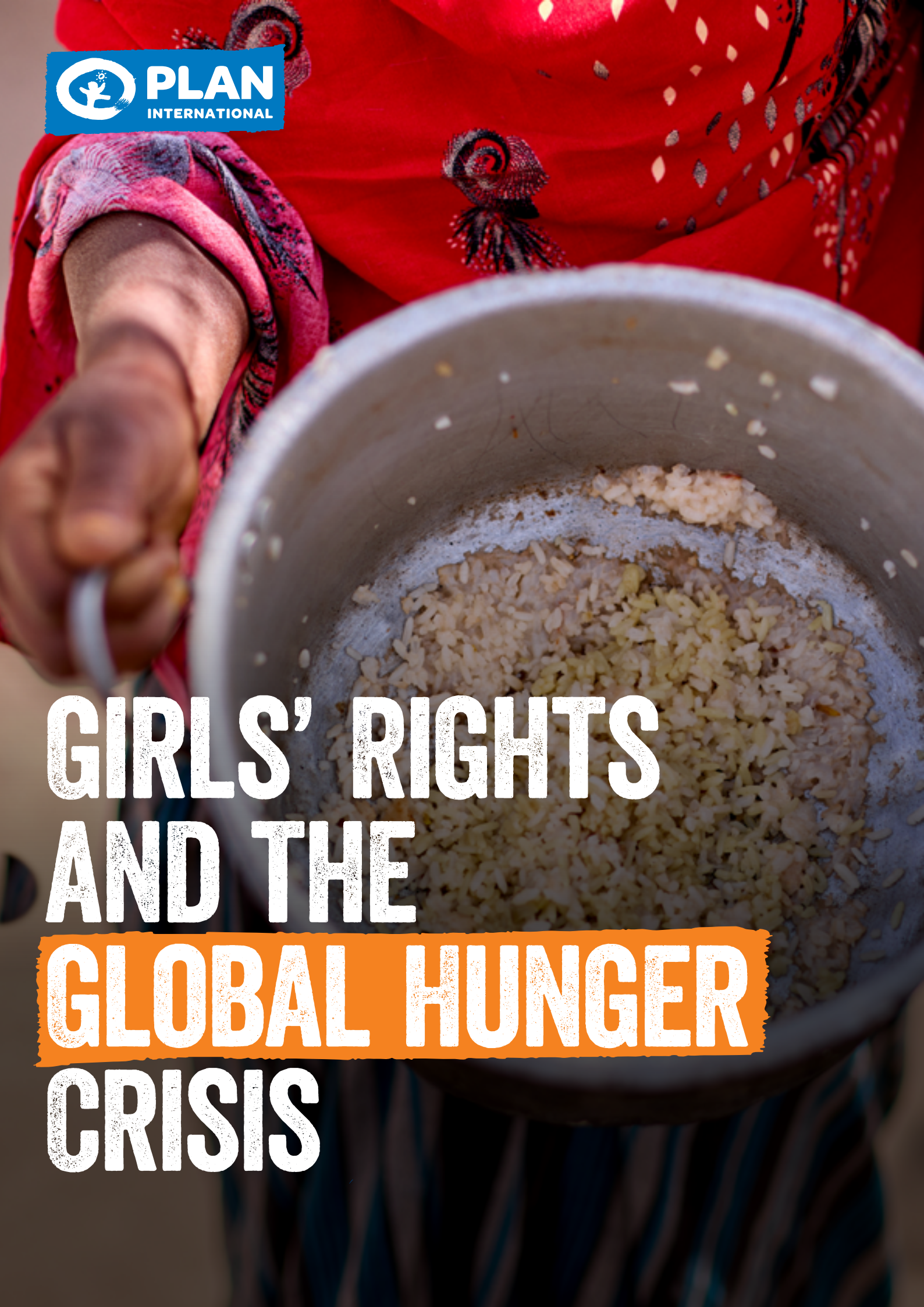


PLAN INTERNATIONAL

GIRLS' RIGHTS AND THE GLOBAL HUNGER CRISIS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, global levels of hunger surpassed all previous records. Close to 193 million people were acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance across 53 countries, an increase of 40 million on 2020 figures. In 2022 the hunger crisis continues to worsen and millions of people are on the brink of famine.

