

CHAPTER SIX

HUNGER AND CONFLICT

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SUMMARY

Conflicts⁽²⁾ do not necessarily have to be violent, or negative: they are often normal elements within social relations and they help to maintain, develop or change entities which are at the very heart of our society⁽³⁾. Yet we shall be specifically focusing on armed conflicts, i.e. those in which the community is unable to manage and confront their conflicting interests in a creative manner, whereby the situation degenerates into a cycle of physical violence⁽⁴⁾. The dynamics of conflict may therefore mean that a disagreement between various parties turns into a war, which may be a low-intensity war, as the majority tend to be, but which may take on greater dimensions and become a high-intensity conflict whenever it involves more than 1000 victims per year.

On a different note, hunger is the most extreme and radical manifestation of poverty. Reducing by half the number of hungry people in the world has been earmarked as a priority within the

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⁽²⁾ Civil and internal armed conflicts have been on the rise since the late 80's and constitute an overwhelming majority of conflicts in the post-Cold War era: only 3 of the 61 major armed conflicts between 1989 and 1998 were inter-State conflicts. The end of the bipolar confrontation has reduced the risk of a world war, but it has also given rise to a more insecure world, given the proliferation of local conflicts, especially in poor countries.

⁽³⁾ COSER, L. A., «Conflict», in W. OUTHWAITE and T. BOTTOMORE (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, pp. 103-5.

⁽⁴⁾ PÉREZ DE ARMIÑO, Karlos, *Diccionario de Acción Humanitaria y Cooperación al Desarrollo*, Hegoa, Universidad del País Vasco, 2000.

UN's Millennium Goals (MDGs). Widespread hunger is marginalised from government agendas when compared to the media attention that famines tend to receive. Yet the overall impact, both economically and in terms of lives, is far greater in the case of widespread hunger than that of famines.

Studies and research centred on the links between war and hunger have been conducted on the premise that hunger is a consequence of conflict. Through this paper, we aim to provide a more in-depth analysis in order to identify hunger as also being both a cause and instrument of conflict.

Key words:

Conflict, food security, hunger, malnutrition, humanitarian aid.

■ INTRODUCTION

War and hunger have ridden side-by-side since the times of the Old Testament in a coupling which ultimately culminates in the Fourth Rider: Death. Although the connections between war and hunger have been studied in depth, little work has been done linking food crises to conflict. Yet experience shows that both are likewise closely related in a cycle whereby the effects and consequences of one compound and augment the effects of the other.

We can establish differing types of civil conflicts by taking into account their causes, objectives, dynamics, combatants, consequences and the instruments employed. Yet we must establish that certain conflicts are the end product of various realities in one. Conflicts may thus be the result of support provided by regional groups or powers to rebel groups (Mozambique), counterinsurgency wars (Afghanistan), civil wars (Eritrea), wars of liberation (Ethiopia), wars against marginalisation or to prevent genocide (Uganda) and wars of rebellion against a central power in decline (Liberia, Somalia, etc.) and exploited by so-called *Warlords*.

Internal armed conflicts⁽⁵⁾ also present differences in terms of their outcomes, which tend to be the following: a) All-out victory on the part of the rebel movement or movements and the introduction of a new regime (Zaire/Congo, Uganda, Ruanda, Ethiopia, Albania). b) The *de facto* creation of a new State (Eritrea, Somaliland, Bosnia). c) Negotiated peace with a power-sharing option (Mozambique, Liberia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Camboya, Georgia, Sierra Leone). d) A stalemate (Sudan, Angola, Algeria, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Burundi). e) Perpetuation of the collapse of the State (Somalia)⁽⁶⁾.

On a different note, food security has become one of the most fertile fields of study as regards development and humanitarian action⁽⁷⁾. Yet this concept

⁽⁵⁾ For more information on the new typology of conflicts, see, among others: GALTUNG, JOHAN, «Los fundamentos de los estudios sobre la paz», in RUBIO, A. (ed.), *Presupuestos teóricos y éticos sobre la Paz*, Universidad de Granada; GALTUNG, JOHAN, «Paz», in RUBIO, A. (ed.), *Presupuestos teóricos y éticos sobre la Paz*, Universidad de Granada, 1993; KALDOR, MARY, *New and old wars. Organized violence in a global era*, Tusquets, Barcelona, 2001; MARTÍNEZ GUZMÁN, Vicent, *Filosofía para hacer las paces*, Icaria, Barcelona, 2005; MUÑOZ, FRANCISCO A, *La paz imperfecta*, Universidad de Granada, Granada, 2001; NÚÑEZ VILLAVÉRDE, Jesús and REY MARCOS, FRANCISCO, *Iraq en su laberinto: apuntes para una salida*, CIP/IECAH, Madrid, 2003.

⁽⁶⁾ *Op Cit* PÉREZ ARMIÑO, Karlos.

⁽⁷⁾ Food Security as a scientific discipline first appeared in the 70's thanks to the world oil crisis, which gave rise to a worldwide crisis in cereal and foodstuffs. Since then, different explanatory paradigms have occurred concerning the origin and causes of hunger. Recently, the political causal explanation has gained strength, relating to long-term policies, the willingness of leaders, the need for concertation agreements that create social capital within States and the realisation of the right to food. According to this paradigm, the victims of hunger in many cases are not characterised so much by resource poverty as by lack of political power in order to claim their rights and put political pressure on the State which is supposed to represent them.

is often treated vacuously, linking it to the causes of hunger and famines and aimed at their eradication. Moreover, food security is now an ever-present aspect of development projects, especially those related to rural and agricultural development. Through this article, we aim to provide an in-depth analysis of the existing interaction between hunger and conflict as well as shedding light on how the right to food tackles this issue.

Technically, when referring to situations where part of the population suffers from hunger, we tend not to employ the term hunger but rather food insecurity. A population has food security when «all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life»⁽⁸⁾. Food security has four dimensions⁽⁹⁾:

- a. The physical availability of food, which depends on local production, reserves and markets;
- b. Physical and economic access to food;
- c. Utilization of food. In reference to how food is turned into nutrients, divided among the members of a family, handled, cooked...; and
- d. Stability of food availability. Variations in the availability of food throughout the year may lead to food problems.

We are also obliged to analyse food security in terms of its temporality:

- a. Chronic food insecurity – hunger - or moderate malnutrition suffered endemically by the most vulnerable sectors;
- b. Temporary food insecurity, associated with exceptional causes and which may lead to famines if adequate measures are not taken; and
- c. Seasonal food insecurity, conditioned by diverse factors such as shortage of food reserves, increased food prices, etc.

