

S. Albrecht, R. Braun, Z. Heuschkel,  
F. Marí, J. Pippig (Editors)



## Future of Food

State of the Art, Challenges and  
Options for Action

*DBU Environmental Communication / Volume 2*



Stephan Albrecht, Reiner Braun,  
Zoe Heuschkel, Francisco Marí, Julia Pippig (Hrsg.)

### **Future of Food**

State of the Art, Challenges and  
Options for Action

ISBN 978-3-86581-419-7

266 Seiten, 16,5 x 23,5 cm, 39,95 Euro

oekom verlag, München 2013

©oekom verlag 2013

[www.oekom.de](http://www.oekom.de)

**3.**

**WHAT CAN  
WE DO?**



Ellen Messer

## What we can do: Human Rights, Food Security and Conflicts

### Introduction

The mammoth IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development) process that began over 2006–2008 was supposed to build consensus on directions for future research and development. The final synthesis report focused on scientific and technological developments and institution building, but did not address significant cultural and political factors, such as violent conflicts, persistent political-geographic-ethnic-religious (PGER) tensions, or human rights norms and violations that impact food-security and peace, and continuing cycles of food insecurity and conflict. Nor do proposed future of food scenarios, privileging one or another set of technology choices and patterns of agricultural investments projecting optimal or sustainable yields, figure conflict-potential of different agricultural research and program approaches into their calculations. This chapter argues that conflicts («food wars») matter, PGER and conflict histories matter, and conflict-sensitivity and attention to human rights norms should and can be part of future of food scenarios, and international agricultural assessments for science, knowledge, and technology in development.

### Background

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most countries in food crisis requiring external assistance for food show conflict is a causative factor. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N.) Geographic Information Early Warning System Crop Prospects and Food Situation (October 2012)<sup>1</sup> reports 35 countries in food crisis, 28 in Africa. Although weather and natural disasters are usually implicated, almost all show political and social instability and violence, and »slow recovery from war-related damage,« including poor infrastructure and market access, as contributing causes to »exceptional shortfalls«. Internally displaced persons, refugees, and returnees from political violence add to »widespread lack of access« or

---

1 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/al992e/al992e00.htm>

»severe localized food insecurity« and violence potential in the affected countries and also across borders.

Additional agricultural models demonstrate that conflict history is closely correlated with food underproduction and failures in agricultural growth, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. One study, comparing food-production outcomes in samples of war-affected vs. peaceful sub-Saharan African countries over 1970–1993, found conflict countries produced on average 12.3 % less food per capita in war years than in peacetime; and »peace-adjusted trends« show countries could have added 2–5 per cent to food production per capita per year (Messer et al. 1998).<sup>2</sup> FAO, in its State of Food and Agriculture 2000 report<sup>3</sup> similarly showed that violent conflict and civil strife are leading causes of food underproduction and food insecurity.

Critics of international development aid, furthermore, implicate the ways agricultural development aid influences PGER relations and serves as a trigger or underlying cause of violence. The way agricultural assistance is conceptualized and managed can contribute substantially to ethnic tensions, including competition for land and perceived unequal access to resources, and disadvantage small holders, who, as a consequence, are drawn into violent livelihoods, especially in places where rule of law is lacking (Duffield 2001).<sup>4</sup> Recent increases and spikes in food prices, which raise land values, encourage increases in foreign direct investments or land-grabs that further dispossess small-farmers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America (see, e.g., Kugelman, M. and S. Levenstein, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Singly and in combination, these displacements and local dissatisfactions with resulting resource distributions, livelihood disruptions, and elevated food insecurity, encourage civil strife, more widespread rebellions, and violent regime change.

Even where conflict is acknowledged, conceptualized, and made part of regular reporting structures by official aid agencies and NGOs, most agents of change are uncertain what to do; question whether conflict prevention, resolution, and management are their job; and if not, who should do it? The official UN agency system, bilateral agencies, and NGOs all tend to maintain divisions of labor which separate humanitarian from development actions, and short-term emergency aid in conflict zones from more peaceful and longer-term development assistance. Integrating conflict sensitivity into agricultural and food-security programs likely requires bridging these strategic, operational divides. In these multiply difficult contexts, agricultural professionals, already struggling to advance technological choices that will favor sustainable livelihoods, food systems, and environments,

---

2 Messer, E., M. J. Cohen, and J. D. Costa (1998): Food from peace. Breaking the links between conflict and hunger, IFPRI.

