State are classified as being in IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or Emergency). Forecasting further into 2018, the outlook for May – July 2018 indicates that food insecurity in Aweil North may be even more severe than in Rubkona.[87] This presents an opportunity to explore how different levels of violence can lead to similar food insecurity outcomes.

3.2 National and local dynamics of conflict

Conflict can take many forms, and affect people in different ways. South Sudan's national crisis is characterised by violence between government and opposition forces, fighting for control over territory, populations and resources. However, at the local level, conflicts can emerge over smaller-scale, but sometimes no less devastating, disputes. The research highlighted the multiple levels of conflict within South Sudan, the interaction between these levels, and the impact of these conflicts on hunger and food security.

3.2.1.   National-level conflict

First, both sites are affected by national-level conflict, although this manifests in very different ways. Ongoing violence in areas surrounding Bentiu's PoC and the locations of origin of many residents includes cattle raids, attacks on civilians, forced recruitment by armed groups, and violent criminality.[88] Although the security situation has improved in some areas, it remains uncertain whether this will be sustained.

People within the camp are almost completely dependent on food distribution and nutrition services inside the site to survive. As one member of a mother-to-mother support group reflected, **"In the PoC, you depend totally on others. If there is no food distribution, you go hungry. If you need to repair your _tukul_ [dwelling], you have no access to wood yourself"**. In contrast to life before the crisis, which many community members characterised in terms of **"freedom"** and **"free movement"**, insecurity and targeted attacks in the surrounding areas severely restrict movement, strategies for survival, and by consequence, food security. Many residents reported that they would like to engage in small-scale cultivation, but cannot do so:

"We hope to do agriculture activities, but don't have space. People fear going outside – they are killing people outside. There are also kidnappings. Outside this camp, there are spaces for agriculture, but people fear going" (FGD, male nutrition advocates, Sector 3).

> **Some people can come at night and loot the cow you have – they will kill you. Someone can even shoot you for your clothes out there [...]. We will only go back if there is peace.**

Within the PoC, strategies for supplementing household diet are extremely limited, with congested conditions meaning space for conventional farming is simply not available. Concern's interventions have pioneered innovative solutions such as 'gunny sack gardens,' which involve planting vegetables in a vertical sack, saving on space and providing much-needed dietary diversity. The beneficiaries targeted are mothers involved in mother-to-mother support groups, which makes it easier to apply the lessons they share in their groups on health and nutrition in their own homes.

Ultimately, however, the only sustainable solution is the creation of an enabling environment for voluntary and safe return, so communities can begin to rebuild their lives. Concern was one of the first organisations to spearhead humanitarian responses outside the PoC, and continues to serve some of the most marginalised and hard-to-reach communities in the surrounding area. Those who have recently taken the decision to leave the PoC are particularly vulnerable, as they have often not had the chance to plant crops or rebuild livestock assets that they lost. Ongoing violence disrupts humanitarian access, which in turn undermines food security for households dependent on assistance. This, in turn, undermines the sustainability of the return process, and contributes to some households re-settling in the PoC in search of safety and food assistance.

Because of this, many residents of the PoC are apprehensive about return. In addition to insecurity in the surrounding area, livelihood considerations are also a concern. One member of a mother-to-mother support group reported, **"I could not [return] because I do not have cattle and won't have milk. I used to have cattle, but I cannot go back without livestock. There is nothing to eat"**. In many communities in South Sudan, cattle are a key livelihood asset, as well as an important indicator of social status and basis of exchange and reciprocity in local culture. Discussion participants also recalled the experiences of fellow PoC residents who sought to leave and found their home, field or former business occupied. Paradoxically, other residents feared that _having_ valuable assets might make them more vulnerable in a context of extreme poverty. As one mother in Sector 4 described:

"Some people can come at night and loot the cow you have – they will kill you. Someone can even shoot you for your clothes out there […]. We will only go back if there is peace".

This paradox highlights the complex security risks facing many households contemplating uncertain futures both within and outside the PoC.