The drivers of this crisis are complex – often involving multiple and interrelated factors. The effects of conflict and insecurity, the climate crisis and COVID-19 are now being compounded by soaring inflation, rising food, energy and fertiliser prices, as well as food shortages due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. These drivers show little sign of abating, and the longer-term outlook provides scant reasons for optimism.

Despite the international community's ambition of achieving **Zero Hunger by 2030**, nearly 670 million people are projected to still be facing hunger in 2030.[1] This is nearly 8 per cent of the world's population – a proportion scarcely below that in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda was adopted.[2]

Such unprecedented levels of hunger are having devastating consequences for the countries, communities, and individuals affected. Yet these consequences are not experienced equally – age, gender and other factors shape individuals' vulnerability to hunger, and to its wider impacts.

When hunger crises combine with entrenched gender inequalities, girls and women are often disproportionately affected. There is evidence, for example, that the prevalence of moderate

or severe food insecurity is now 10 per cent higher among women than among men – a gender gap which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as gender inequality spiked.[3]

Food insecurity and hunger have myriad implications for the realisation of girls' rights. Not only do adolescent girls have specific nutritional requirements, which makes them particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, but as families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, pre-existing rights violations become more acute and widespread.

During times of food insecurity, girls are at heightened risk of being removed from school, of child, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, and of sexual exploitation. Yet these implications for girls' rights are often overlooked by needs-based humanitarian responses which are insufficiently attentive to age, gender and diversity.

The intersection of human rights, and in particular the rights of girls, and hunger is the focus of this report.

Despite the tendency to portray combating hunger and malnutrition as a moral duty or a policy choice, it is argued that this approach masks the important element that addressing hunger and malnutrition is also a legally binding human rights obligation.

A human rights-based approach is important because it insists on protecting rights-holders and underscores the obligations of duty-bearers; it emphasises the prevention of violations as well as accountability. As such, it has the potential to address the root causes of hunger.

In emergency settings, a human-rights based approach can assist in prioritising vulnerable communities, avoiding discrimination, and can provide enforceable obligations.

It also seeks to redress injustice and places duties on the international community.

This report elaborates these arguments about the powers of a rights-based approach to addressing hunger, and in particular the value of this approach for girls. These added advantages include: **the focus this approach places on addressing inequality, especially gender-based discrimination which exacerbates the food insecurity of girls;** holding not only states but also non-state actors to account; and the provision of remedies for violations.

Girls collecting water from a river in Kenya.

CONCEPTS & DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions are used:

FOOD INSECURITY

Lack of consistent access to food, which diminishes dietary quality, disrupts normal eating patterns, and can have negative consequences for nutrition, health and well-being.[4]

HUNGER

The distress associated with lack of food.[5]

MALNUTRITION

both undernutrition and overnutrition (problems with unbalanced diets).[6]

STUNTING

prevents children from developing to their full potential mentally and physically, and is largely irreversible.

SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

is the deadliest form of extreme hunger and is a major killer of children under five years of age.

Some of the literature on hunger and food insecurity speaks of malnutrition as a "triple burden covering undernutrition, which often leads to stunting and wasting and can lead to death"; "hidden hunger" - the deficiencies of essential vitamins and minerals which is rarely noticed; and overweight, which in its more severe form, is obesity.[7] It is the first of these burdens that this paper addresses.

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) presented a grim set of facts that the international community cannot afford to ignore.

It underscored that in 2021, levels of hunger surpassed all previous records. Close to 193 million people were acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance across 53 countries, an increase of 40 million on 2020 figures.[8]

The outlook for the remainder of 2022 is even more sobering, as the hunger crisis continues to worsen across many countries.