3 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x4400e/x4400e00.htm>

4 Duffield, Mark R. (2001): Global governance and the new wars, Zed Books Ltd.

5 Kugelman, M. and Susan L. Levenstein (2012): The global farms race: land grabs, agricultural investment, and the scramble for food security, Washington D.C.: Island Press.

must also contend with cultural and political factors: not only what choices may be optimal, but which pathways are feasible under particular local, national, and regional historical conditions (see, e.g., Feitelson 2009, pp. 728–745).<sup>6</sup>

## Food Crisis Situations and Their Causes

Although food insecurity related to conflicts and human rights violations happen in all world regions, the geographic region of greatest concern is sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The latest GIEWS Crop Prospects and Food Situation (October 2012)<sup>7</sup> reports 35 countries in food crisis, requiring external assistance for food, 28 in SSA. The 2010 State of Food Insecurity<sup>8</sup> issued by FAO and WFP (World Food Programme) addressed food insecurity in countries in 22 protracted crisis, most of them in Africa. These data are consistent with the Global Hunger Index (2011)<sup>9</sup>, which finds 26 countries with levels of hunger that are extremely alarming or alarming. The index reports the four countries with extremely alarming 2011 GHI (Global Hunger Index) scores – Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea – are protracted crisis countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the countries with alarming GHI scores are in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Among the six countries in which the hunger situation worsened over 1990–2011, the Democratic Republic of Congo stands out. Its GHI score rose by about 63 per cent, deteriorating circumstances attributed to conflict and political instability.

In the Asia region, which for UN purposes includes North Africa, the seven countries in need of emergency assistance are: Iraq, suffering exceptional aggregate food shortfalls as a result of »severe civil insecurity«, Afghanistan experiences severe localized food insecurity linked to conflict, Kyrgyzstan (»lingering effects of socio-political conflict«), and Yemen (»widespread lack of access« tied to social and political unrest, high food prices, IDPs (internally displaced persons), and refugees. The Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea suffers severe food insecurity due to »economic constraints«, which, unstated, can be coupled with its particular political system, and Pakistan's hunger misfortunes are attributed to natural disasters, but its response failures carry unstated correlates to political instability and conflict. Haiti is the lone Latin American and Caribbean recipient of emergency food aid, which can be blamed on natural disasters, but also years of political and economic violence.

Such findings should not belittle or divert attention from the overall findings that the largest numbers of undernourished people live in Asia, or that the main cause of hunger and

---

6 Feitelson, E.F.I. (2009): Spaces of water Governance: The case of Israel and its neighbors. In: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (4): 728–745.

7 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/al992e/al992e00.htm>

8 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1683e/i1683e.pdf>

9 <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/2011-global-hunger-index>

undernourishment is poverty. But it is also true that the main cause of hunger and poverty is harmful economic systems (World Hunger Notes 2011)<sup>10</sup>, and it can also be argued that violent conflict contributes to hunger and poverty by causing cumulative reductions in food production and rates of increase in food production, which also disrupt livelihoods, markets, and household incomes, thereby damaging health infrastructure and causing malnutrition and illness, especially among displaced people. Going forward from 2011, impacts of Arab Spring and other Middle Eastern and North African regime changes on food security are yet unknown; government changes might well change the mix of governmental and non-governmental programs for food producers and consumers, and challenge the sustainability of safety-net programs that progressively prevent widespread suffering, so dampen conflict potential, particularly in times of increasing food prices and unstable employment and income.

## Concepts and Methods

### Foodwars

Foodwars are defined as armed conflicts that use food or hunger as weapons, and which raise hunger vulnerability as a consequence. Foodwars analyses demonstrate the impacts of violent conflict on food shortage (food availability or supply at the aggregate national level), food poverty (food access, entitlements, & assets at the household level, including livelihood/income streams relative to food prices and costs of an adequate diet), and food deprivation (malnutrition and biological utilization of food at the individual level), relative to environmental health & sanitation, and social status. They use this Brown University tri-level »hunger typology« to pinpoint food insecurity as a lingering cause of conflict in ongoing cycles of food insecurity and armed violence.

