

RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY AMIDST CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

Disrupting a Vicious Cycle and Promoting Peace and Development



INTRODUCTION

Food crises are increasingly concentrated in conflict-affected and fragile contexts: areas of limited state capacity and legitimacy where groups compete, often violently, for power. Eight of the worst food crises in the world today are linked to conflict and climate shocks.¹ To continue improving global food security and contributing to greater prosperity and resilience for all, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) will need to more fully deploy development resources in precisely these conflict-affected and fragile contexts. These areas present many operational challenges for USAID, but also many windows of opportunity—regions or periods of relative stability in the midst of broader conflict or fragility—for programming. These include more stable areas near those affected by ongoing violence, changes in the political environment over time, and finding creative ways to leverage what is working well.

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This brief addresses what is at stake for resilience and food security programming when food insecurity is increasingly driven by conflict and fragility.² It proposes how USAID can adopt strategic approaches, programming, and measurement to promote better development outcomes, and sustain peace and prosperity.

What is at stake for resilience and food security programming in fragile and conflict-affected regions?

Progress in eradicating hunger and spurring agricultural development will increasingly require ensuring interventions contribute to achieving long-term development in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Meanwhile, carefully understanding conflict sets USAID up to achieve core development goals of building resilience and promoting inclusive and sustainable agriculture development in these contexts.

¹United Nations Global Humanitarian Overview (2020).
²Global Report on Food Crises (2020).

Over the past decade, every region of the world but Western Asia and Africa has made gains in eradicating chronic undernourishment, defined as habitual food consumption insufficient to provide energy levels required to maintain an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and World Food Programme (WFP) 2019). Not surprisingly, Western Asia and Africa were the most conflict-affected over the same period.

The relationship between conflict and severe food insecurity is particularly stark. The ten worst food crises of 2019—collectively impacting 88.3 million people—occurred in conflict-affected or fragile states (see Table I).

The challenge for USAID investments in such settings could not be clearer. Operating amidst conflict or the possibility of conflict can be daunting. Active conflict zones are highly dynamic and create obstacles to the medium and long-range planning that development programming generally requires. Logistical challenges are omnipresent. Communities targeted for assistance may be forced to flee to safety with little advance warning or become host communities to the newly displaced. USAID staff and our partners face threats in such environments to their safety and mental health (Irving 2018).

Yet in most conflict-affected and fragile states, windows of opportunity for programming still exist. Not all conflict-affected and fragile contexts are alike. Indeed, these contexts tend to be highly unique, so assistance that works in one may not work in another. Understanding these complexities—and the role food insecurity plays as a cause and consequence of conflict—is critical to building success.