For our initial approach, and although they will be clearly defined over the following pages, it is essential to outline two concepts which are often identified in a similar way. On the one hand, *hunger* is a generic term which describes a situation of an *under* consumption of food or malnutrition, usually chronic, and, on the other, *famine*, which often encompasses a more specific reality.

■ INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUNGER AND CONFLICT

Famine can be viewed as a disaster which is secondary to other disastrous events such as droughts and war, which in turn lead to other types of disasters: mass displacement and refugees. For instance, when there are large-scale migratory movements due to a famine, over-population occurs in small areas giving rise to safety and humanitarian problems.

⁽⁸⁾ 1996 World Food Summit.

⁽⁹⁾ Food Security Information for Action. Practical Guides. FAO.

The stability of social, political and economic conditions are the determining factors in food insecurity and define the capacity to address the situation when the population is vulnerable, such as during a drought. Immediate risk factors such as wars or droughts are closely associated with those fundamental factors; more vulnerable populations are less able to overcome setbacks and more susceptible to famine. Political stability alone often leads to armed conflict and civil unrest, which can be a direct cause of famine.

In such contexts, food insecurity is graded according to its intensity and classified in five levels⁽¹⁰⁾:

1	General food security	Crude mortality rate: 0.5/10,000/day Acute malnutrition: <3% Stunting: <20% Access/availability: 2100 kcal person/day
2	Chronic food insecurity	Crude mortality rate: 0.5/10,000/day; Under-Five Mortality Rate or U5MR <1/10,000/day Acute malnutrition: >3% but <10% Stunting: >20% Access/availability: 2100 kcal person/day unreliable and barely adequate food
3	Acute crisis in food and means of subsistence	Crude mortality rate: 0.5-1/10,000/day; U5MR 1-2/10,000/day Acute malnutrition: 10-15% Access/availability: 2100 kcal person/day through sale of assets
4	Humanitarian emergency	Crude mortality rate: 0.5-1/10,000/day; U5MR >2/10,000/day Acute malnutrition: >15% Access/availability: less than 2100 kcal person/day
5	Famine/catastrophe	Crude mortality rate: >2/10,000/day; Acute malnutrition: 30% Access/availability: extreme lack of access, far less than 2100 kcal person/day

Food insecurity may arise for different reasons and in any one of its intensities. The most common causes are:

- War, armed conflict or social upheaval,
- Crop failures due to climatic or environmental causes such as drought, floods, wind, insect plagues (mainly locusts),
- The interruption or destruction of the food distribution chain and/or market system affecting a large part of the population. The cause may lie in political, environmental or economic crises.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Summary of the table from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification FAO June 2006. Table created by the authors.

Amongst the cited causes, the most common are drought and conflict. In the case of conflict, the resulting instability interrupts the delicate productive cycle of agriculture, destabilises the markets and transport networks which deliver the food to its final destination and increases the costs of food production. Conflict impedes normal food production as it displaces populations and halts the arrival of supplies, as well as dismantling markets. Conflict affects all elements of food security as it affects the availability of food, its access and exploitation. On occasions, hunger is not only an indirect result of conflict but a weapon of war in itself.

At times, hunger is imposed upon a population under the control of the opposing side seeking to weaken the enemy and the loss of popular support. History shows us how, despite being a common strategy, it is not any more effective. The combatants, who are usually armed young men, are the last ones to go hungry. The most vulnerable population is the most affected: women and children. An extreme example of this phenomenon can even be found in Europe when, during the great Russian sieges (Leningrad, Kiev, etc.), it was revealed that the population had «stopped eating» in order to feed the soldiers.

The capacity of hunger to generate conflict is a subject that has been studied to a far lesser degree. Although scientific approaches to the issue have recently been instigated within *Peace Studies*, strictly direct relationships have not been considered, though this may be about to change. Agricultural productive capacity has become a strategic element not only as a means of subsistence for people, but also for its strategic value in the struggle for raw materials and as a source of speculation in an international panorama in which it seems that food is becoming scarce and crops have become an element of energy policy.

Excessive population growth in certain regions has led to governments and multinationals purchasing large areas of land beyond their borders. China, for instance, which has a huge and growing population, also has large desert areas. It has therefore started to buy up large areas of land in Africa, a form of agrarian colonialism, which has a significant destabilising potential.

In a similar vein, European regulations making it mandatory to use 10% of biofuels in transport as from 2015⁽¹¹⁾, along with the attractive business opportunities arising from intensive food production in the light of future climate change, water shortages and the increase in current population levels, specifically in countries such as China and India, are encouraging large countries like China to buy up huge areas of land in Africa. In recent years, and by way of illustration, the Ethiopian government has offered three million hectares of its most fertile land to developed countries and some of the wealthiest individuals in the world so that they can export food to their own

⁽¹¹⁾ Source: European Commission, 2012.

populations. The paradoxical statistic here is that 13 million people in Ethiopia are suffering a food crisis⁽¹²⁾.

Furthermore, drought is generally the main cause of reduced agricultural production. However, the traditional idea of there being a direct cause-effect relationship between drought and famine has been overturned by studies over the last twenty years which have revealed other, more complex relationships between them⁽¹³⁾. In recent years, wars have been the primary cause of famines; we only need to look at Africa for confirmation of this. As a natural phenomenon, drought has been ever-present throughout history and occurs to a greater or lesser frequency in many regions.

In those contexts in which the vulnerability of the population is very high, this type of natural catastrophe can give rise to a crisis which, if it cannot be tackled through family coping strategies, government policies or international aid, may trigger a disaster, including famine. Droughts have diverse consequences, which both spread and worsen as the situation goes on, and they affect⁽¹⁴⁾:

- a. Livelihoods, especially those of farmers and shepherds, who lose part of their food production and income, being forced to gradually sell off their productive resources in order to survive, thereby jeopardising their future subsistence;
- b. Food security, more the result of diminishing economic resources than of diminishing supplies;
- c. Health, since the scarcity of drinking water forces people to drink contaminated water, which in turn leads to diarrhoeal illnesses;
- d. The work overload of women, who must travel even further in order to bring water back to their homes; and
- e. The macroeconomic situation of the country, which deteriorates on several fronts due to the fall in agricultural production.

■ HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

In terms of food security, hunger is defined as the «*inability of people to cover their food needs*»⁽¹⁵⁾. Minimal nutritional needs are currently measured in caloric terms at 2100 Kcal a day, though this not an average and certainly does

⁽¹²⁾ However, Ethiopia is not the only country offering up its most fertile and plentiful fields to these new kinds of colonisers, displacing millions of farming families who suddenly find their property being invaded by tractors and farm machinery. To date, 20 African nations have sold 50 million hectares of their land.

⁽¹³⁾ *Op Cit.* PÉREZ DE ARMIÑO, Karlos,

⁽¹⁴⁾ CLAY, E., «Aid and Drought: Responding to the Human and Economic Consequences of Natural Disasters», in O'Neill, H. and J. Toye (coords.), *A World without Famine? New Approaches to Aid and Development*, Mcmillan Press and St. Martin's Press, London-New York, 1998, pp. 199-220.

⁽¹⁵⁾ This definition is provided by the World Food Programme (WFP).

not mean that all the members of a family have the same caloric requirements⁽¹⁶⁾. The inability to meet food needs results in malnutrition. Malnutrition can refer to either a lack of food (undernourishment) or an excess. Undernourishment manifests itself to a greater or lesser degree according to its severity and nature:

■ **Protein-calorie Undernourishment Occurs from an Insufficient Intake of Proteins and Calories and can lead to two Different Pathologies:**

- Kwashiorkor and marasmus. Kwashiorkor is usually linked to protein deficiency. The name of this illness is clearly related to its origin. The name Kwashiorkor comes from Ga, a language spoken in South-Eastern Ghana, and translates as «deposed/displaced child» in reference to a baby who has been weaned from the breast when a younger sibling comes along. It should be taken into account that meat consumption amongst populations living in poverty is minimal or even non-existent.
- In Afghanistan for instance, people eat an average of one meal a year containing meat. The symptoms of kwashiorkor include oedema and distended abdomen. It is also associated with ulcerations and skin problems. The most poignant sign of this illness is without doubt the swollen belly that we see all too often in famine situations.
- In contrast, marasmus does not only imply protein deficiency, but rather it is caused by a complete lack of food. This in turn causes the body to consume its own tissues to ensure its survival. The symptoms include an absence of fat tissue, even in areas such as the buttocks where fat tends to build up, depigmentation and hair loss. A combined pathology also exists, known as marasmic kwashiorkor.

■ **Micronutrient Undernourishment**

Micronutrient undernourishment refers to the lack of vitamins and minerals. A deficiency of such micronutrients not only causes short-term health problems. It also leads to long-term learning disabilities and retardation along with lower resistance to disease. The consequences for the future development of societies are difficult to gauge. The most common deficiencies among developing countries are in vitamin A, iron and iodine⁽¹⁷⁾:

- Vitamin A: According to the FAO, every year between 250,000 and 500,000 children are left blind for life due to a lack of vitamin A (xerophthalmia). Two thirds of these children are exposed to a greater risk of dying than the rest of the population.
- Iron: a lack of iron primarily results in anaemia. It also causes physical fatigue, complications during childbirth, retardation and lower resistance to disease. The loss of blood associated with anaemia causes 20% of deaths during childbirth. Anaemia also increases infant mortality after delivery.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Source: World Food Programme (2005).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Source: International Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)

- Iodine: according to the FAO, more than 200 million people suffer from mental retardation or goiter caused by a lack of iodine. Iodine deficiency is the primary cause of preventable mental retardation in the world.

As you will certainly have realised by now, women and children are the ones who suffer most from the effects of undernourishment. This is mainly because, in communities affected by hunger, women and children, along with the elderly, are always the first to go hungry. To date, few studies have been conducted as regards the impact on the elderly population, although in such scenarios merely reaching old age is an accomplishment in itself and something which only a very small minority ever achieves.

Other vulnerabilities, as in the case of people suffering from a physical disability, are exacerbated during food shortages. In our brief journey through hunger-related pathologies, a further relationship arises on which, due to its difficulty, few studies have been carried out. Namely, the fact that a loss of mental capacity due to undernourishment throughout childhood can lead to fewer opportunities upon reaching adulthood, which can in turn lead to the person being more prone towards violent behaviour. One thing that is certain and which does not require any extensive studies is that the lack of mental resources can result in far fewer job opportunities, thereby leading to a greater number of young people to swell the ranks of the combatants.

■ Obesity

There is a third type of malnutrition, increasingly linked to poverty as a new, yet equally worrying phenomenon. It involves an over consumption of calories, with or without a sufficient intake of micronutrients.

When we compare a map of areas affected by traditional undernourishment to a map showing areas of child obesity, we find that they coincide. As a growing phenomenon, those within the poor population who can afford the required daily calorie intake turn to cheap food that has a high number of calories and very low nutritional value. This type of malnutrition leads to obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure as well as potentially serious micronutrient and protein deficiencies.

In order to classify the severity of malnutrition, an age, weight and size comparison is made between the target population and the members of that population who have never gone hungry.

All those weighing 80% less than the average weight for their age and height are deemed to be affected by undernourishment. Moderate undernourishment applies to those within the 70-79% bracket and severe undernourishment to

those below 70%⁽¹⁸⁾. Another measurement of undernourishment is the Middle-Upper Arm Circumference, or MUAC. A value below 12.5 indicates Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) and below 11 implies Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). The sum of both is called General Acute Malnutrition (GAM).

One crucial factor must be taken into account as regards the humanitarian impact of any event, including food shortages: vulnerability. It is difficult for a European reader to understand the extent to which conflict situations and their populations are fragile. The fragility of such populations is caused by various issues:

- The poorer a population, the greater the percentage of its income spent on food, leaving less money available for other types of expenditure such as health, investment in productive elements, or education. In developing countries, the most vulnerable live on less than one dollar a day and spend 80% of their resources on food. The slightest price rise has a huge impact on their chances of surviving a crisis.
- Hunger does not affect all people equally. Take the population of the Sahel, for instance. It constantly faces undernourishment beyond emergency levels. When the situation gets worse, people do not have sufficient reserves in their body to go for long periods without eating and still maintain their productive capacity.
- Besides bodily reserves, those of families are also extremely low. When a shortage arises, people are forced to take uneconomical decisions simply to survive. They sell their herd of animals, for example, which would enable them to farm the following year, or eat the seeds which they keep for planting from one harvest to the next. This means that their survival today puts their short-term future into jeopardy.

All of which creates situations of extreme vulnerability, whereby the impacts of having no access occur more quickly and far more dramatically than we could ever imagine from our viewpoint in an overfed world.