Food wars analysis at the Brown University World Hunger Program, as part of a large interdisciplinary project (Newman 1990)<sup>11</sup>, documented the use of hunger as a weapon of war, of food as political tool used to command political loyalties and dependence, and the lingering impacts of violent conflict on food security in various parts of the world. Food wars reports (1987–1995) then documented contemporary situations in countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where hunger was a cause of conflict, conflict was a cause of hunger, and human rights violations underlay both hunger and conflict as root causes. Short country case studies, drawing on official and gray literature, plus media sources, utilized the hunger typology to indicate where food insecurity followed as a consequence of violent conflict or was a conflict cause.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.worldhunger.org/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> Newman, Lucile F. (1990): *Hunger in history: food shortage, poverty and deprivation*, Blackwell Publishers.

A mid-1990s study (Messer et.al. 1998) quantified negative impacts of SSA foodwars on food production and rates of increase in food production, and demonstrated the significance of food wars as a cause of food insecurity connecting food shortage, poverty, and deprivation in the foodwars of Rwanda and Ethiopia. FAO's (2000) *State of Food & Agriculture* addressed foodwars as a leading cause of food insecurity, and in its *State of Food Insecurity* (2010) considered how to address food insecurity in countries in protracted crisis, which they defined as countries experiencing some combination of severe food insecurity and violent conflict for most of the previous 10–15 years.

A series of *Food, Globalization, and Conflict* (2000–2009) papers then addressed larger issues of how food and conflict figured into globalization (trade and trade agreement) scenarios (e.g., Messer and Cohen, 2006).<sup>12</sup> Over this decade, conflict specialists were less interested in food wars scenarios, but instead argued over whether the chief causes of international, regional and civil-war conflicts are natural resource scarcities (need), identity politics (creed), or resource abundance (greed). The foodwars documentation demonstrated how globalized trade in food and agricultural commodities connected need, creed, and greed as sources of conflict, and in particular showed how export cash crops, including cane, coffee, cotton, and cocoa, served as conflict commodities, especially in SSA foodwars.

These food wars studies, however, also highlighted a brighter side of globalization, which argued that normative and substantive human rights, formulated as »human right to food«, food sovereignty networking, and food & justice advocacy advancing fair trade marketing and slave-free production practices, added normative and substantive value to food chains.

Less positively, IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute), UN, and NGO researchers tracked connections linking financialization of food and food lands to food insecurity and political instability in developing countries. »Land-grab« reports asserted that increasing food and energy prices, plus rising demands for bio-fuels, competed directly with human food and small-holder tracts to produce it. In 2009, in the wake of social mobilizations and violence associated with spiking food prices, an additional set of food wars analyses showed that some three dozen countries experiencing at least 54 political-protest demonstrations, some violent, in response to 2007–2008 food price spikes, displayed few overlaps with food wars countries in protracted food crisis.

In all cases food wars analysts, along with human right to food proponents, called for the international community and agricultural policy professionals to pay more attention to human rights concerns, and political-geographic-ethnic-religious (PGER) factors that divide societies and potentiate violent conflict. In response to the 2009 food riots, they also emphasized human and market displacements that push people into violence, and called for more conflict-sensitive approaches to food security and agriculture programming. Small holders reliant on land, seed, and water resources for their livelihoods appear partic-

---

12 <http://www.ifpri.org/search?keys=messer%20cohen>

ularly vulnerable to political-economic and geographic displacements, which potentiate violence in both originating areas of outmigration and destination areas of in-migration, where resource access may already be stressed and potential for conflict high. African farmers and pastoralists experiencing negative impacts of both political and environmental volatility, and South Asian environmental and economic migrants seeking new livelihoods across political borders, are populations of particular concern. Climate change fans conflict particularly in places where resource distributions and management are already skewed by PGER factors (Messer 2009).<sup>13</sup>

In summary, the lessons of these findings are that food wars matter; this conflict and PGER background, and not just technical agricultural factors, should be part of agricultural assessments and technology choices. So, how and who should do it?