Chan Adim Garang, is one of twins admitted to the outpatient therapeutic programme (OTP) run by Concern in South Sudan. Pictured here with Monica Mawien a supervisor with the Concern community nutrition team. Photographer: Kieran McConvillle

In former Northern Bahr el Ghazal, the impacts of national conflict have been far less direct, but are still very tangible. While the current crisis is the focus of international attention, it is important to recall the country's long history with conflict-driven food insecurity, and the legacy of past crises. Interviewees emphasised the impact of the past war with the Republic of Sudan on livelihoods, including the loss of cattle. The conflict also had profound and lasting consequences for families. As one member of a local health committee in Nyamlell recalled,

"The conflict [with the North] caused us a lot of pain: our children died, our cattle were taken away. I always dream I will see my family again but they will never come back. All that pain is in this place [...] What could make me smile again, [since] my children were taken away [in that conflict]?"

In addition to this legacy, the area around Aweil was an important site of mobilisation and recruitment in the most recent crisis. Large-scale recruitment of young men from the communities has left a mark on widows, orphans and elderly family members who don't have the same capacity to farm and trade in their absence. Vulnerable family members are often unable to undertake the physically demanding work. One male farmer in Hong Voi reflected: **"I had two children at school who went to be soldiers. They were both killed. Some people are left with no children; some are widows. Now they struggle to survive. They do the job men should do"**. In some cases, this has led to distress displacement, with older community members relying on host families for support. Many discussion participants reported considering moving to Khartoum, the capital of the Republic of Sudan, where they felt there were more employment opportunities.

National-level conflict has also affected the area indirectly through disruption to the economy. Conflict has disrupted trade and transport systems as well as food production. Together, these have culminated in increasing prices that make what food there is available, highly inaccessible.[89] Insecurity affects not only local trade but also regional and cross-border trade, which was a mainstay of the economy in Aweil North in the past. As a group of female farmers reported:

"Before the war, we used to have imports and exports of cattle. Now the roads are not secure, which affects trade – if you buy your things from Khartoum, they cannot pass from Khartoum to here: you will be killed on the way. Even if you can come, you have to put things at a high price and this affects people on the ground" (FGD, female farmers, Hong Voi).

The devastation of cattle herds, which used to serve as a form of currency in local exchange, has compounded inflation in a context of increasing monetization of the economy. One male farmer in Hong Voi starkly described the predicament of price increases: **"If you don't have money, you will just die of hunger. Everyone is not the same in this country: there is rich, there is poor"**.

The impact of price increases also ripples out to affect not only food availability and accessibility, but also a wider range of factors that affect nutrition, including healthcare. Concern's activities in Aweil West and North include health and nutrition programming focused on strengthening the capacity of the County Health Department (CHD) in Aweil West and Aweil North to ensure comprehensive coverage of curative and preventative nutrition services, but the system faces a number of structural challenges, exacerbated by conflict. Price increases drive up the cost of medication; while the wider economic crisis means public service salaries often go unpaid, leading to a failing public health system. This collapse directly undermines nutrition and health, further exacerbating food insecurity and hunger in these contexts.

3.2.2. Local-level dynamics

Alongside the impacts of this national-level conflict, local-level disputes have a profound effect on households and communities, but are often far less visible.

In Bentiu, while national-level conflict created the imperative for the PoC in the first instance, intra-community tensions within the opposition are now fuelling deep divisions among the residents of the site. There, county identities largely align with intra-ethnic clan identities, perceived as proxies for political affiliation in an increasingly divided opposition. Discussion participants gave examples of restrictions on marriages between people from different counties, and even increasing fighting between young children who used to play together:

"Relationships now and before [the crisis] are totally different […]. The relationship is affecting the small children – even if they need to go and play together, they go fighting among themselves, even if you advise them not to" (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4).

In the confined and stressful environment of the PoC, increasingly, these tensions spill over into open violence. One young mother in Sector 4 described her fear of rising criminality in the site, following recent incidents where market stalls and properties were burned: **"Even in PoC people are not sleeping at night. We don't think of good things – we are just checking around, maybe someone can come and burn your house"**. Another mother in Sector 3 shared her fearful outlook: **"I am not thinking of a good future. People are thinking – 'I can die here today' – or be killed outside"**.

In all protracted conflicts, shifting politics and alliances mean patterns of violence change over time. While inter-community conflict remains the most visible division in the conflict, increasingly, localised disputes are escalating to violence and destroying lives.