■ HUNGER AND CONFLICT

We must analyse the relationship between hunger and conflict bidirectionally. In one direction, food insecurity and malnutrition seem to have contributed towards the increased rate of crises and the increased vulnerability of those countries facing them. Today, most armed conflicts and natural disasters are centred on regions which are highly dependant on agriculture and countries with a high percentage of homes suffering from food insecurity, classified by

⁽¹⁸⁾ See the report published by Save the Children, *Acute Malnutrition Summary Sheet*, at <http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/Acute-Malnutrition-Summary-Sheet.pdf>

the FAO as «*Low-Income Food-Deficit Countries*» (LIFDCs)⁽¹⁹⁾. In the other direction, as well as being the result of a conflict, food insecurity can in fact be both its cause and origin. Very few conflicts occur in situations where there is food security.

■ Conflict as a Cause of Food Insecurity

«Conflict causes food insecurity by reducing the production of food, access to food, well-being and human capacity through the destruction of the environment, health and health care services, education and social infrastructure»⁽²⁰⁾. The first way in which conflict affects the food security of populations is to reduce production. According to FAO data, between 1970 and 1997, agricultural losses caused by conflict in developing countries amounted to 121 billion dollars. In sub-Saharan Africa, losses in the 80s and 90s represented over 50% of the aid received and greatly exceeded foreign investment. According to 2003 World Bank data, inter-state wars lead to an annual fall of 2.2% in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)⁽²¹⁾.

Another major effect is the breakdown of normal trade. Conflict tends, on the one hand, to increase the military spending of the affected countries at the expense of other investments, such as infrastructures which could provide a cheap means of bringing food to people suffering from insecurity. And on the other, military operations compete to a large degree for the same logistical elements as the procurement market, thus raising food transport costs and impeding access, especially that of the poorest people. Conflict also brings about a reduction in health spending in favour of military spending.

It should be pointed out that conflict as a cause of hunger has been extensively studied and therefore we do not intend to dedicate a large part of this article to its analysis. Generally speaking, the elements described by Frederick C. CUNY in his book *Famine, Conflict and Response* (1991) are still relevant. Conflict leads to hunger by way of the following causes:

- It interrupts the agricultural cycle
- It drives farmers from their land
- It interrupts trade mechanisms
- It destroys food stores
- It provokes food shortages which pushes up prices

⁽¹⁹⁾ International Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), *Reducing Poverty and Hunger*, Document Repository, 2002, at: <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/Y6265S/y6265s03.htm>

⁽²⁰⁾ SEN, Amartya, «*Conflict, Food Insecurity and Globalization*» in Ellen MESSER and Marc. J. COHEN, *Conflict, Food Insecurity and Globalization*, Food Policy Research Institute report (IFPRI), May 2006.

⁽²¹⁾ Source: World Bank.

■ **Hunger as a cause of conflicts.**

Hunger as a cause of conflicts has been the subject of far fewer studies. As we shall see, until recently hunger was not regarded as a key element of armed violence. It was regarded as just another element which required many other destabilising elements. Only recently has this relationship come to light and the effects of the global food crisis have begun to alter the paradigm. Food, a secondary conflict-triggering factor in early warning indicators of conflict, is now becoming a primary factor. Time will tell whether, as predicted by certain studies, it becomes a crucial factor in the long term as food insecurity increases around the world.

A report issued by the *International Food Policy Research Institute* (IFPRI)⁽²²⁾ in May 2006 entitled *Conflict, Food Insecurity and Globalization* includes the following emphatic statement: «most wars of the late 20th century and early 21st century are “food wars”, meaning that food is used as a weapon, food systems are destroyed in the course of conflict, and food insecurity persists as a legacy of conflict»⁽²³⁾. The study analyses various conflicts based on their levels of food insecurity, defining food insecurity as a lack of food, a lack of access to food or undernourishment.

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In a study conducted by the same institute in 2003, the results could not be more unequivocal. Overlaying a map of food insecurity on a map of conflicts revealed that of the 44 countries that had high or average food insecurity (between 5% and 20% of the population), 24 had active conflicts, 18 were in post-conflict situations and 2 were receiving refugees from external conflicts⁽²⁴⁾. This result seems to prove beyond any doubt that conflict and the subsequent situations caused thereby generate rates of food insecurity that exceed 20% of the population. Furthermore, a large percentage of that population meets the criteria to qualify for humanitarian aid. In other words, their acute food insecurity culminates in the loss of human lives which, as we have already seen, mainly involves women and children.

The report thus proves something that, by common sense, we have been aware of since biblical times: hunger and war ride side-by-side. However, the study debunks one of the great dogmas of the advocates of globalisation. One of the ideas upheld as being positive effects of globalisation was that the opening up of markets could prevent insecurity in contexts of conflict by allowing markets to remain supplied.

⁽²²⁾ The *International Food Policy Research Institute* (IFPRI) is probably the Research Centre which has carried out most research into the relationships between hunger and conflict.

⁽²³⁾ *Op Cit.* Ellen MESSER and Marc J. COHEN.

⁽²⁴⁾ See Map 2 of Discussion Paper 206 *Conflict, Food Insecurity, and Globalization* May 2006 International Food Policy Research Institute.

Despite the fact that in many such contexts it was shown that the affected economies' access to international markets was high, this did not prevent the consequences for the food insecurity of the populations. Globalisation also failed to create a more stable world as its advocates had been suggesting⁽²⁵⁾. Globalisation has not brought peace to the world, quite the opposite. It has in fact brought new tensions, as we shall see. This study confirms what we have been seeing for the last 20 years.

Although globalisation has led to a reduction in inter-State conflicts, intra-State conflicts have increased very significantly. One thing that does seem apparent is that the effects of globalisation are clearly beneficial to the arms trade, yet the food markets do not appear to benefit from the same level of access⁽²⁶⁾. A clear example is the recent famine in Somalia, where the markets could not be supplied with food, but the militias' access to weapons allowed them to build the most sophisticated arsenal that money can buy.

Although IFPRI studies have established a clear link between post-conflict situations and food insecurity, with more than 20% of the population having no access to adequate food, not all of the population affected by high food insecurity lives in countries in conflict. Some countries have a large number of people suffering from food insecurity but who live in non-conflict situations, as is the case of India.