As of September 2022, 970,000 people were facing starvation and death in Ethiopia, Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan alone.[9] **The effects of conflict, the climate crisis and COVID-19 are now being compounded by soaring inflation, rising food, energy and fertiliser prices, as well as food shortages due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.** The longer-term outlook provides little more reason for optimism.

Despite the ambition of the Sustainable Goals to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030, nearly 670 million people are projected to still be facing hunger in 2030.[10]

This is nearly 8% of the world's population – a proportion scarcely below that in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda was adopted.

This means that, unless accelerated action is taken, achieving Zero Hunger by 2030 will be very challenging.[11]

Such unprecedented levels of hunger are having devastating consequences for the countries, communities, and individuals affected. Yet these consequences are not experienced equally – age, gender and other factors shape individuals' vulnerability to hunger, and to its wider impacts.

When hunger crises combine with entrenched gender inequalities, girls and women are often disproportionately affected. There is evidence, for example, that the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is now 10 per cent higher among women than among men – a gender gap which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as gender inequality spiked.[12] Food insecurity and hunger have myriad implications for the realisation of girls' rights. Not only do adolescent girls have specific nutritional requirements, which make them particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, but as families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, pre-existing rights violations become more acute and widespread. During times of food insecurity, girls are at heightened risk of being removed from school, of child, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, and of sexual exploitation. Yet these implications for girls' rights are often overlooked by needs-based humanitarian responses which are insufficiently attentive to age, gender and diversity.

The work of the UN human rights mechanisms underscores the importance of a rights framework for ending hunger.

This report highlights the value of a rights-based approach to responding to food crises and ending hunger, with a particular focus on the rights of girls. It addresses the following questions:

- What are the implications of the various responses by states as well as non-state actors to the crisis on the rights of girls?
- What are the added advantages for girls of looking at the current hunger crisis through a rights lens?
- What are the key human rights obligations of states that should be taken into account in the international community's response to the current hunger crisis?
- What are some of the human rights arguments for a more gender-responsive approach to the crisis?
- What is the impact of the current global hunger crisis on girls' rights?

In its attempt to explore these questions, this report makes some underlying assumptions.

First, that there are fundamental structural issues that continue to lead girls and women to be disproportionately affected as a result of hunger.

Secondly, that the common tendency to view girls and women as being categorically "vulnerable victims of their circumstances" is inaccurate, as it fails to appreciate that, given the same opportunities and access as men (boys) to productive resources, they can be and are agents of change.

It should also be recognised from the outset that this report paper is prepared in an environment where sex-and age-disaggregated data on girls and hunger is too limited.

Finally, this report cannot be exhaustive, and a prioritisation of issues informed by the evidence is an inevitable part of its preparation.

THE CONTEXT

Food insecurity and hunger are largely human-made problems, and their drivers are complex – often involving multiple and interrelated factors. Conflict and insecurity, climate change, price inflations and deterioration of supply chain systems are some of the main drivers. On aggregate, more than enough food is produced to feed the global population, yet as many as 829 million people still go hungry.[13] This is an indication of the fact that, while conflict, climate change, and COVID-19 are currently the main drivers of hunger, policy choices bear their fair share of the blame.