### Conflict Sensitivity

Conflict professionals, who train policy planners and operational field personnel, emphasize three guiding principles for all ground-level through higher-level policy work: »be aware of conflict« (PGER context), »do no harm« and »do some good«. Conflict-sensitive methodologies offer three additional directives to guide food security and agricultural fieldwork and programming. The first step, strategic analysis, asks: »How does conflict background affect food security and the agricultural intervention context?« Are communities uniform or divided by PGER factors, and if divided, who controls what resources that might be affected by project dynamics? This leads to the second step, operational assessment. How might conflict or post-conflict dynamics affect project implementation (inclusive participation), and how might the proposed intervention affect conflict dynamics? A third step concerns monitoring and evaluation of actions that affect not only conventional indicators, such as food security, agricultural production or income, but also co-existence and conflict indicators. Did the project proceed without violence; is it sustainable? Are all the participants still committed to working together without conflict?

Development and humanitarian practitioners committed to conflict-sensitive process offer some good sources for the construction of checklists for practice. They include Peter Uvin (1998), who bitterly critiqued conventional food security, agriculture, humanitarian, and development aid, as Aiding Violence<sup>14</sup> that exploded in the horrific 1994 Rwandan genocide. The key conflict-sensitivity questions Uvin raised for food and agricultural researchers can be taken seriously by everyone interested in promoting a peaceful, equitable,

13 Messer, Ellen (2009): Rising food prices, social mobilizations, and violence: conceptual issues in understanding and responding to the connections linking hunger and conflict. In: NAPA Bulletin Special Issue: The global food crisis, Vol. 32, Issue 1, pp. 12–22.

14 Uvin, Peter (1998): Aiding violence: the development enterprise in Rwanda, Kumarian Press.

and effective agricultural process, and anyone working on the ground on an agricultural, rural livelihood, and food-security project.

First, whose land/land use will be affected? Whose water will be used, and is water scarce? Whose labor will be redirected, at what price, with what risks? Most agricultural land is already occupied. So whose end products and livelihoods (food, feed, fuel, and other uses of crop plants and environmental resources) will be transformed, with what opportunity costs for existing residents and resource users? And who decides or chooses to take actions for change?

A second series of questions surrounds particular agricultural inputs. Whose seed (what traits?) will be involved, from what sources (open-pollinated, hybrid), for what ends (food, feed, fiber, fuel)? Who monitors performance, guarantees quality, and maintains replacement seed stocks? Whose inputs (high or low), with what guaranteed quality assurance, timely distribution, and on whose credit or insurance? This second series opens additional questions for agricultural scientists, namely, what are the risks and opportunities costs versus benefits (for different stakeholders) of high-yield potential seeds, agronomic packages, and selective extension? And also, what traits should be prioritized (drought tolerance, N-response efficiency, photoperiod sensitivity, pest resistance, other economic traits, storage stability)?

A third set concerns choice of farmers who participate. In project planning and implementation, whose value-added (which farmers) should be prioritized in more integrated local to global food value chains? Whose improved access to markets and communications (cell phones, IT)? Who are the local partners, and how are they selected? What are relationships of local partners to government, NGO agencies, and private sector?

In establishing a priori the indicators for monitoring and evaluation, it may also be advisable to set up checklists of PGER/conflict factors and concerns. Who controls (which) factors of production? How will project affect existing horizontal as well as vertical inequalities? Who records, owns, uses this information? Alternatively, it may be feasible to draw systems flow diagrams, to describe, model, then calculate/trace ex-ante and ex-post products, outcomes, and impacts pathways.

Mary B. Anderson, in »Do No Harm«, a guide to operational practice (1999)<sup>15</sup> and Maria Lange, in *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice* (for International Alert, 2004)<sup>16</sup> offer clear guidance and examples on these points. So do the case studies informing FAO/WFP's State of Food Insecurity 2010 report, combining livelihood security and rights-based approaches to food security and development in protracted crisis countries. Yet as already suggested, conflict sensitivity is notable for its absence, not its impacts. In the literature, I found only one striking success story showcasing the profound effectiveness

---

15 Anderson, Mary B. (1999): *Do no harm: how aid can support peace – or war*, Lynne Rienner Publ.

16 [http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/Building\\_Institutional\\_Capacity.pdf](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/Building_Institutional_Capacity.pdf)