Although Aweil North has been largely spared the intense violence that has taken place elsewhere in the country, localised conflict systems – including interpersonal violence, looting and cattle theft – occur sporadically, and have been aggravated by national conflict dynamics. Much of this violence centres around disputes over access to natural resources, such as grazing for livestock, and planting areas for crops. This violence is particularly pronounced in the most fertile areas, as these attract both agricultural cultivation and cattle grazing due to high-quality vegetation.

Restricted mobility due to violence has a clear impact on food security, as it prevents people from accessing fertile areas for farming and grazing. Male farmers in Hong Voi described a location where they used to farm, but that is now affected by insecurity. As a result, they no longer travel to the area to cultivate, concluding, **"It is better to remain with hunger than go to die."** While community members were adamant that there were relatively few tensions within their own communities, inter-community conflicts were a source of fear. Female farmers in Hong Voi described another location where cross-border movement has fuelled tensions. As a result, they no longer farm there:

"Cattle-keepers from the North [Sudan] are there. This causes fear for us to go there to cultivate […]. These people attack people on their farms […]. This causes a fear among us to go to that place – the fertile place – to get food and we cannot reach there" (FGD, female farmers, Hong Voi).

In a highly volatile conflict, even local-level issues over access to grazing land can be exacerbated by national-level politics. Consultations indicated that even minor-level conflicts can escalate quickly in the current context. As one key informant in Juba remarked, reflecting on the current context, **"When you infuse these explosive politics into these [low-level] disputes, and everyone being**

> **Cattle-keepers from the North [Sudan] are there. This causes fear for us to go there to cultivate [...]. These people attack people on their farms [...]. This causes a fear among us to go to that place – the fertile place – to get food and we cannot reach there.**

armed, that is when they become serious". In these contexts, long-standing dispute resolution mechanisms – for example, between customary authorities and community leaders of opposing groups – can be undermined or less effective. Traditional mechanisms that existed between communities to negotiate access to land, or demand compensation for damages may still exist, but they are often undermined by widespread insecurity.

These conditions are even more pressing given the impact of climate change as a force multiplier in these contexts. Climate change both compounds the stresses vulnerable communities already face, and is further aggravated by the secondary consequences of conflict, for example, the depletion of livestock. In Aweil North, discussion participants reported that the loss of cattle has reduced availability of manure for fertilisation, affecting the quality of soil. **"If I go in the morning and start cultivating, I will not get anything because the soil is not fertilised"** (FGD, male farmers, Hong Voi). The impacts of climate change have in turn been exacerbated by restricted movement, which contributes to a concentration of income generating activities, such as collecting firewood and fishing, in a smaller number of places. Meanwhile, the consequences of extreme weather events such as flooding or drought, can further fuel conflict among divided communities.[90]

Climate change's impact on conflict is indirect, and often dependent on local-level capacities to adapt to and anticipate effects.[91] Where these capacities are disrupted or eroded – for example, through the sustained impact of violent conflict and price shocks – the stresses of climate change can contribute to violent contestation for control over and access to these resources. For these reasons, Concern's response in the area has included programming to improve climate resilience, disaster risk management and planning at the community and national levels.

Coupled with the evidence of increasing tensions at the local level in Bentiu, both cases attest to the destructive impact more hidden forms of violence can have on communities. These often escape the attention of national actors and diplomatic efforts geared at high-level peace processes. Nevertheless, they have profound consequences: local violence can fuel, and in turn be shaped by national conflict, thus undermining prospects of peace on a larger scale.[92] Although conflict and violence undoubtedly have national, regional and international drivers, supporting communities' capacity to peacefully resolve disputes, and equitably share and manage natural resources, is a vital step in building resilience and mitigating conflict at the local level.

3.3 Gendered dimensions of food insecurity and hunger

While the nature and dynamics of conflict differed significantly in both sites, the impacts of that insecurity was also highly differentiated *within* communities. The impacts of violence and of food insecurity are often deeply gendered, with women – who typically bear primary responsibility for childcare, collection of firewood for cooking, and feeding the household – particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as less visible forms of violence and discrimination.

3.3.1.   Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict

> After we came here, I tried to go outside to prepare a garden. When I went there one day, some armed men came. I witnessed from afar, they took a lady into the bush. We ran into the PoC and never went back again.