Figure 1. Regional Trends in Populations Exposed to Conflict

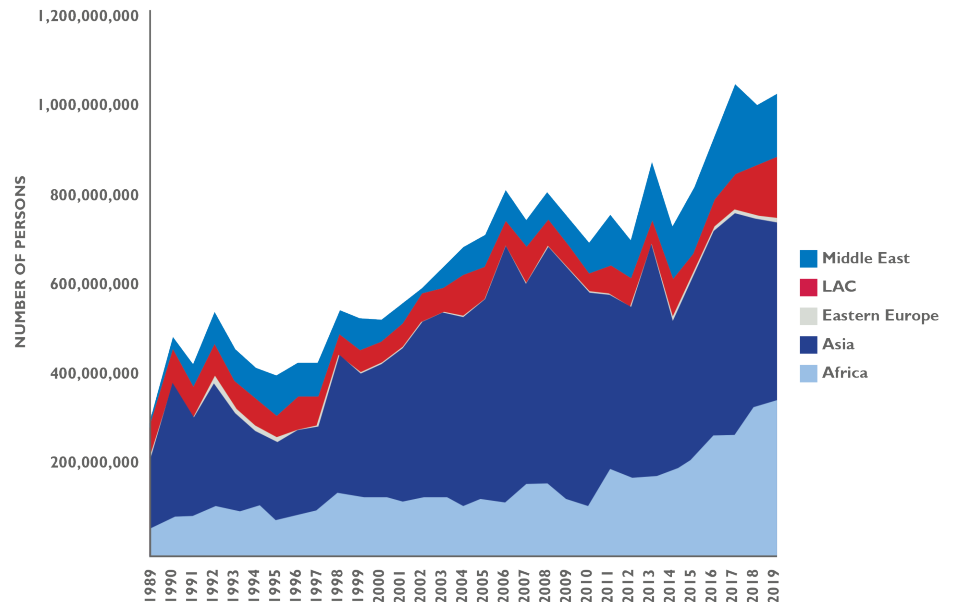


Table I. Acute Food Crises and Political Stability

Country	Total Persons in Crisis (WFP), 2019	% Population Acutely Food Insecure (USAID), 2021*	Total Population, 2018	% Total	Rank, Fragile States Index, 2019 ³	Ongoing Armed Conflict, 2019
South Sudan	7.0	>60%	11.0	64%	3rd	Yes
Yemen	15.9	>60%	28.5	56%	1st	Yes
Syria	6.6	N/A	16.9	39%	4th	Yes
Haiti	3.7	20-40%	11.1	33%	12th	No
Venezuela	9.3	N/A	28.9	32%	32nd	No
Afghanistan	11.3	20-40%	37.2	30%	9th	Yes
Dem. Rep. Congo	15.6	5-20%	84.1	19%	5th	Yes
Sudan	5.9	20-40%	41.8	14%	8th	Yes
Ethiopia	8.0	5-20%	109.2	7%	23rd	Yes
Nigeria	5.0	5-20%	195.9	3%	14th	Yes

* Denotes forecasts for May 2021 based on Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) (2020). Sources: GNFC (2020), World Bank (2020), Fund for Peace (2020), Petterson and Öberg (2020).

³The 2nd, 6th, and 7th place countries on the Fragile States Index were Somalia, Central African Republic, and Chad. While none of these countries experienced an acute crisis (per IPC definition) in 2019, all are chronically food insecure countries that experienced armed conflicts in 2019.

What is the relationship between conflict, fragility and food systems?

Conflict-affected and fragile contexts are areas of often violently contested governance where state capacity to provide order or public services is low and the social contract between citizens and government is either absent or broken. **Food insecurity can be both a cause and consequence of conflict.** For instance, **conflict and crime exacerbate food insecurity** when community members are forced to flee their homes,

losing jobs, the means to secure their basic needs, the ability to engage in agricultural production, and access to markets. People often cope by selling off productive assets too. Conversely, **food insecurity can contribute to conflict in a number of ways**, from triggering conflict through food riots, to exacerbating fault lines between communities and groups competing over resources, to fostering criminal activity and aiding rebel recruitment, among

other harmful outcomes. In Nigeria, for example, the militant Boko Haram group has exploited pervasive food and livelihood insecurity to recruit fighters. Subsequently, sustained conflict with the group has deepened Nigeria’s food crisis by damaging livelihoods, disrupting access to markets and trade, and prompting dangerous coping strategies.

CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND FRAGILITY

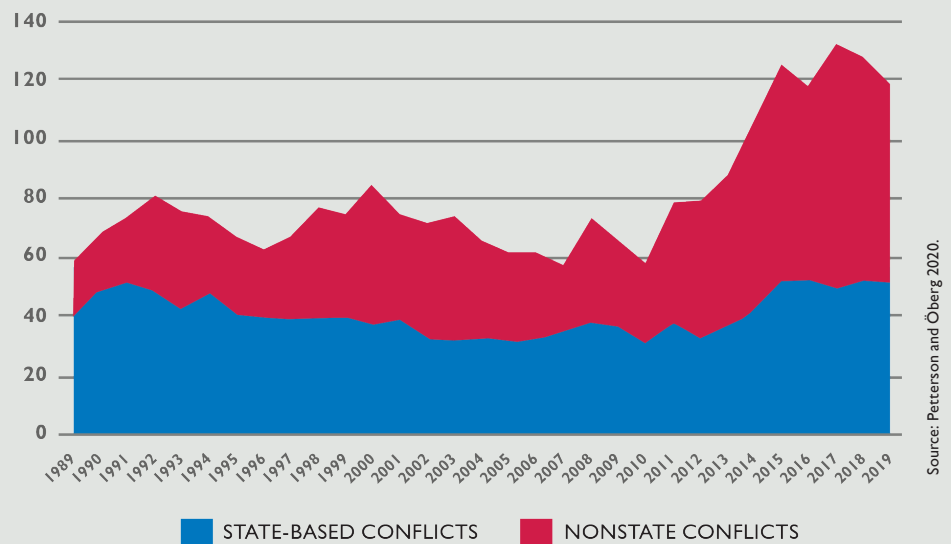
More than half of the countries where USAID operates suffer from armed conflict or other forms of violence, often the result of serious crime or violent extremism.