of conflict sensitive methods, and that is the 1990s eradication of rinderpest in southern Sudan. The literature anticipates others, such as successful coffee cooperatives, grain and potato producer associations in Rwanda, and progressive safety net programs (PSNP) in Ethiopia. WFP's »Purchase for Progress« (P4P)<sup>17</sup>, which favors local sourcing for food aid, and tries to make food and food programs PGER connectors, not dividers, are also promising. Targeting farmer and producer associations mainly in post-conflict countries, P4P provides quality seeds, extension services, timely inputs, and credit, and assures sustainable fair-price markets for products that meet quality standards. Testimonies by participants are glowing, as P4P works with coops and farmer associations, especially with women farmers in post-conflict countries, where WFP is endeavoring to build commercial food system capacities. Country by country projects are furthermore transparent, to the extent that anyone can view web-accessible maps and commodity reports on purchases. Media vignettes describe participants, such as a returned Rwandan war widow, who joined a participating coop, and now has access to quality seeds, inputs, and guaranteed markets, so she can feed her family better, safely house herself and her offspring, and send them to school. But such short promotional vignettes do not ask or respond to those critical questions raised by Uvin, or indicate what PGER mix prevails in farmer associations chosen as local partners. They also do not scrutinize the human rights situations prevailing in the countries of interest.

Summarizing lessons, for conflict-affected countries, agricultural plans should always

- Describe the background conflict context
- Analyze PGER divisions and dynamics
- Consider who are the stakeholders, what varying crop characteristics/traits/requirements they value, and why
- Anticipate how foodwars legacy might constrain community participation and inputs, and affects products, outcomes, and impacts.

In addition to technical and environmental parameters, consider who controls (which) factors of production; how projects will affect existing horizontal as well as vertical inequalities, and who will own and use any newly introduced materials and information.

## Policy and Practice Response

All these food wars and related countries-in-crisis and right-to-food reports argue for greater attention to food war dynamics and their underlying PGER causes. Conflict and underlying political-geographic-ethnic-religious (PGER) factors and normative or substantive human rights considerations, however, are largely absent in Millennium Development

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.wfp.org/purchase-progress>

Goal (MDG) plans, the first phase IAASTD reports, and also other food research, such as the UK Foresight Project Report, »Future of Food and Farming: Challenges and Choices for Global Sustainability«<sup>18</sup>. All these efforts for the 2000s and beyond acknowledge that conflict prevention is one motivation for addressing agriculture and food-security issues, but then address economic, technical, and institutional factors. They leave background papers and workshop reports on sources and possible consequences of social and political volatility to some other venue for follow-up, in some instances, a second stage of policy making. There are also some signs of movement, however.

In implementing the MDGs, some individual country poverty-reduction-strategy papers address conflict issues. For example, Angola makes removal of land-mines, as a step to post-war reconstruction, a top priority. There are also efforts underway to make MDGs and rights-based approaches more compatible and interactive. Human rights expert Philip Alston, who bemoaned the lack of cooperation of MDGs with rights-based approaches, as »Ships passing in the night« (Alston 2005, p. 755)<sup>19</sup> found fault on both sides, and recommended bridging efforts; for example, let MDG indicators and monitoring provide base line and time-bound metrics for assessing tangible achievements by governments of the substance of economic and social rights; and let the human rights framework provide the structures of legal obligation for implementation of MDGs.

The World Food Programme launched its Purchase for Progress (P4P) program as a means to strengthen producer organizations, through improved access to extension, seeds, inputs, and fair-price markets, so far in 21 countries, many of them still emerging from years of conflict. This program lends substance to the otherwise vague references to participation by producer and farmer associations in UN Secretary General's High Level Task Force's Comprehensive Framework for Action in response to food price spike crisis. FAO made innovations in food aid in countries in protracted crisis the theme of its 2010 State of Food Insecurity Report. The Secretary General's clearly stated concerns over political instability and violent conflict connected to food and energy price spikes, more generally, produced no groundswell of conflict-sensitive planning on the part of UN development agencies. UNEP continues to study the conflict implications of climate and environmental change, particularly in unstable political places, such as Darfur (Sudan). UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) acknowledges the conflict history of the places it works, but without sensitivity to conflict dynamics that might modify its works.

---

18 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-547-future-of-food-and-farming-summary.pdf>

19 Alston, Philip (2005): Ships passing in the night: The current State of the human rights and development debate seen through the lens of Millennium Development Goals. In: Human Rights Quarterly 27(3): 755–829.