In discussions across Bentiu's PoC, women consistently reported that they face an imminent risk of rape if they venture out in search of firewood. Regrettably, this is a near-daily task for many women, who collect firewood both to use for their own household cooking, and to sell or trade for food within the site. Because of this, many of the women present had experienced this threat multiple times. **"Sometimes women go to collect firewood. When they go outside, people attack and rape them"** (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4). Other women recalled venturing outside the site to farm and witnessing violence:

"After we came here, I tried to go outside to prepare a garden. When I went there one day, some armed men came. I witnessed from afar, they took a lady into the bush. We ran into the PoC and never went back again" (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4).

In each of these cases, the fact that women bear primary responsibility for cultivating, collecting and preparing food is directly tied to their risk of sexual and gender-based violence. The fact that these are inescapable tasks that many women must undertake on a daily basis highlights the fact that many women and girls are under near-constant threat of violence.

This has implications for their psychosocial and physical health, and through this, it impacts on their ability to look after other family members, and take care of the health and nutritional wellbeing of their households. It is for these reasons that Concern's interventions in this area include the creation of 'Baby Tents' – spaces for mothers to use for breastfeeding (which can be challenging in crowded conditions), and to come together and share positive health practices and messages. The Baby Tents also provide a safe space for mothers to share experiences and support one another in this challenging context. In spite of all the hardships they face, mothers remain hopeful for a brighter future, and focused on the wellbeing of their children. One young mother visiting a Baby Tent spoke for her group when she said: **"Our hope is that the country will be at peace. Peace brings good life and good health for children"**.

As always, gendered roles are highly relational, with women's responsibilities conditioned in part by those of men, and vice versa.[93] Men were acutely aware of the risks women face outside the PoC:

Conflict and Hunger

"**Women and girls are very vulnerable. They are […] suffering because they go to collect firewood. The long distances they go – they get raped when they meet the armed groups. They go because they have no firewood. They go to collect, sell in the market to get food and milk**" (FGD, male nutrition advocates, Sector 4).

Some men, however, contrasted the risks women face of sexual violence, with the risk of death many men faced if they venture outside:

"**Boys and men are most targeted if they go outside. They can be forced to be soldiers by the [armed groups] and if you run away, you can be shot. That's why you force your wife to go outside**" (FGD, male WASH beneficiaries, Sector 5).

One interviewee linked these risks to the severely restricted space within the PoC: "**You need to go outside [to farm]. If you are a man and go outside, they kill you. If you are a woman, they rape you**" (Interview, male WASH beneficiary, Sector 5).

These accounts reflect the seemingly impossible choices facing households in the PoC. In attempting to navigate complex risks, many women and girls are repeatedly exposed to extreme violence. This exposure is closely tied to household food security, and the responsibilities women and girls have for day-to-day household welfare. At an operational level, this points to the importance of responses being built on a better understanding of these risks and responsibilities, and working to minimise further exposure and maximise opportunities to address gender inequalities.

3.3.2.   Less visible forms of gendered violence and discrimination

> When mothers divide the food, they consider the boy more than the girl [...]. If you have a boy and a girl, you need to serve the boy first, because if they don't eat first, they're unhappy. Girls are together with you at the house all day – they just eat what remains.

Beyond the most visible forms of sexual and gender-based violence, other forms of violence and discrimination shape women and girls' daily lives. Within the PoC, limited resources result in a gendered distribution of food within the household. For example, many women reported feeding men and boys first: "**We get [food] and feed first the men and young children. The women and girls might not eat**" (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4).

"**When mothers divide the food, they consider the boy more than the girl […]. If you have a boy and a girl, you need to serve the boy first, because if they don't eat first, they're unhappy. Girls are together with you at the house all day – they just eat what remains**" (Interview, lead mother, Sector 3).

While some of these practices may pre-date life in the PoC, many discussion participants suggested that household members go without meals far more frequently in the PoC setting than was common before their displacement.

Women also pointed to other gender-specific coping strategies women and young girls employ to try to secure their future, including early marriage. Women recognised that although this may appear to present a short-term option for vulnerable households, many young women end up more vulnerable as a result:

Conflict has caused a lot of unhappiness. A husband at home cannot even provide for a family. Before the crisis, there was everything, but now you have to ask the husband for everything – and now there is no money at home, asking can lead to violence [...]. The more I ask, the more problems I have at home.