State-based conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war, are those in which non-state armed groups battle state forces seeking control of the government or territorial autonomy (i.e., separatist conflicts). Non-state-based conflicts, like those between criminal gangs in Honduras or between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria, do not directly involve government forces. Figure 2 plots the number of state-based and non-state-based conflicts around the world since 1989.

Beyond the rise in non-state-based conflicts, global violence is on the rise too and it does not stem from civil wars. While most forms of violence do not devolve into traditional warfare, casualties resulting from non-combat violence (including homicide, terrorism, domestic abuse, sexual and gender-based violence, disappearances, and kidnapping) outpace deaths associated with war zones by a three-to-one margin.

Violence and armed conflicts today are characterized by recent trends that render them increasingly protracted, tough-to-solve and harmful to civilians.

Figure 2. Active Armed Conflicts, 1989-2019



For example:

- The internationalization of conflict: Neighboring countries are increasingly supporting one side in conflicts outside their territories. When such conflicts spill over borders, they tend to become more violent, longer lasting, and harder to resolve than traditional civil wars.

- **The number of non-state armed groups participating in violence is increasing.** Roughly half of today’s wars involve between three and nine opposing groups. In places like Syria, **hundreds of armed groups are fighting each other.** Wars are harder to end when multiple groups are involved.

PHOTO: UN PHOTO / ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRI



A Sudanese child holds bullets picked from the ground in the village of Rounyn, North Darfur in 2012, during violent clashes between rebel forces and Sudan's Government.

- **Armed groups increasingly fragment into subgroups.** In recent years, for example, Mexico's most dominant criminal organizations have either splintered or been threatened by smaller groups that are diversifying their criminal portfolios and using extreme violence to try and gain control of key territory. This makes it more difficult to identify appropriate responses for each group (since one size does not fit all) and more challenging to track actors and supporters of violence.
- **Non-state violence has overtaken state-based violence in frequency, while violence against civilians has also increased.** Rebel groups are also more likely to be responsible for the majority of civilian deaths.
- Today's armed groups are more likely to be affiliated with drug cartels, mafia groups, and criminal gangs. Organized crime is a major stressor that undermines state legitimacy and can lower incentives for armed groups to enter political settlements. Since 2000, **organized crime has killed as many people as all global armed conflicts combined.**

- The number of displaced people due to violence is also at an all-time high. Overall, there are now **79.5 million people displaced in the world.**

Beyond these trends, conflict and violence are highly context-specific and locally driven. In some conflict-affected countries like South Sudan, conflict is pervasive, leaving few populated areas unaffected. In others, conflict and violence may be highly concentrated, often in remote areas or hot spots. These differences matter for programming. Even in significantly conflict-affected and fragile contexts there are often windows of relative stability, safety, and effective governance, as well as emerging opportunities following a new election or other political shift.

The diversity of conflict-affected contexts, with distinct drivers and local dynamics, also has significant implications for designing and implementing development programming. Some countries experience multiple types of conflict and violence simultaneously. Nigeria is one example. While the Boko Haram conflict in the Northeast is generating food insecurity through forced displacement and food theft, the underlying grievances driving

the armed group are not related to food or agricultural development. Yet they may threaten the success of sustainable, inclusive agricultural developments. In the country's Middle Belt conflicts, however, land and access to water are among the primary issues being contested. Programs focused only on enhancing the productivity of crops in the Middle Belt could be seen as privileging the interests of farmers over herders and could exacerbate grievances and local conflict dynamics. But interventions that aim to create win-win scenarios between farmers and herders—such as encouraging the sale of manure to farmers by herders—could promote social cohesion, reduce tensions, and contribute to more sustainable, inclusive development.