The World Bank, after largely ignoring conflict in its 2008 World Development Report (WDR) themed on Agriculture and Development, made Conflict, Security, and Development its 2011 WDF theme<sup>20</sup>, but mostly left out food and agriculture. Its »Food Security and Conflict« background paper for its conflict-themed World Development Report 2011<sup>21</sup> (Bora, S., I. Ceccacci, C. Delgado, and R. Townsend 2010) raises possibilities of superior financial and emergency preparedness planning to meet ever more frequent disaster situations. It also lends support to the idea of superior grain reserve mechanisms. Through such dealings, the World Bank perhaps hopes to change the way international agencies supply food aid to conflict-prone countries, and also use food aid as an entry point to prevent further conflict. It promises to make more money available for emergency preparedness and response, and also make humanitarian aid more reliable and effective. But the overall directive to raise foreign agricultural investment in developing countries suggests business as usual regarding planned agricultural investments, despite some rethinking of food aid regimes, food funds and world to regional grain reserves. The language of social equity and human rights is scarce, even as World Bank, along with FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and other partners have formulated guiding principles for foreign investment that suggest respect for land rights and inclusion of existing communities in consultations about cropping, land and water use that promise to forever change their ways of life, and direct products and income outward. The UN Human Rights Commission's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has been the most active and proactive in responding to such initiatives and their stimuli (Documents detailing a human rights approach to foreign direct investments, responses to climate change, and other pressing issues are available online at the UN Human Rights site).<sup>22</sup>

Although humanitarian agencies have sought to address the special problems of food-insecurity and food aid in conflict countries, with greater focus on stable grain reserves, local food sourcing for emergency food aid supplies, and targeted interventions that will protect livelihoods, there persists a clear division of labor between disaster response by humanitarian agencies and development aid by UNDP, which makes UNDP reluctant to admit it works in conflict areas, which are not its domain. There is also a division of labor between FAO and WFP, which operational personnel are trying to bridge, especially as both work in conflict countries, many in protracted crisis.

---

20 World Bank Pubn. (2011): World Development Report: Conflict, security, and development.

21 Bora, S., I. Ceccacci, C. Delgado, and R. Townsend (2010): Food security and conflict. <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/food%20security%20and%20conflict.pdf>

22 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/Otherdocuments.aspx>

Literature review in European Report on Development's (2009) »Food crises and long term development of the agricultural sector«<sup>23</sup> suggest that the food-insecurity and conflict factors identified almost 20 years ago in food wars reports (Messer et.al. 1998) and War and Hunger analyses (e.g., Macrae et.al. 1994)<sup>24</sup> are being taken seriously by food-security researchers, and there is increasing research attention to macro-economic contexts, price volatility in key agricultural commodities, which constrain livelihoods and produce desperation and outrage. Human rights, however, are still largely missing from this official language and analysis, even as such reports increasingly recognize the significance of horizontal inequalities, social exclusions, and ethnic differences, deprivations, and divisions on conflict behaviors (see, e.g., Stewart 2008).<sup>25</sup>

NGOs are largely attentive to conflict, as they work at ground-level where their operations are directly affected by violence. Development NGOs, while asserting their primary mission is direct service-delivery and that they are not »human rights NGOs«, have been quicker to adopt rights-based approaches (RBA) and human rights reference points, as part of their strategies of community empowerment. In one case, Oxfam America has also reframed its mission statement and community partnership model as human rights. NGOs have also taken a lead role in drawing attention to the connections linking climate change, livelihood insecurity, human migration, and violent conflict (e.g., Christian Aid). International Alert is the principal peace-and-conflict NGO urging, implementing, and monitoring conflict-sensitivity trainings and check-lists among humanitarian and development agencies in all sectors.

## **Where PGER and Human Rights Thinking (might) contribute to conflict-sensitive food security planning**

Humanitarian practitioners in countries in protracted crisis take a human rights approach when they respond to emergency conditions, and furthermore take PGER factors into account in assessing needs, targeting, and delivery strategies. Significantly, these ground-level humanitarians, whether or not they assume a conflict-negotiator's professional stance, attend to PGER differences that might disadvantage or deprive those in need of program aid. Their programs promote connectors/avoid dividers in livelihoods programs.

---

23 <http://erd.eu.eu/media/chapter-4-food-crisis-and-long-term-development-of-the-agricultural-sector.pdf>

24 Macrae, Joanna and Anthony Zwi (eds.)(1994): War and hunger: rethinking international responses to complex emergencies, Zed Books.

25 Stewart, Frances (2008): Horizontal inequalities and conflict: understanding group violence in multiethnic societies, Palgrave Macmillan.