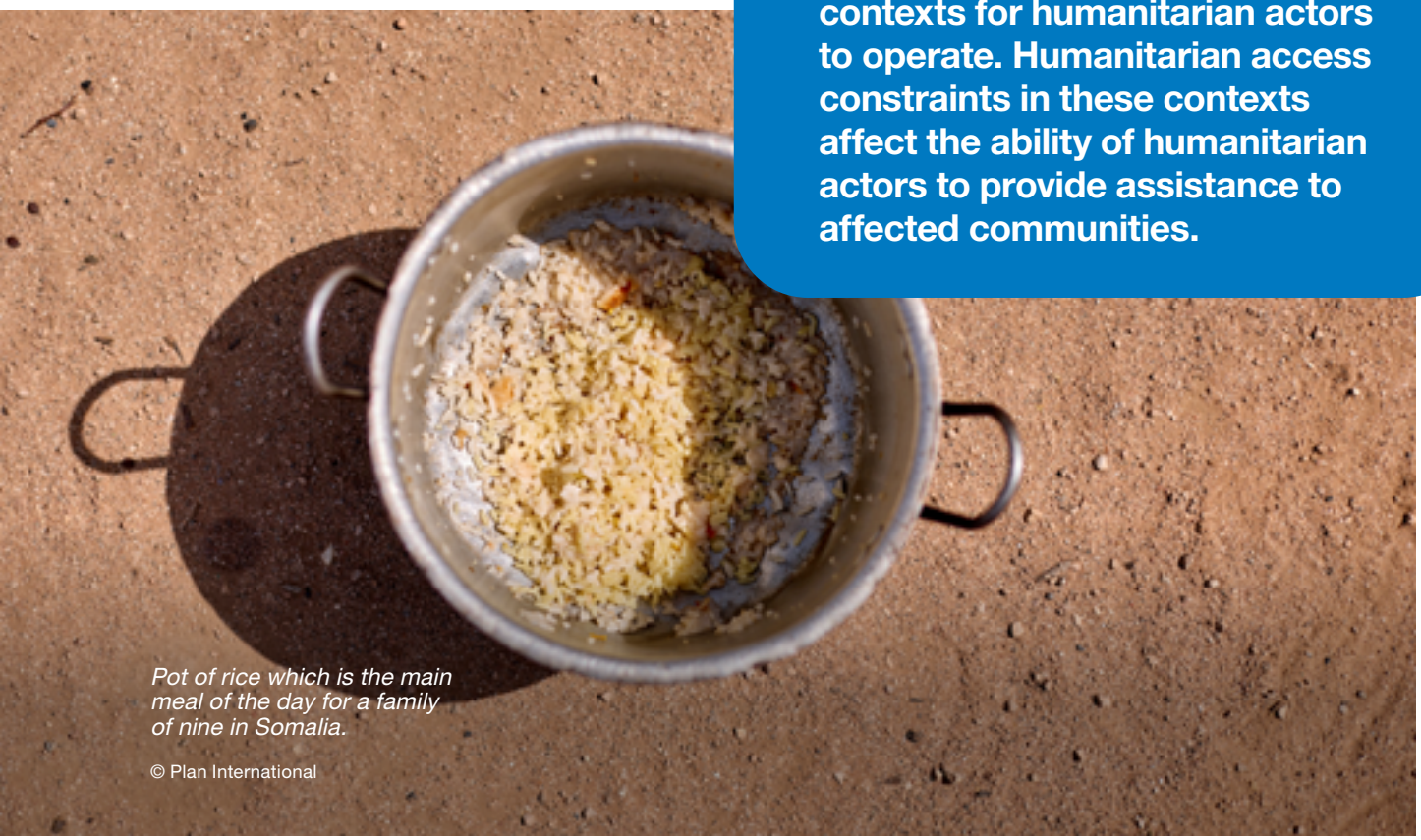
CONFLICT AND INSECURITY

The link between conflict and hunger is well established. Six out of 10 people facing acute food insecurity are in countries affected by conflict or insecurity,[14] and these are the primary drivers of acute food insecurity in hunger hotspots such as Ethiopia, Central Sahel, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and northern Mozambique.[15]

Evidence shows that, during armed conflicts, many more people die from lack of food and associated illnesses than from bullets and explosives.[16]

As civilians are displaced, agricultural land is left fallow and livelihood assets lost, while food systems and markets are disrupted driving up food prices.

Countries facing conflict and insecurity are also the most complex and challenging contexts for humanitarian actors to operate. Humanitarian access constraints in these contexts affect the ability of humanitarian actors to provide assistance to affected communities.



Pot of rice which is the main meal of the day for a family of nine in Somalia.

In many of the most fragile contexts, armed conflict is intersecting with the impacts of climate change. Afghanistan, for example, is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change and has been at war for decades[17]. Even before the Taliban retook power in August 2021, Afghanistan already had the world's second-highest population experiencing critical levels of hunger, and this year 50 per cent of children under the age of five are predicted to suffer from acute malnutrition and need specialised care to live.[18]

While in most countries the impacts of conflict on food security and hunger are primarily local, the conflict in Ukraine, between two major food exporters, is affecting food security far beyond its borders.