Finally, it is important to note there are many fragile contexts that are not as violent, but which still pose considerable challenges for resilience and food security investments. In these contexts, armed conflict may not be present, but government legitimacy and effectiveness are still lacking. In Honduras, for example, more than fifty percent of the population believes the government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, and the country has been in a state of nearly constant crisis and widespread protest since marred elections in 2017 (Daugaard 2019). USAID programming will need to carefully identify windows of opportunity in these contexts, too. For example, the **USAID-ACCESO project in Honduras** has increased farmer incomes by offering technical training in pest management, engaging with grievances around access to economic opportunity. In southwestern Bangladesh, and in the midst of recurrent climate shocks and an increasingly authoritarian government, **USAID's Rice and Diversified Crops project** is working through local markets systems to help local farmers generate income by cultivating higher-value, nutrient-rich crops.

How does conflict and violence affect food security and agricultural development?

The effects of conflict on food security and agricultural development are almost uniformly negative, with conflict causing declines in agricultural production, interruptions to food transport and marketplaces, and large increases in hunger. Food insecurity is always present in conflict zones. These negative impacts operate through a variety of channels:

- Displacement and labor redeployment: [Armed conflict crowds out productive economic activities with those that are destructive or defensive](#). Some food producers join armed groups, others flee, both across borders and within affected countries, seeking safety. Such migration affects men and women differently (see Box 1, “Gendered Dynamics of Agriculture, Conflict, and Displacement”). The flight to safety often results in missed planting seasons. Those who stay tend to leave distant land fallow and shift to activities closer to home with shorter-term yields and lower profitability, including completely reverting to subsistence practices (Arias, Ibáñez, and Zambrano 2019).
- Logistical challenges: Even if food is available, it may not be accessible to the population and/or certain segments of the population. Processing and distribution centers, including markets, may be destroyed or less accessible, leading to increased costs of and risks to food transshipment. For example, sugar prices in the South Sudan market in Toch, [which is supplied by boat and where informal tax burdens are 30 to 50 percent higher than in Old Fangak, just 20 kilometers away](#) (WFP 2020). Similar challenges exist with production. Irrigation systems and drinking water infrastructure may be intentionally sabotaged, restricted to benefit certain social groups while leaving out others, or fall into disrepair due to lack of maintenance and governance.



Thousands flee the town of Bunia in 2004 as heavy fighting raged in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

- Increased illicit activity: Resources invested in counter-insurgency efforts and/or fighting mean less to invest in policing land rights, borders, and territorial waters. Some examples include [increases in illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing by foreign vessels off the coasts of conflict-affected countries](#), including Angola, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sri Lanka; [drug trafficking between Myanmar and Bangladesh](#), and commodity crop theft as well as land-grabbing of farm or pasture land abandoned by fleeing populations (Hendrix and Glaser 2011, Mabikke 2011).
- Foregone investment and capital flight: Inherent risks associated with conflicts tend to [discourage investment](#) needed to increase agricultural productivity or support new or existing market systems due to higher political risk. These can include small-scale investments, but also larger expenditures on farm machinery and irrigation systems. Also, funds that might otherwise be invested in increasing agricultural output instead are used to repair roads and basic infrastructure. Ultimately, these forgone investments can undermine USAID’s effort to support sustainable agricultural development.
- Active food denial by combatants: As in present-day Yemen, [armed groups have used food denial both to literally starve the opposition of its ability to fight](#) (recalling the adage of Napoleon Bonaparte, “An army marches on its stomach”) and to punish civilians suspected of sheltering non-state combatants. Humanitarian food aid is also sometimes stolen by violent actors, who may either consume it themselves or sell it on black and grey markets to fund their activities. Water resources may be similarly affected.
- Weakened institutional capacity: In fragile contexts, violence need not be present for livelihoods and markets to be disrupted. Weak institutions, corruption, and limited public services all impose tolls on development. Recurrent demonstrations and strikes, [like those in Nepal](#), can also shutter markets, choke transportation infrastructure, and make ordinary citizens fearful of leaving their homes.