Literature from *Peace Studies* tends to evaluate two sources of conflict: the *greed* of certain sectors of the population for resources controlled by another sector, and historic *grievances*. Both concepts are linked to rivalry between groups over certain resources, including access to harvests that can provide economic rewards. Along with the cause of conflict, we also find certain catalysts of conflict, such as:

- Political catalysts: Political catalysts are related to the struggle for resources and are only triggered when the country in question lacks sufficient social dialogue to solve its problems without resorting to armed conflict in the face of unjust political measures and little or no rule of law. Examples of this are the land evictions by the Zimbabwe Government or the refusal to grant access to land in Chiapas.

⁽²⁵⁾ By way of example, see GLEDITSCH, PETTER, Nills, WALLENSTEEN, Mikael, «Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset», in *Journal of Peace Research*, N° 39, 2002, pp. 615–637; MARSHALL, M. and GURR, T., *A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, Peace and Conflict, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005; MARTÍNEZ GUZMÁN, Vicent «Teorías de la guerra en el contexto político de comienzos del siglo XXI», in MURILLO, I. (ed.), *Filosofía práctica y persona*, Centro Internacional Bancaja para la paz y El Desarrollo, Castellón, 2004.

⁽²⁶⁾ Much related literature exists on this subject. However, if you would like more information on this issue, see: NAIM, Moisés, *Ilícito*, Ed. Debate, Barcelona, 2005; BECK, Ulrich, *¿Qué es la globalización? Falacias del globalismo, respuestas a la globalización*, Paidós, 2007, Barcelona.

- Natural catalysts: droughts, floods, etc., such as the 1973-74 drought in Ethiopia, the recent drought in West Africa or the current drought in East Africa, where 11 million people are at risk. While no direct connection has been established, the Tuareg conflict in northern Mali grew out of changes in traditional transhumance routes due to climate change. The same seems to be true of the conflicts in northern Kenya and Somalia.
- Economic catalysts: such as spikes in food prices or falls in international prices of monocultures (coffee, cocoa, rice, etc.) making it impossible for populations to subsist. An example of the first catalyst can be found in last year's Arab Spring, which coincided with a rise in the cost of wheat. As an example of the second, we can look at the case of Rwanda and the fall in coffee prices. Indeed, according to the FAO, one of the main accelerators of conflict is the price fluctuations in raw materials that come from monoculture. Monoculture makes a country highly dependant on price variations and the importing of basic foods. A change in international prices generates conditions among vulnerable populations that are below subsistence levels.

As we can see, food as a cause of conflict, whether through «greed» or «historic grievances», requires catalysts according to the classical viewpoint of Peace Studies. That is why most Conflict Early Warning Systems do not view food insecurity as a central triggering element but rather as simply another catalyst.

As an example of this classical viewpoint, the *European Commission Check-list for Root Causes of Conflict* establishes eight groups of indicators: legitimacy of the State, rule of law, respect for fundamental rights, civil society and media, relations between communities and dispute-solving mechanisms, sound economic management, social and regional inequalities and geopolitical situation. The document only refers to food in regards to the pressure put on resources by flows of refugees. It also refers indirectly to food in regards to the existence of inequalities.

Early Warning Indicators for Preventive Policy created by the SIPRI set out a series of similar parameters which are used to assess how prone a society is to conflict. The indicators are divided into nine groups (justice and human rights, socio-cultural factors, internal security setting, geopolitical setting, military and security, environment and resource management, governance and political stability, socio-economic factors, regional and country specific variables). Only in regard to resource management does the SIPRI mention water management and, indirectly, food.

However, this classical viewpoint could be wrong, and we have very recent examples which give a primordial role to food crises as triggers of conflicts (needless to say, with additional catalytic agents).

One interesting study by the New England Complex Systems Institute sheds new light on the connection between hunger and conflict⁽²⁷⁾. The study shows

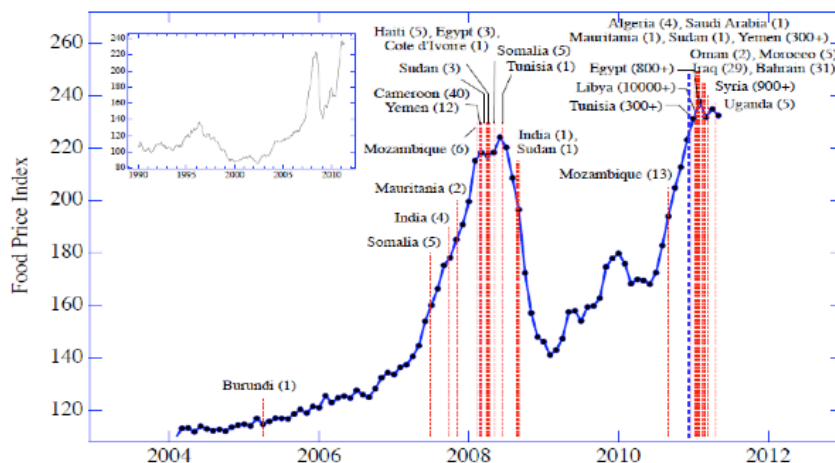
⁽²⁷⁾ LAGI, MARCO, BERTRAND, Z. and BAR-YAM, YANEER, *The Food Crises and Political Instability in North Africa and the Middle East*, England Complex Systems Institute, London, 2011.

how international food prices precipitate conditions of political instability to the point of being a conflict-triggering element.

The authors' predictions even go so far as to set a price level beyond which global instability may become widespread. Such instability seems unavoidable unless corrective actions are taken, as it is predicted that these levels will be reached in just a few years, regardless of the occasional price spikes which we will suffer for differing reasons. The theory upheld by the article for establishing a relationship between prices and instability is that people rely on a political system, whatever type it may be, to offer them a series of assurances. Any failure in this respect causes people to react and to look for some form of political change.

The authors of this study (Chart 1), by way of an in-depth econometric study, clearly establish the implications of the global food crisis and the rise in prices. They even go so far as to predict the price level beyond which new conflicts will arise, as well as when the world will reach the determined price level. They thus establish that if we take into account the values at constant prices (without taking inflation into account), the world will face a new critical period in August 2013. However, when we carry out the same analysis at current prices, we reach the danger zone as early as August of this year.

Chart 1. The FAO Food Price Index from 2004 to May 2011⁽²⁸⁾



⁽²⁸⁾ Chart taken from a study by the New England Complex Systems Institute which correlates conflicts with the FAO Food Price Index from 2004 to May 2011. The vertical red lines correspond to the commencement of conflicts, the brackets contain the number of victims of armed violence). As we can see, there is a clear correlation between social instability and global food prices.