Blockades of Ukrainian ports,[19] destruction of farms and fields and reports that Ukraine's national seed bank has been partly destroyed[20] have led to warnings that the fallout of the war in Ukraine is adding to the existing drivers of hunger and food insecurity,[21] Somalia, for example, which imported almost 100 per cent of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia, has seen the price of wheat and oil increase by 300 per cent since the onset of the Ukraine crisis.[22] Today, Somalia stands on the brink of famine.[23]

Woman gathers leaves from a Laluq tree in South Sudan

It is worth recalling that armed conflicts are regulated by International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Both treaty based and customary international humanitarian law standards prohibit, for example, the use of famine and starvation as a weapon of war; the destruction of crops and goods that are essential to the survival of the population; and the destruction of the food production objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.[24]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Global climatic conditions are changing faster than ever and affecting human lives everywhere. Changes in the climate are inextricably linked to issues of food security and hunger – the 27 nations identified as most vulnerable to climate change, for instance, are also hunger hotspots.[25]

The World Health Organisation projects that between 2030 and 2050, climate change impacts will cause 250,000 more deaths each year from climate sensitive health risks, including malnutrition.

These health risks are disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including women and children.[26] Moreover, the main threat to agriculture in the foreseeable future is the combination of rising CO2 and resultant rising temperature.[27] Even if the Paris Climate Agreement goal of keeping rising temperatures to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels is met, the world should be prepared for worsening food insecurity and extreme weather events.[28]

It is now widely recognised that many of the impacts of climate change are gendered. Evidence shows that gendered disparities in vulnerability mean that climate change is negatively affecting gender equality, particularly in lower income countries with higher dependence on agriculture.[29]

Recent projections suggest that children born in 2020 will likely endure nearly three times the number of droughts and crop failures as their grandparents faced, with children in lower income countries bearing the burden of the environmental crisis.[30] Therefore, climate change is exacerbating children's food insecurity, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions.[31]

A girl in Burkina Faso.

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ECONOMIC SHOCKS, CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19

Economic shocks contributed to placing more than 30 million people in 21 countries in 2021 in a category of acute food insecurity or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above).[32] Today, we see how domestic food price inflation and food costs in low-income countries with high dependence on food imports are increasing more than in the last decade.[33]

In 2021, food prices reached their highest in a decade, while in 11 countries with a Humanitarian Response Plan, the cost of a food basket is at least 30 per cent higher than 5 years ago.[34]

Global economic forecasts continue to be negative. The global economy is still suffering the economic consequences of COVID-19 and the true macroeconomic impacts of the conflict in Ukraine are yet to be fully understood.[35]

There is also evidence that gendered economic inequalities are widening.[36] The slow COVID-19 recovery of employment opportunities in some countries has increased the already high gender disparity in employment, since fewer women re-entered the labour market, particularly those working in the informal sector.[37]

Since pandemics have historically worsened inequalities, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender inequality should not come as a surprise.[38] There is evidence, for example, that the gender gap in the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity increased during the pandemic, a rate that is now 10 per cent higher among women than among men.[39] Girls have been exposed to new risks as a result of the pandemic, and as a result of hunger risked being removed from school.[40]

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, many governments decreased expenditure in social sectors including child protection, education and nutrition[41] which in part explains why the pandemic exacerbated child hunger and malnutrition.[42]

In March 2022, as the pandemic entered its third year, it was reported that 23 countries were yet to fully reopen schools to their more than 405 million school children.[43] In 2022, COVID-19 disruptions and supply chain challenges may push an additional 9.3 to 13.6 million children into acute malnutrition.[44] Supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19 and increased consumer demand for food drastically raised food prices across the globe – increasing the severity of food insecurity for more than 800 million people around the world who go to bed hungry every night.[45]

THE EFFECT OF THE FUNDING GAP

The extent of current hunger crisis is forcing humanitarian actors to make exceptionally difficult decisions in the allocation of food.