"They don't have enough food at home – so they try to get married to be more secure, but if you don't choose the right man who has a job, can end up more vulnerable" (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4).

While these practices are not wholly new to the South Sudanese context in recent years, research suggests that rates of early marriage also increased during South Sudan's past conflicts (at that time, civil wars within Sudan). There is reason to believe, therefore, that conflict exacerbates these practices.[94]

Although the context is very different, women and girls in Aweil North shared many of the same experiences of conflict and hunger's hidden, gendered impacts. Communities identified widows and single-headed households as particularly vulnerable, a fact that many link directly to the national crisis: **"During the conflict in 2013, a lot of men died. Now there is a lot of malnutrition because the women cannot feed the children alone. Only the men can fight for their food"** (FGD, male health committee members, Nyamlell).

As in Bentiu, these impacts also affect social dynamics, including the prevalence of early marriage. Male community members in Nyamlell reported that high levels of food insecurity were driving younger women to marry to reduce the burden on their families. Discussion participants contrasted the current situation with conditions before the war, when a young woman was **"free not to go to a husband's house. Now, there is hunger in the house – no-one can take care of these young girls. Maybe the father of the girl died, the mother cannot feed and maintain her […]. She will sacrifice herself to be fed"**.

A number of women also reflected on the added strain that the crisis has put on relations within households. They reported that the pressure of the economic crisis meant many men were struggling to provide for their families financially, and that this was a contributing factor in tensions within the family. As one 26-year-old mother-of-five from Hong Voi reflected: **"Before, my husband used to come home with things [to eat]. But now, he does not […]. This can create conflicts. He comes home sometimes when he is very stressed and he can talk badly"**.

Another 21-year-old mother from Akuangkgap went further, recounting her experience of intimate partner violence, in part as a result of the strain the current crisis is placing on communities:

"Conflict has caused a lot of unhappiness. A husband at home cannot even provide for a family. Before the crisis, there was everything, but now you have to ask the husband for everything – and now there is no money at home, asking can lead to violence […]. The more I ask, the more problems I have at home".

While women bear the brunt of these tensions, it is important to recall the relational aspect of gendered roles. In discussions, women recognised that these tensions were driven by men's feelings of being **"ashamed"**. A male member of the local health committee in Nyamlell also alluded to the guilt men feel when they perceive themselves as having failed to provide for their families:

"If we wake up in the morning and go to the job, then everyone will be happy. At the end of the month, you are going home with a salary. But if you come home without a salary, your children will say, *you are working but you are bringing us nothing. You are not even taking us to school***"**.

These discussions highlight the deeply gendered – but often hidden – impacts of conflict and hunger. Responses must take account of these less visible forms of violence and discrimination, and work to empower women. At the same time, progress will be limited if programming does not support a transformation in men's social roles, and engage them as allies and champions of gender equality.

3.4 Disruption to social solidarity

The gendered dimensions of conflict and hunger are only one aspect of the social and cultural consequences of conflict in South Sudan. Longstanding community structures have served for generations to provide some form of social safety net through solidarity mechanisms, reciprocity, mutual support and exchange in previous periods of stress. However, the impact of the current crisis, and the unprecedented levels of suffering in some parts of the country have a particular impact on social structures. Conflict is transforming systems that previously reinforced community resilience, deeply disrupting and eroding, if not completely destroying, practices in place prior to the crisis.

High-intensity violence, mass displacement, and the confined nature of life in South Sudan's PoCs all combine to create an environment in which longstanding community traditions are being disrupted. A male interviewee in Sector 4 contrasted the pre-conflict period of mutual support between family members, with the present day:

"Before the crisis, the relationship was very good. If you see one of your relatives has nothing, you help him. But here in the PoC, there is no exchange – help me, help you, is not there now, because no-one has enough anymore".

Community members were particularly concerned that these changes have an impact on the most vulnerable, such as people disabled or widowed as a result of conflict. **"Since the crisis, there are a lot of people who have been wounded. You see people missing one leg, or two legs… and they are not able to help themselves here"** (Interview, lead mother, Sector 4). However, even among residents who had previously been prominent members of their community and accustomed to supporting members of their family, life in the PoC makes this extremely difficult: **"Someone who is vulnerable cannot contribute to another. I want to help others, but I have nothing to contribute"** (FGD, male nutrition advocates, Sector 3).