But, what exactly has changed? Is it the world that has changed, or our perceptions of conflict-triggering causes? The fact is that a number of factors have made populations vulnerable, more than ever before. Those sectors of society that spend 70-80% on food will be unable to cope with the new situation arising from a huge variation in global price dynamics.

The study by the New England Complex Systems Institute determines that global prices affect dissimilar economies equally. An upward trend in global prices affects such dissimilar economies as those of India, Somalia, Yemen or Sudan. This impact, caused by the effects of globalisation, has been compounded by differing factors of our current reality, which are in turn negative consequences of this phenomenon. In other words, due to a number of circumstances which we shall try to summarise below, it does not seem like the situation is going to improve:

- *Higher energy costs*

Numerous FAO studies link the price of energy, particularly the price of gas and oil, to increases in the price of food. After water, oil is the main input in extensive farming. Agricultural fertilisers come from natural gas and pesticides come from oil. And this is before we take into consideration the energy cost of pumping water, of using agricultural machinery, of food-related transport, processing, packaging, etc., as well as a myriad of steps which all depend on oil to carry food from the farm to our table. Unless a new global energy model comes along, oil is set to become an increasingly scarce commodity.

- *Biofuels*

Rising oil prices mean that biodiesel is becoming a more attractive alternative. Today, 25% of corn production in the US, the world's largest producer, is allocated to biodiesel. And 15% of global production is used for this purpose. This shift in the use of corn, from food to raw material for biofuels, is one of the contributory factors to the sharp rise in food prices that occurred in 2008. According to an article in *The Guardian*, which cited a secret World Bank report⁽²⁹⁾, biofuels have forced global food prices up by 75%. The impact of such fuels on food prices meant that many countries, including the UK, were forced to reduce their goals regarding their integration and use. In light of their effect on the global stability of food prices, it seems the decision was more than justified. In 2009, ethanol production in the US required enough grain to feed 350 million people for one year⁽³⁰⁾. One of the few pieces of good news arising

⁽²⁹⁾ Aditya CHAKRABORTHY, *Biofuel caused food crisis. Internal Secret report: World Bank study delivers blow to plant energy drive*, guardian.co.uk, Thursday 3 July 2008.

⁽³⁰⁾ BROWN, Lester, «The Great Food Crisis of 2011. It's real, and it's not going away anytime soon», in *Foreign Policy*, January 2010.

from the recession is that it has curbed the surge in demand for biofuels, giving food markets some breathing space⁽³¹⁾.

- *Export restrictions*

Rising demand has led to many countries imposing export restrictions in order to keep their own markets supplied. Once again, in a situation that augured an even greater price rise in 2011, Russia lifted the export restrictions which it had imposed thanks to an unexpectedly good harvest in the Black Sea region at the end of last year. Nigeria has recently imposed export restrictions on rice. It is not the first time that such a measure has been introduced in Nigeria which, as an oil producer, has relatively low-cost output. Yet such restrictions are especially harmful to neighbouring countries who are suffering a major food crisis.

- *Food price speculation*

Deregulation of the food market began in the mid-90's. However, interest in commodity futures began to rise as the economic crisis took hold towards the end of 2008. In 2011, a European Parliament resolution regarded financial speculation as being responsible for 50% of the rise in food prices⁽³²⁾ and stated that intervention was required in order to avoid negative effects on global food security. Speculation is not restricted to spurious interests. In 2011, the Mexican government, aware that its population is highly dependent on corn to make tortillas, one of its staple foods, guaranteed its purchase prices by buying futures on the Chicago Commodities Exchange. The Mexican government was aware of the need to maintain a certain price level in order to avoid social unrest, such as occurred in Ciernes in 2007 in the so-called «tortilla crisis» (caused precisely by the surge in demand for corn from US ethanol producers).

- *Land accumulation by multinationals and States*

Amid the current global situation, and based on strategic analysis, many international actors, States and companies have begun to assert themselves in what is expected to be a fight for a future resource that is set to become increasingly scarce: food. Countries like China, India and Saudi Arabia have already begun to assert themselves by leasing huge tracts of land in Africa. Saudi Arabia has found itself pushed into this situation due to the depletion of its aquifer and a significant drop in its wheat production. China has been forced to do so because of its growing population and rampant desertification. India finds itself obliged to do so due to the tremendous growth of its population and 18% inflation rate of food prices in 2011, which is still increasing.

⁽³¹⁾ Source: reports issued by the International Grain Council, 2012.

⁽³²⁾ Draft resolution RC-B7-0114/2011.

- *Demographic growth*

Demographic growth has been one of the few breathing spaces given to the global food market in recent times. Compared to the 2% global growth rate of the 70s, the last decade ended with a 1.2% world population growth rate. This, combined with the alleviation that the crisis has provided as regards the pressure of biofuels on the food market, has delayed the even harsher expectations from materialising this year. Nevertheless, the population continues to grow and this does not only affect the demand side. The supply side is also affected by the use of agricultural land for other purposes, the diversion of available water to cities and the urbanisation of the populace.

- *Climate change*

The IFPRI again alerts us to the consequences of climate change for the food market. According to a 2009 study⁽³³⁾, climate change will have the following consequences by 2050:

- A reduction in global food production (especially in South-East Asia, whereby rice is likely to be one of the most affected commodities).
- A fall in the production of irrigation commodities
- A widespread rise in the price of corn, soya, rice and wheat. As a result of these rises, the price of meat will also go up.
- There will also be a significant fall in worldwide caloric availability to 2000 levels, along with a 20% increase in infant malnutrition when compared to the same scenario if climate change can be avoided.

This whole scenario will be decided by various factors, such as the rise in plagues due to temperature rises, reduced water availability, soil erosion caused by the destruction of arable land, the often combined effect of severe droughts and extreme weather phenomena such as hurricanes, floods, etc.

- *Changes in eating habits*

According to studies carried out by Cornell University⁽³⁴⁾, the cost of producing one kilo of beef entails an investment of 13 kilos of grain and 30 kilos of hay, which in turn require a total water usage of 35,400 litres. The grain which the US allocates to feeding livestock over the course of one year would be enough to feed 800 million people over the same time period. Reference has often been made to the introduction of meat into the eating habits of a growing middle class in China. However, figures reveal that, to date, China has a relatively high

⁽³³⁾ In this respect, see: NELSON, Mark, ROSEGRANT, Jawoo Koo, ROBERTSON, Richard, SULTER, Timothy and AA.VV, *Climate Change Impact on Agriculture and Costs of Adaptation*, International Food Policy Research Institute Washington, D.C. October 2009.