The gap between funding and needs has meant "taking food from the hungry to give to the starving".[46] It is an approach that raises a number of human rights questions.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has, in recent months, been forced to cut down on the services that it is providing in countries such as South Sudan, Chad and Niger.[47] The rations in Chad and Niger have been cut by 50 per cent as a result of funding gaps.[48] In South Sudan, it is said that humanitarians have been left in what is described as "famine-prevention mode".[49]

As funding gaps widen, it is anticipated that further cuts to quotas will be forced in more countries.

The funding gap not only affects the availability of food assistance but other critical services too.

Despite the high profile of gender-related issues within humanitarian policy and increases in funding for gender equality and to support girls and women in humanitarian crises, global efforts have fallen short during COVID-19.[50]

Although there is a lack of data on the needs of girls and women and how well funded these are, gender-based violence (GBV) continued to be underfunded between 2018 and 2021, with only a quarter of funding requirements (28 per cent) met in 2021.[51]

Black tea being poured in Kenya.

THE CHILD RIGHTS IMPERATIVE

A SNAPSHOT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH AND HUNGER

A human rights-based approach is important because it insists on protecting rights-holders and underscores the obligations of duty-bearersIt is often informed by five main principles – **universality, indivisibility, equality, accountability, and inclusion/participation** – principles that have implications for the manner in which state institutions and other actors conduct themselves towards individuals, especially persons in vulnerable situations. Under equality, for example, not only should the rights of both women and men be respected, children too should not be discriminated against on the basis of grounds such as age, sex, nationality, and the status of their parents.

States have to undertake active measures to address discrimination against girls and women.

The approach also emphasises the prevention of human rights violations as well as accountability. As such, it has the potential to address the root causes of hunger, such as inequality, conflict and poverty, and to direct the international community's attention toward "eliminating these root causes of famine, and not just addressing the visible symptoms of the prior food catastrophe".[52]

In the extreme instances where violations have taken place, then a human rights-based accountability framework would provide access to remedies.

The human rights-based approach also assists in the effort to accord respect for cultural values. After all, the provision of food requires taking into account relevant traditional and cultural practices.[53]

When promoting positive coping strategies and the recovery of livelihoods during and after a time of hunger, there is a need to increase indigenous community awareness of support and resilience.[54]

The advantages of a human rights-based approach in emergency settings, situations in which hunger is often most acute, is immense. It can assist in prioritising vulnerable communities, avoid discrimination, and provide enforceable obligations.[55]

The right to access to information in emergencies, including on the availability and accessibility of food assistance – a right that is critical for children but often neglected – could at times mean the difference between life and death or between protection and exploitation in the context of hunger.[56]

There is ample evidence that in the context of disasters and emergencies girls and women in particular are at heightened risk of, for example, sexual exploitation and abuse by non-state actors, including humanitarian workers. The accountability mechanisms for such incidents are significantly informed by the human rights-based approach.[57]

A human right to food allows the child or his/her guardian to seek remedy and resolution for the violation of the right. Thus, a rights-based approach seeks to redress injustice, along with relieving the suffering of children. Child hunger is a degradation of human dignity and therefore a violation of human rights. The elimination of child hunger, using a human rights-based approach, positions the child as a subject of law with legitimate interests to be protected.

The rights-based approach also places duties on the international community. Under international law, the state is the principal duty-bearer with respect to the human rights of the people living within its jurisdiction. However, the international community at large also has a responsibility to help realise universal human rights. Thus, monitoring and accountability procedures must not only extend to states, but also to global actors such as humanitarian actors, the donor community, intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs and trans-national corporations, whose actions bear upon the enjoyment of human rights in any country.

> "A rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights… Rights also lend moral legitimacy and the principle of social justice to development objectives, and help shift the focus of analysis to the most deprived and excluded, especially to deprivations caused by discrimination."[58]
>
> **MARY ROBINSON,**
> **FORMER UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

This is the main reason why the sections that follow also focus on non-state actors and address the role of human rights in guiding their actions in respect of child hunger, with a focus on girls.