This damage to social solidarity mechanisms has several implications. First, it undermines the resilience of communities and disrupts indigenous mechanisms for support. Second, it risks further marginalizing already vulnerable community members, such as those with disabilities, the elderly, widows and orphans, who may be poorly integrated into social networks as it is, and have even less support in a context of limited resources. Third, it can be a source of further tension. Some

Now, you only struggle for yourself. Before, we used to help each other, but now, that doesn't happen.

residents attributed deteriorating relationships within extended families to eroded solidarity mechanisms. They reported that this can lead directly to criminality and violence: **"If one of your relatives asks for something from you and you don't have it, or don't give it, they can become angry and send people to loot you at night"** (FGD, mother-to-mother support group, Sector 4).

Although the nature of life in the PoC necessarily contributes to particular social dynamics, similar accounts of the breakdown of social networks were shared in Aweil North, and contrasted with life before the conflict. **"The life was much better before the crisis […] people could freely cultivate, and had good yields. They had cows, and could help people in their family",** a mother in Akuangkgap reported. By contrast, now:

"Everyone is struggling for his or her life and may not be able to help others. We all have a lot of dependents to support […] Some churches now are even collapsing because there is no money being contributed".

A male farmer group in Hong Voi concurred, noting that before the crisis:

"If you didn't have something, your relatives could help you. Now, you only struggle for yourself. Before, we used to help each other, but now, that doesn't happen. Back then, the community used to sit together and see – *who is very poor?* **– and help that person. Now, for this life, our current life, it is much harder than before"** (FGD, male farmer group, Hong Voi).

The deep despair this has contributed to was clearly apparent. Many discussion participants described feelings of hopelessness, fear and anxiety. One community member in Nyamlell stated: **"You can even question God sometimes: why does He give you such a life of suffering?"** In spite of all of this, community members nevertheless remain hopeful of a return to peace in the country, and reported seeing even greater value in education following the crisis, as a way out of their current situation: **"So we only hope for three things: to have peace, to have good health, and to have a good school for our children"** (FGD, male farmers, Hong Voi).

Although the settings are very different, the accounts from Bentiu and Aweil North alike illustrate conflict's multidimensional and complex impacts on hunger. Conflict drives population movement, through which people are separated from their land, crops and livestock. In settings like the PoC, people have limited options for self-reliance, and humanitarians need to plan and act innovatively and with an eye to the long-term sustainability of interventions. Conflict-related disruption to social networks can also undermine mutual support systems, contribute to rising tensions, and ultimately put people at risk of future violence. In response, identifying ways that those affected by conflict can strengthen resilience and rebuild systems of mutual support is an important step in empowering communities and reducing hunger.

4 | Conclusions and Recommendations

The accounts detailed in this report demonstrate the profound needs and challenges facing communities affected by conflict and food insecurity in its many forms – from the direct impact of violence restricting movement, hindering return and destroying livelihoods; to the indirect consequences of conflict on the economy, gender roles, and social solidarity. However, the accounts shared also attest to the strength, resilience and hopes of communities who have survived extreme violence, continue to navigate uncertainty, and are committed to a brighter future.

Ultimately, it is important to keep in mind that even those who have been victimised in violent conflict remain active agents in rebuilding their lives and a more stable, prosperous future for their families, communities and country. A better understanding of people's experiences of conflict and hunger, how they seek to (re)build lives in the midst of insecurity, and their hopes for the future is central to developing informed, effective, accountable and empowering responses.

Drawing on these accounts, this study contends that ultimately making progress on the global goal of ending hunger (SDG 2), requires a commitment to addressing conflict. The recent UN Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018), on the use of food as a weapon of war, is an historic milestone in the global community's recognition of the linkages between conflict and hunger.[95] It lays the groundwork for an ambitious agenda at the international policy level that could ultimately deliver meaningful change for millions of people, from Qoryoley to Bentiu and beyond.