Box 1: Gendered Dynamics of Agriculture, Conflict, and Displacement

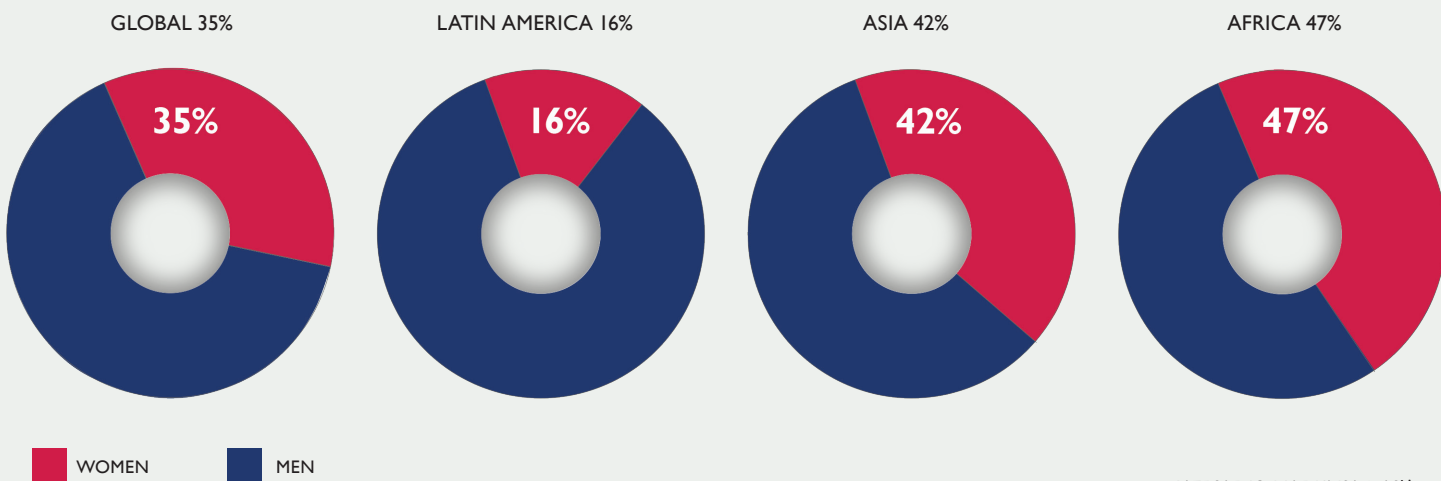
Agriculture, armed conflict, and forced displacement are highly gendered in nature. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, women have made up about a third (35 percent) of the global agricultural labor force. However, large regional disparities exist, ranging from 16 percent of the agricultural labor force in Latin America, to much higher proportions in Asia (42 percent) and Africa (47 percent) — the two world regions that have experienced the most armed conflict in past decades (Doss 2014). Evidence also points to the “feminization” of agriculture in the face of shocks such as conflict, disease, migration and globalization ([World Bank 2016](#)).

Men, especially young men, make up the vast majority of front-line fighting forces of both rebel and government armies (Goldstein 2003, Wood and Thomas 2017). However, women are combatants too and often perform significant roles in logistics and supply chains, as well as with encouraging male family members to fight (Jennings 2009). They also often become heads of households during conflict, taking on new roles and responsibilities in their home and community.

These gendered dynamics appear in patterns of displacement as well. Though women make up roughly half of displaced populations, their rates of labor force participation are much lower than those of both host women and displaced men (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2019). Displaced populations tend to be disproportionately composed of the young and elderly, so many displaced working-age women are engaged in unpaid child or elder care. Displaced women and girls also face heightened risks for gender-based violence, such as while collecting firewood.

This evidence is only illustrative of a complex issue set, but it demonstrates how resilience and food security investments will impact men and women differently in these contexts, even more so than in stable places. Gender-sensitive programming can ensure that programming does not exacerbate gender inequality and instead identifies ways to address the unique needs of men, women, boys, and girls. This includes understanding who is excluded and why, and how that contributes to conflict as well as how conflict can be mitigated.

AGRICULTURAL LABOR FORCE



PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT): USAID/HONDURAS; JESSICA HARTL/USAID; LENKATE SAENGHKAEW/USAID ASIA



How do food insecurity and depressed agricultural development affect conflict and violence?