⁽³⁴⁾ PIMENTEL, David and PIMENTEL, Marcia *Sustainability of meat-based and plant-based diets and the environment*. Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 2009.

level of self-sufficiency in food. Yet we cannot rule out the possibility that, as other economies continue to grow and add to the overall number of consumers, future prices will be adversely affected.

- *Loss of agricultural skills due to major population displacements*

According to figures released by UNHCR, the number of displaced people worldwide has reached record levels since the 90s, there being over 50 million such people. Displaced people often have age-old agricultural skills that allow them to subsist in their homelands. Such ancestral knowledge may disappear within a single generation of displacement. Displaced people, with no land and without the necessary skills to survive even if they did have land, often end up feeding the combatants of the conflict. This situation occurs in numerous contexts, the most paradigmatic of which is possibly that of Afghanistan where those returning after years as refugees in Iran and Pakistan often end up swelling the ranks of the Taliban.

■ ACTION MECHANISMS IN FOOD AID MATTERS

It is possible that, throughout this article, we have been able to at least raise the question of food aid becoming a way to prevent conflict. If we take into account that dramatic price rises can be a destabilising factor and root cause of crises, it seems logical to think that food-related interventions can act to «cool down» specific regions. What is more, and this will have to be the fruit of a more in-depth study, it might seem that preventive actions can end up being cheaper than after-the-fact actions deriving from conflict. In the *Oceans Beyond Piracy* report issued by the *One Earth Future Foundation*, the 2011 cost of Somali piracy reached 6.6 billion dollars in terms of rescues, insurance, increased fuel consumption by ships, military operations, etc. The entire 2011 United Nations Humanitarian Appeal came to 7.4 billion dollars for a total of 50 million beneficiaries.

Therefore, we shall now move on to an analysis of the different action mechanisms in food aid matters. In other words, what the International Community can do when the dreaded humanitarian consequences of hunger are upon us. In this article, we intend only to analyse the humanitarian aspects of the solution, given that price stability, support for agricultural production, etc., lie more within the realm of development aid. Humanitarian aid deals with the symptoms rather than the illness and its function is not to deal with the structural issues which tend to be behind nutritional crises, but rather to avoid the loss of human lives and the extreme suffering caused by crises.

We have to bear in mind that humanitarian aid often acts in the same way as chemotherapy in a cancer patient. Food aid is the last resort for saving lives yet, just like cancer medication, it has a toxic nature since injecting food into an economy often produces distortions that alter market dynamics. The few

farmers who have managed to save their crops see how, suddenly, what they sell at the market is now being given away by International Agencies and NGOs. This ultimately leads to new famines in precisely that sector of the population which would not have been affected by food crises if we had not intervened.

In order to avoid such fallout, humanitarian aid has generated a whole range of intervention instruments based on different parameters, such as local production capacity (i.e. if the crisis is one of economic access to food or market shortages), the final beneficiaries (children, pregnant women, AIDS patients, etc.) and the phases of the crisis. We ask the expert reader to be patient as regards the generalisation that we are performing here. The reality is obviously more complex and each organisation has its own ideas concerning the stages of intervention in a crisis and the methods to be used. If at any time we make an inadequate generalisation, please understand that it is out of a need to bring such a highly technical subject matter to the attention of non-specialists.

The outset of crises: Hoarding. Regardless of the root causes of a food crisis (an economic crisis, drought, floods, plagues, conflict, etc.), the usual effect on individual behaviour in the face of an impending bad harvest or food shortage is that of hoarding food in order to better cope with the harder times to come. Consumer hoarding practices logically lead suppliers to stockpile food in the face of impending price rises at peak moments of a crisis. This dynamic gives rise to general economic behaviour which leads to increased unemployment, even higher price rises and the sale of productive assets. Once the initial stage of a crisis has peaked, it is not uncommon to see families being forced to sell productive assets in order to buy food. Thus, many families sell their draft animals to buy food, thereby jeopardising next year's harvest.

During this stage, humanitarian aid actions endeavour to focus on the protection of resources and assets. Actions aimed at avoiding the sale of productive assets strive to prevent families from falling even further into the depths of hunger and poverty by selling that which enables them to generate revenue. Actions which are sought to be carried out during this stage mainly involve the creation of wealth and are equivalent to our economic stimulation policies. We humanitarians endeavour to inject money into the economy through *cash-for-work* programmes, cash transfers to the most vulnerable groups or other revenue-generating actions.

At the same time, projects for the protection of livestock and any other productive assets are undertaken aimed at protecting productive resources which allow people to emerge from the crisis once its cause has disappeared. The use of food distribution in this phase can do more harm than good, since it can put an end to what little local production the farmers have managed to save, thereby giving rise to a new aid-dependant population.

Emigration. Once the initial stage is over, and once food hoarding has led to a substantial price rise (by way of illustration, the price of millet in Mali this year is double that of last year), the populace starts to migrate in search of alternative income and areas where food is cheaper. Bartering commences, as does the migration of the workforce to areas of greater opportunity. Normally, these will be large cities or areas offering alternative job opportunities that often lead to their falling into the hands of human traffickers for all manner of activities including the mobilisation of combatants and child soldiers, sexual slavery, organ trafficking, etc. At the same time, the sale of livestock also commences, allowing families to buy other items that are necessary for their survival as well as for diversifying their diet. A common symptom of this stage is the fall of livestock prices. As they can neither feed nor provide water for their livestock, herdsmen undersell their animals, as do many others. This in turn jeopardises their ability to survive, as they do not even make adequate profit.

During this stage, humanitarian workers launch food aid activities for the more vulnerable collectives by distributing rations at schools, high-energy biscuits for children, nutritional support for breastfeeding mothers, the sick, the disabled, etc. Such activities have a specific target population, focusing on the most vulnerable. At the same time, cash-for-work activities are continued, as is monetisation through local traders (products are sold to local retailers at subsidised prices on the understanding that they re-sell them within specific price limits) and support for livestock.

Undercapitalisation and death. The critical phase. In this phase, the need to sell all types of assets becomes a matter of survival. The decisions taken in this phase are ultimately uneconomical, since they arise from a need to survive. Having used up all their reserves, families are not only forced to sell productive assets (implements, work animals, etc.), they are forced to do so at any price, which leads to a fall in price of such assets, especially of livestock, since families are unable to feed them.

By underselling their livestock and being frequently forced to abandon their dependant family members including sons and daughters, families lose their productive resources, thus condemning themselves to future poverty in order to survive the cycle of hunger which they are suffering. This survival strategy is usually accompanied by a resorting to food which does not have suitable nutritional value or is even harmful to health. This in turn leads to an even worse phase, namely severe undernourishment and death from illness or hunger.