By contrast, official agricultural science and policy initiatives struggle to integrate additional cultural political factors, including historical conflict tensions, into their operations, although fact-finding reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food is making land grabs, human rights claims, and food financialization part of the right to food agenda and reporting.

As UN agencies and agricultural research and investment projects work more closely with farmer and producer associations, they can attend to issues of access to land, water, project inputs, markets, and social connections. Regular monitoring and evaluation of progressive safety net programs (e.g., Ethiopia's PSNP) can also uncover intentional or incidental favoritism or exclusion, and use findings to negotiate more equitable outcomes. Because such attention is always politically sensitive, this raises the question whether PGER factors are a more acceptable language than »human rights« for investigating rights-related issues.

Advocacy and activist organizations also help mobilize producers, marketers, and consumers on their own behalf, and to assert their human rights. Since 1986, one key agency is Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), with Via Campesina, which works in conflict and post-conflict countries, helping farmers and consumers organize to put food first on political agendas and defend their rights. Labor and right to food advocates also use political demonstrations, the non-violent kind, as a constructive tool for social change. Oxfam, Global Exchange, and other NGOs also work in this rights-based food-security policy and advocacy arena. Additional development NGOs embrace the human rights approach, although they do not identify human-rights as their primary identity.

In all these cases, regular monitoring and evaluation of social protection and food-security programs can help ensure equity and non-exclusion, and also present possibilities of rights-based appeals. They do not remove the expectation that governments or non-governmental partners will privilege their political supporters and friends, marginalize their political opponents, and sometimes try to circumvent other conditionalities, such as gender equity, where they experience such constraints as inconvenient or against cultural-political custom. But food wars-attentive and conflict-sensitive food security programs can help reduce discrimination and exclusion by constructing connectors that encourage opposing sides to work together. Nevertheless, the challenges remain great.

## **Obstacles to Addressing Conflict and Human Rights Issues**

Official aid deals government-to-government, and makes human rights and PGER factors internal sovereign-country political issues. Skewed distribution of food or project aid happens, practitioners may be aware, but politicians may be reluctant to deal with such political matters, which they deem »internal« affairs.

Development agents and agencies may also be reluctant to raise conflict concerns, where to work in conflict situation goes beyond their mandate. UNDP official documents acknowledge the post-conflict status of a working context, but may be reluctant to go farther, in factoring conflict-sensitive PGER factors into agricultural plans.

Agricultural, nutrition, and other economic-development personnel may lack expertise in conflict-transformation management techniques. They may be totally occupied with the challenging technical tasks of agricultural research and operations. Conflict status is also a sensitive matter for development agencies.

In top-down plans, ground-up efforts that take PGER factors into account may struggle to find their niches, especially where governments deny PGER divisions are a problem and forbid discussions, as in Rwanda.

## Ways Forward

Conflicts matter, PGER factors matter, and there are steps agricultural and food-security personnel can take to become more food-war attentive and conflict-sensitive.

Some aid agencies have developed checklists to train managers and field personnel. Some NGOs and bilateral agencies also mainstream conflict-sensitivity into their plans. But evaluations suggest that even in such instances, there still need to be plans for the different levels in planning to listen to one another.

Flow charts present another possibility for diagramming the ways in which social-cultural dynamics are affected by project dynamics, and project dynamics are affected by PGER factors. Agricultural planners work with flow charts to show technology adoption pathways and constraints, and product (increased yields), outcomes (income, biodiversity), and impacts (improved awareness for peaceful co-existence). They could construct flow charts tracking PGER participation and impacts of a project on peaceful co-existence or conflict. But who should take on such tasks? Who will fund them? Such efforts are unlikely to appeal to science-technology funders, who are looking for silver bullets to reverse biological or technological obstacles.

More generally, conflict-prevention is not yet conceptualized as a product, outcome, or impact comparable to increased yields or livelihoods. Looming questions for conflict specialists are how to motivate food and agricultural researchers, policy makers, and project managers to pay greater attention to food wars and conflict issues, not only in conflict countries, especially countries in protracted food crises, but all food-security and agricultural programs. As a corollary, conflict-specialists wonder how to incentivize agricultural experts and policy makers to look at the complexities of land-holding, water access, labor compensation and safety, and social connectedness that influences implementation and participation.