Food insecurity and depressed agricultural development affect conflict and fragility in a variety of ways, ranging from spurring recruitment by armed groups to causing communal conflict over access to scarce land and water resources, spurring urban protest and rioting, and delegitimizing governments and institutions (Hendrix and Brinkman 2013, WFP 2017).

Hunger and unemployment, especially rural unemployment, are often motivating factors in the decision to join armed groups. Food and livelihood security have been central components of military recruitment for centuries. The promise of meals, shelter, and protection are powerful inducements to join armed groups, especially in contexts where battle lines are fluid and several competing armed groups may be present. Boko Haram's recruitment in Nigeria has focused on unemployed youth, and food and income are powerful enticements. In 2015, Boko Haram expanded its recruiting activities to Cameroon by offering monthly salaries of \$600 to \$800 to young men in food-insecure communities, a staggering sum in an area with a \$72 per month minimum wage and where local under-employment is as high as 75 percent.⁴

Areas with higher food prices and adverse weather conditions (drought, lower-than-normal rainfall) also experience more conflict, especially communal conflict between ethnic, tribal, or religious groups (Raleigh, Choi, and Kniveton 2015). This is because these conflicts are most likely to occur in poorer areas of weak state presence, where access to renewable resources is key to supporting livelihoods. In these contexts, ethnic and tribal militias often fight over land, cattle, and access to surface water and boreholes (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2018). Such violence has claimed more than [1,800 lives and](#)



Opium poppy production in Afghanistan flourished at the expense of wheat production.

PHOTO: UN PHOTO/UNODC/ZALMAL

[displaced 300,000 persons from their homes in Nigeria's Middle Belt since 2018.](#)

Food insecurity, especially caused by price spikes, can also foster protest and rioting, in some cases (as in Haiti in 2008 and Egypt in 2011) leading to regime instability. [Food prices are the quintessential “kitchen table issue,” relevant for those even with no deep interest in politics.](#) Most developing and middle-income country governments heavily subsidize food consumption—especially urban consumption—often to the detriment of rural producers. As such, food prices are one of the most obvious metrics by which citizens assess government performance. Failure to maintain low and stable prices can trigger market riots or, as in the Arab Spring, be a rallying point for broader claims about government performance and effectiveness. Food price-related protests and riots have occurred in a number of Feed the Future countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Honduras, Senegal, and Uganda all experienced food price-related protests and rioting in response to the 2007/08 and 2010/11 global food price crises.

Truly acute food insecurity, such as famine and extreme hunger, tends to have

countervailing effects on conflict. While these conditions enhance grievances, they also significantly diminish an aggrieved population's ability to prosecute violent aims, as individuals turn their activities toward meeting the basic need for sustenance. That is one reason why active food denial has been used as a component of counterinsurgency for centuries (Hendrix and Brinkman 2013).

USAID staff must be aware of conflict impacts beyond food systems in the immediate vicinity of conflict for programming. Conflict can dramatically reshape local politics, economies, and social systems and have significant spillover effects for food, water, and livelihood systems far from where fighting takes place.

In Niger, for example, the Boko Haram conflict along the border with Nigeria forced refugees into towns that swelled in population by 20-30 percent within weeks and strained local water and sanitation systems (Wetterwald and Thaller 2020). The conflict in Afghanistan allowed opium poppy production to flourish at the expense of wheat production, deepening dependence on imported wheat and exposing consumers to higher prices and volatility (FEWS NET 2004). In Uganda, conflict between the Ugandan government and Lord's Resistance Army in the northern part of the country caused millions to flee to the comparatively peaceful south or into camps for internally displaced people. Seeking sustenance, those displaced young men and women, and in some cases urban workers displaced by the displaced arrivals from the north, began fishing in large numbers along the shores of Lake Victoria. Ultimately, their activities destabilized the open-access fisheries there and led to violent conflicts, including a conflict between Uganda and Kenya (Glaser et al. 2019).

⁴ “No Shortage of Recruits for Boko Haram in Cameroon's Far North,” New Humanitarian, March 5, 2015. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/255134>. Accessed May 28, 2020.

How can resilience and food security investments maximize impact towards our development goals in these contexts and also contribute to peace?

To continue making headway in combating food insecurity and spurring agricultural development, USAID should tailor programming in the following ways:

Analyze real-time information from diverse sources to understand the context.