Mortality rates rise, especially amongst the most vulnerable: breastfeeding women, children under five, the disabled, the elderly, the sick, etc. Two of the symptoms that accompany this acute phase is the death of livestock and the rise in prices, which not only affect the region in question, but also neighbouring

regions (a current example can be found along the Nigeria-Niger boundary, where prices have risen alongside the hunger in Niger).

We also find a sharp fall in population levels, due to an increase in both mortality and migration. In response to the mortalities, food actions are also launched to help the more vulnerable groups. Throughout this phase, and when humanitarian personnel detect a rise in mortality, mass distribution of food commences and which accompanies all other actions during the entire critical phase. A critical phase which continues until the root cause or causes have disappeared. New rains, the signing of a peace agreement, the end of flooding or frosts or the end of a plague pave the way to the next, early recovery phase.

It goes without saying that the critical phase always occurs through the failure of actions carried out in previous phases. A failure which not only means the loss of human lives. It is also a failure in economic terms since, at this point, all actions are significantly more expensive and their results are less important. By way of example, the intensive feeding of a child under five years of age (which often entails their hospitalisation and monitoring by expert personnel) is five times more expensive than the preventive distribution of food of high nutritional value among the same collective. What is more, brain damage suffered by a child who has needed intensive feeding tends to be irreparable and will predetermine their future.

Early recovery. Early recovery must pave the way for the complete recuperation of the livelihoods of the affected populace, increased income and the replenishment of reserves and livestock. In this phase, humanitarian action is focused on helping the transition towards development. Here is where our development aid colleagues must take the helm in order to address the structural deficiencies that led to the food crisis. Now is the time to treat the illness, not the symptoms, by way of long-term political solutions.

■ CONCLUSIONS

Conflict today involves an increasing number of non-State actors. Rather than a bilateral or multilateral conflict in which States are the major actors, it is an insurgent struggle in which non-State actors take advantage of the people's dissatisfaction in order to support political, economic or commercial causes. Within the framework of insurgent conflict, the key lies in the population's perception of the role of the Government or State which it supports and, in that context of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, the fact of being able to feed oneself takes on political dimensions which become relevant in both the domestic and international ambit.

As has already become apparent, hunger is not only a consequence of conflict but also leads to a more direct relationship by its being both a cause and instrument of conflict. Hunger cannot only be perceived as a technical, social or humanitarian matter, but instead should be analysed as a real problem with deep political roots and an anomaly of the economic systems of production, distribution and access to food.

Within the context of globalisation, agricultural productive capacity has become a strategic element in the struggle for raw materials and as a source of speculation in an international panorama in which food is becoming scarce and crops have become an element of energy policy. Along these lines, large multinationals and some State actors are taking advantage of the power afforded them by their position on the international stage in order to adopt measures aimed at increasing their profits. This posture implies a vindication of realistic and conservative theories and, moreover, reveals the lack of sensitivity towards situations affecting the stability of the majority of the world's population.

Within the context of economic globalisation, livelihood systems are being adversely affected, giving rise to a loss of income for farmers and shepherds in contexts of high food insecurity. The direct effects on this population are: the sale of their productive resources; a worsening of the state of health of the populations; scarcity of water giving rise to diarrhoeal illnesses; work overload of the most vulnerable populations; and long-lasting crisis in the local economic systems.

Therefore, the poorer a population, the less resources it can invest in other activities such as health, education and improvement of productive systems, thus increasing vulnerability. Food insecurity and malnutrition contribute directly to the increase in crises. Current conflicts, along with natural disasters, are centred on regions which are dependant on agriculture and where the percentage of homes with high rates of food insecurity is amongst the highest in the world.

To the present day, hunger has been identified as a consequence of conflicts as it impacts on the productive cycle, directly affects farming populations, interrupts trade mechanisms and generates food shortages. Yet food also triggers conflicts, especially in situations where food insecurity persists over time and becomes the cause of the following conflict.

Accordingly, we are starting to take early warning mechanisms into account in conflict prevention interventions related to situations of food insecurity. However, actions are not being implemented in all variants associated with hunger and the outbreak of conflicts. For instance, there continues to be a lack of policies aimed at mitigating the rise in food prices that hastens conditions of instability, not only economic but also political, thus becoming a conflict-triggering element;

measures are not adopted in order to reduce energy price increases; lax regulation is allowed in the area of biofuel production; the protectionism of major States such as the US, Canada, Japan, etc., as well as regional organisations such as the European Union, promotes export restrictions which exacerbate, among other things, food insecurity; speculation on food prices continues; large multinationals and powerful States are accumulating huge tracts of land in countries where there is food insecurity; policies are not being drawn up to reduce demographic growth; so far, agreements reached on climate change issues have failed to deliver the expected result; changes to eating habits are being encouraged; and there is no exchange of balanced agricultural knowledge, with standardised models being imposed to the detriment of local production.

In conclusion, food crises are the result of an accumulation of failures which ultimately affect the lives of many people. They imply a policy failure on the part of the affected States which, for differing reasons (institutional weakness, lack of resources, etc.) find themselves condemned to crisis. It also implies failure of the actions of these governments in association with donor governments in development aid actions. And, finally, it implies the failure or inability of humanitarian actors to tackle the crisis before it reaches its most critical phases.

However, the sheer size and complexity of the challenge makes it unfair to paint a picture of guilty and innocent parties. Yet it should be added that food crises seem to have taken a new turn: they are becoming a conflict-triggering factor. In line with this scenario, we should ultimately explore the potential of food aid as a preventive and stabilising factor in various ways:

- It helps to prevent mass population movements, especially if intervention occurs in the initial phases of a crisis.
- It prevents the creation of new combatants.
- It reduces social conflict and disaffection amongst the population. One line of research which this article may open up is the link between this year's food crisis in the Sahel and a clear upturn in Al Qaeda activity within the region.
- It avoids the undercapitalisation of large sections of society, who are left with no alternative for their survival other than illegal activities.

In summary, a shift is needed as regards how we study the causes of conflicts that lead to hunger. Hunger should not only be viewed as one humanitarian aspect of armed conflict, but also as one of the causes behind the increase in conflicts. Alleviating hunger leads to improved security. This requires political action and multi-sectoral interventions, sustained over time, together with political, economic and social participation, underpinned by solid institutional frameworks with their respective budgetary support.