> **Ultimately making progress on the global goal of ending hunger (SDG 2), requires a commitment to addressing conflict.**

Operationally, humanitarian actors must also meet the challenge of breaking the cycle of conflict and hunger by developing innovative models and approaches for working in acute conflict, that take account of the many complex threats communities face every day. Our responses must be more sensitive to this context, highly attuned to the differential impact of conflict within communities, and adapted to take account of how conflict transforms and destroys – and not just interrupts – social life.

Moreover, while Resolution 2417 (2018), is a vital step, its greater focus on conflict's direct links to the destruction of food systems or denial of humanitarian access, should not blind us to the many complex and indirect ways that food security is undermined by insecurity. Humanitarians must also understand and respond to the indirect, and often less visible, consequences of conflict on hunger. This includes the economic impacts of conflict on livelihoods and markets; the indirect social impacts of conflict, such as through gender roles and community support systems; and the way conflict combines with factors like climate change and natural disasters to erode resilience over time.

> **To make real progress on reducing global hunger in a conflicted world, we must address both the direct and indirect consequences of conflict on hunger.**

Together, these findings point to the need for more genuinely integrated approaches that take account of the social, political, economic, environmental, and health-related consequences of insecurity. Only through these approaches can we effectively address needs in acute humanitarian crises and ultimately contribute to breaking future cycles of conflict, hunger and human suffering.

To achieve this, we make several recommendations:

1. **Humanitarian and development actors must work in a conflict-sensitive way to support peace at different levels and deliver effective, accountable, quality programming.**

Conflict is the primary driver of food insecurity in the world, and the greatest threat to a more stable, prosperous and food-secure future. Humanitarian and development actors cannot meet the challenge of global hunger today without working in conflict; and we cannot work in conflict effectively without changing the models and approaches we use.

Organisations must invest in conflict-sensitive approaches to ensure that their programmes do not further exacerbate conflict drivers or divisions. This requires a deep understanding of conflict dynamics at national and local levels, how they interact and shape one another, and how they change over time and place. Crucially, it also requires an awareness of how programmes interact with and influence the conflict environment, and a willingness to act on this and adapt approaches where necessary. This can only be achieved by investing in the institutionalisation of conflict-sensitive analysis, design, implementation and adaptation; and not if conflict sensitivity is relegated to a standalone or superficial exercise.

Deepening this practice in South Sudan and other conflict-affected contexts can help ensure that responses do not inadvertently exacerbate divisions in conflict-affected communities. This is particularly important as patterns of violence, population movement, and humanitarian access shift to create new drivers of potential conflict and competition. This is absolutely vital in sites of acute conflict, but must also be applied in areas far beyond the reach of violence alone where conflict's indirect impacts are often less visible, but no less real.

2. **Humanitarian and development actors should implement programmes that are highly attuned to the ways gender and social relations shape conflict's impacts on food security.**

The research highlights how violence affects food security through direct mechanisms such as the loss of livestock, agricultural land, or the closure of markets. It also shows how conflict undermines food security indirectly through social relations, including gendered social roles and social networks for mutual support and reciprocity. To make real progress on reducing global hunger in a conflicted world, we must address both.

Conflict and Hunger

The impacts of conflict and hunger are fundamentally gendered. Women in every site reported experiencing sexual and gender-based violence as a direct or indirect result of conflict. These experiences are closely tied to their responsibilities for the production, collection and preparation of food. In addition to targeted sexual violence by armed actors, intimate partner violence, early marriage and the unequal allocation of food attest to the spectrum of violence and discrimination women and girls face in crises. Gender roles are relational, and thus the burdens borne by women are reinforced by the heightened threats men face of physical violence and forced recruitment. In light of this, many men shared feelings of shame and helplessness in the face of widespread violence and their perceived failure to fulfil their role as provider. Beyond gendered considerations alone, the research shows that collective social institutions for solidarity, mutual support and reciprocity are profoundly undermined, if not completely destroyed, by acute crisis. This has consequences for community resilience and cohesion.

Addressing conflict's multi-dimensional impacts on food security demands a genuinely integrated approach to prevention that tackles the combined impacts of conflict, climate change and natural disasters.