Because conflict-affected and fragile contexts are highly dynamic environments, conflict assessments may quickly go out of date. In these contexts, we know we need a range of goals and operational plans based on what is possible, including contingency planning when things go wrong and seizing windows of opportunity when things go right.

For this reason, it will be important to frequently collect information from multiple sources, including perception information from different segments of society both within and outside USAID. Additionally, USAID's interventions become part of the context whenever we provide assistance. USAID must continually analyze how investments are affecting a conflict and how that conflict is affecting Agency investments. At minimum, USAID must ensure Do No Harm (DNH) principles are implemented and, where possible, contribute to a more peaceful environment that supports inclusive development goals. Opportunities for achieving this include:

- Conflict and violence [assessments](#)
- Continuous context monitoring, with extra attention to inclusivity
- Collaboration across the [Bureau for Resilience and Food Security \(RFS\)](#) and the [Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization \(CPS\)](#) and its [Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention \(CVP\)](#)
- Partnerships with local conflict prevention organizations or [early](#)



PHOTO: UN PHOTO/ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

A woman collects millet near the Zam Zam IDP Camp in El Fasher, North Darfur. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), organized patrols to escort women who are farming and collecting firewood in rural areas surrounding the camp.

[warning networks](#)

- Collaboration across RFS and the [Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance \(BHA\)](#), which ensures DNH principles are upheld in USAID's humanitarian assistance.

Ensure programming is conflict sensitive and seek peace dividends.

Doing so does not just promote peace for the sake of peace. By contributing to a more peaceful environment, RFS programming will ultimately better contribute to its core development

goals of building resilience and promoting inclusive and sustainable agriculture development.

Conflict sensitivity means avoiding unintended consequences of interventions by carefully understanding the context, the two-way relationship between our interventions and the context, and adapting accordingly. Understanding the context includes, but is not limited to, understanding the history of a place (and recognizing that history will be understood differently by different groups), the causes and logic of violence, and opportunities for building peace. Ultimately, conflict sensitivity demands understanding the implications of

the context for an intervention and acting quickly to mitigate harm and improve the positive impact of an intervention.

For instance, while resilience and food security programs will principally be designed to strengthen resilience and improve food security, they can also help rebuild social cohesion—often diminished by conflict but nearly as important for economic growth as financial capital—in pursuit of peace and longer-term development goals (Knack and Keefer 1997). Resilience and food security investments can be leveraged for peace if we think creatively about how they can accomplish important goals like reducing inequality and grievances, increasing trust, sharing information, and creating a positive relationship between citizens and their government. For instance, support for a community land trust can create new rules for sharing land between farmers and pastoralists and demonstrate the benefits of collaboration for both parties. Investments in agricultural and livestock extension services can build trust between citizens and government around shared problems. These interventions are good for building peace but contribute to longer-term development outcomes as well.

Strengthen resilience by working with and through local systems and partners.

Locally led development and direct partnerships with local leaders, networks, groups, and institutions, where possible, is important for strengthening resilience in fragile and conflict-affected places. RFS is already supporting research and evidence on [how to work with and through local market and social systems](#) in conflict-driven crises. It is also more complicated, especially when in some contexts USAID cannot formally partner with government actors. In these contexts, there are good USAID [examples of creating local groups](#)

for feedback and priority-setting,

as well as local coordination units to link up that feedback with decision-makers. Choosing local leaders, networks, groups, and institutions to partner with also needs to be grounded in an understanding of the context to ensure DNH. Transition awards and opportunities like [Local Works](#) offer innovative ways of working with local actors, while co-creation processes can also be designed to promote feedback and local ownership. Finally, resilience and food security investments can ideally layer on to BHA commitments to localization under the [Grand Bargain](#).

Throughout the program lifecycle the [Local Systems Framework](#) offers an overarching approach to engaging with local systems. The [5Rs \(Results, Roles, Relationships, Rules and Resources\) framework](#) and [CLA writ large](#) both provide useful ways to assess local context and provide guidance on program design and monitoring.

Identify windows of opportunity.

Not all conflict-affected contexts are equally fragile, and the conflicts that dominate headlines are often atypical in their size and ferocity. Many armed conflicts do not generate widespread displacement and destruction. Often, conflicts are characterized by periods of heavily armed peace punctuated by sporadic, low-level violence. Windows of opportunity can often be found, especially with highly localized groups of community members as well as across formal and informal markets. From diaspora networks and local seed markets to successful private sector actors and youth potential, scan for inclusive and creative opportunities to leverage what is working well despite challenging conditions. Here are several examples:

- In Somalia, by situating development projects in areas with comparatively less active conflict, [USAID's Growth,](#)

Enterprise, Employment &

[Livelihoods](#) program has helped the export-oriented fisheries sector improve cold chain infrastructure and grow significantly.⁵

- In Democratic Republic of the Congo, USAID has [attracted private sector investment to the seed sector in ways](#) tailored to this fragile context. Because seed is often the first-entry agricultural intervention during crisis, it is important to leverage, not disrupt, local markets.
- The private sector can be a key driver in investment and job creation in conflict-affected contexts. Telecommunication, energy, and financial services are often promising areas for investment. For example, USAID supports the Global Innovation Fund, which has invested in [digital financial services](#) in Nigeria.

To continue advancing a more prosperous and peaceful world, USAID food security and agricultural development programming will increasingly need to adapt to conflict-affected and fragile states.

Promote coherence of humanitarian, development, and peace assistance.

While this brief has focused on USAID's development assistance resilience and food security investments, the reality is USAID will always be programming alongside both other development sectors and humanitarian assistance colleagues. Coherence across humanitarian assistance, development assistance, and peace assistance, in pursuit of collective outcomes when possible, is critical for maximizing the impact of interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

⁵"[Growth, Enterprise, Employment and Livelihoods](#) (GEEL)," USAID, February 20, 2020.

Achieving coherence across kinds of assistance includes cross-sectoral communication, coordination and learning platforms. It ideally involves joint planning towards collective outcomes and strategically sequencing, layering, and integrating humanitarian, development and peace assistance as appropriate. It also demands shock-responsive programming and adaptive management. USAID has affirmed its commitment at the policy level on this topic through its 2020 strategic review and COVID response plan as well as by affirming the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) recommendation on the [humanitarian-development-peace nexus](#).

Colleagues from across USAID's new R3 bureaus — the Conflict Prevention and Stabilization Bureau and the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance — are important allies for both technical support and for coordinating efforts in Washington. Colleagues outside

this structure, from global health and education, to democracy, rights and governance, and local sustainability are also crucial allies in driving collective outcomes in these complex contexts. A practical resource is the recent Programming Considerations for HA/DA coherence in the face of COVID-19.

Define success and related measurement approaches in new ways.

Because conflict has generally negative consequences for food security and agricultural development, conflict-affected and fragile contexts challenge the evaluation of programs based on conventional definitions of “wins”, such as decreased childhood stunting, increased agricultural productivity, and other indicators that conventionally capture return on investment. In conflict-affected and fragile contexts, preventing erosion of living standards, food security, or crop yields, or averting spikes in humanitarian assistance caseloads, may constitute success. Such

counterfactual-based measurement approaches, which assess what would have happened in the absence of programming, are already being employed. For example, the [2018 Resilience Evidence Forum Report](#) estimated that \$1 invested in resilience and early response is worth \$3 in reduced humanitarian assistance spending and avoided asset losses (Venton 2018).

To continue advancing a more prosperous and peaceful world, USAID food security and agricultural development programming will increasingly need to adapt to conflict-affected and fragile states. The challenges are large and complex, and will require changes in strategic emphases, programming, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as the investment of more resources in managing the challenges of operating in complex contexts. These changes will necessarily entail some risk. But the potential rewards in terms of human and agricultural development, as well as peace and stability, make tackling those challenges worthwhile.

PHOTO: THOMAS CRISTOFLETTI FOR USAID.



Without strong institutions and with limited economic options, many in Colombia turn to the illicit economy—working in the illegal mines and drug trade—to earn a living.

USAID's cacao program has helped families earn a steady income from cacao by connecting them to the chocolate industry. The cacao project is one of many USAID-supported activities that benefit families in Colombia's most violence-torn municipalities, caught in the fighting between the government, the FARC, paramilitaries and other illegal armed groups.

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