Responses must therefore be grounded in detailed and up-to-date analyses of the indirect consequences of conflict on gendered relations and community-level institutions to understand how these affect food security. Particular attention should be paid to the direct and indirect forms of violence and discrimination that women experience, and the destructive effect of conflict on social solidarity and mutual support. Organisations should work in ways that address gendered inequalities, and enhance community cohesion wherever possible. This includes adopting gender-sensitive approaches that bring together humanitarian assistance and longer term sustainable development efforts, and working through mechanisms that strengthen women's decision-making and voice at community level. Programmes should also be based on participatory approaches that improve community cohesion and confidence, and consolidate collective support systems.

3. Humanitarian and development actors should support community-owned resilience-building activities that tackle the combined impacts of conflict, climate change and natural disasters on hunger and food insecurity.

Natural disasters, climate change and conflict individually, and collectively, compound communities' vulnerabilities, erode coping strategies, and undermine long-term recovery and sustainable development.

Addressing conflict's multi-dimensional impacts on food security demands a genuinely integrated approach to prevention, built around three principles. First, an increased investment in improving agricultural development in conflict-affected contexts, as a means of strengthening recovery and building resilient livelihoods. Second, a detailed understanding of the natural environment and opportunities to reinforce community resilience in the face of complex shocks. And third, support to community-level systems for sustainably and equitably managing resources and non-violently resolving disputes over access if they arise.

The most appropriate programming activities building on these principles will be highly context-specific and based on communities' own livelihood strategies and experiences. This requires mapping communities' capacities and vulnerabilities, in addition to wider considerations such as environmental conditions, weather and disaster patterns. Resilience programming should take an integrated approach to preventing food crises before they arise. Coordinated interventions across a range of sectors should address the root causes that contribute to vulnerability –

including inequality based on gender, age or ethnicity. Conflict-sensitive responses should seek to understand how environmental conditions and patterns of resource use relate to existing social divisions. This can help identify potential sources of conflict, and similarly, leverage and reinforce resources that serve as connectors in the community.

4. Donors should provide sufficient, rapidly dispersible and flexible funding to support conflict-sensitive, multi-year, integrated responses to conflict and hunger.

Responses that save lives and meet mounting needs without further aggravating conflict depend on investment in conflict-sensitive analysis, design, implementation and adaptation as the context evolves. Donors should invest in their own capacities for conflict-sensitive analysis and response, while supporting those of partner governments, and humanitarian and development actors, as a necessary condition for sustainable, effective, accountable and empowering programming in conflict-affected contexts.

Beyond this, addressing food insecurity in conflict-affected contexts requires sustained commitment and long-term support. Donors must stay the course in protracted crises to ensure life-saving assistance is delivered in an effective, accountable and sustainable way that best ensures community ownership and empowerment. To date, the majority of donors continue to operate in short 12-18 month funding cycles for humanitarian aid.[96] Flexibility is also important: research suggests humanitarian needs are becoming less predictable, with a growing gap between anticipated needs at the beginning of the year, and year-end revised requirements to address crises.[97] In these conditions, inadequate, inflexible, and short-term funding means that humanitarian organisations cannot effectively address complex needs that require long-term engagement and adaptive responses.

5. All parties to conflict must abide by, monitor and continue to advocate for compliance with, international humanitarian law, including law concerning the use of food as a weapon of war.

The accounts in this report reveal the use, and threat, of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, to curtail populations' movement and limit their access to food and livelihood activities. In some, this is accompanied by targeted efforts to prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching those most in need. These contexts call for a redoubling of efforts to monitor violations, hold perpetrators to account, and strengthen collective humanitarian action and coordination in defence of humanitarian principles and access.

The recently passed Resolution 2417 (2018) is a critical step in the global community's recognition of how food is leveraged as a weapon of war. But it is only a first step. The global consensus around this issue provides a window of opportunity and much-needed momentum to drive this agenda forward and turn words into actions. The coming months will be crucial to ensuring systems for monitoring and reporting on violations are established, fully implemented and clearly linked to accountability mechanisms. Global moral outrage at the use of starvation tactics in war should be the engine of this change, but humanitarian and development actors can lend their weight to this agenda. They can do so by disseminating evidence of its use, coordinating collective efforts to push back against humanitarian access restrictions, and crucially, giving a platform to those most affected by conflict and hunger.

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Working on the construction of a robust emergency shelter at the protection of civilians site on the UNMISS base in Bentiu South Sudan. The shelters were designed by Concern in consultation with the residents of the camp. Photographer: Kieran McConvillle

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