In contrast to a rights-based approach, the dominant humanitarian needs-based approach tends to use a top-down, patriarchal, decision-making structure, with little accountability. After all, charity is voluntary. Eradicating the global blight of child malnutrition requires a rights-based approach.

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

There is the tendency to portray combating hunger and malnutrition as a moral duty or a policy choice. Such an approach is not wrong, but also masks the important element that addressing hunger and malnutrition is also a legally binding human rights obligation.

The right to food is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.[59] It is also enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).[60] In accordance with Article 11(1) of the Covenant, states parties recognise "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" while pursuant to Article 11(2) they recognise that more immediate and urgent steps may be needed to ensure

> "the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition.[61]"

Fundamentally, the roots of the problem of hunger and malnutrition are not lack of food but lack of access to available food by large segments of the world's population, largely because of poverty.

Like other human rights obligations, the right to adequate food imposes the obligation to respect, to protect and fulfil. Any measures that prevent access to already existing food would violate the obligation to respect.[62]

The obligation to protect requires the state to prevent and address violations by individuals and other non-state actors from depriving individuals of their access to adequate food.[63]

The obligation to fulfil, which plays a critical role in addressing discrimination against girls, imposes a duty on a state to "proactively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilisation of resources".[64]

In the instances where individuals are unable to enjoy the right to adequate food, including persons who are affected by disasters, states have the obligation to fulfil (provide) that right directly.[65]

Humanitarian access to provide food aid cannot be denied. Access to affected populations must be rapid, safe and unimpeded.

While all the rights under the Covenant are meant to be achieved through progressive realisation, some minimum core obligations have an immediate effect.

For example, states are required to refrain from any discrimination in access to food as well as to means and entitlements for its procurement, on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, age, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. States are also restricted from taking deliberate measures which result in the deterioration of the current level of fulfilment of the right to food.[66]

It is also important to acknowledge the close link between the right to be free from hunger and the right to life, as a violation of the former could lead to a violation of the latter. The number of countries that have a law that provides for the right to food is on the rise.

Close to 30 countries have constitutionalised the right to food.[67]

It is notable that, among the 38 countries at the "emergency" phase of food insecurity in 2022,[68] only Democratic Republic of Congo, Honduras, Kenya and Niger appear

on this list. The legal motivations to include an explicit constitutional article providing for the right to food are manifold.

Constitutionalisation gives the highest level of protection, especially since in the event of conflict with other laws, constitutional provisions take precedence. Codification also makes State obligations easily identifiable, as well as their violations.

For example, where state policies discriminate against girls and women in respect of the right to food, claimants should benefit from domestic – and in the event of the failure of such domestic opportunities international – human rights redress for violations.

Explicitly providing for the right to food in law, including in constitutions, also helps to avoid the need to undertake a "derivative rights" analysis, for example, reading the right to food based on the right to life or the right to adequate standard of living. It is important to underscore the obligations of states to uphold the right to food in the context of emergencies.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) contains, in Article 4, a provision that allows for the derogation of some of its provisions in a "time of public emergency" that "threatens the life of the nation". Such derogation has to be "officially proclaimed", has to be proportional to the extent strictly required, and should not involve discrimination.

The in-built safeguards are aimed at preventing the abuse of a state's emergency powers. However, the ICESCR does not contain a similar derogation provision.

The committee that monitors the ICESCR has indicated that that the Covenant applies even in times of conflict or general emergency, and that states parties have a core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of at least minimum essential levels of each of the Covenant's rights.[69]

For example, the obligation to ensure access to the minimum essential food which is nutritionally adequate and safe, to ensure freedom from hunger to everyone; or to ensure the right of access to facilities, goods and services on a non-discriminatory manner cannot be derogated, including during situations of emergency or armed conflict.[70]

Corn cobs stored in a house in Guatemala.

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THE RIGHTS OF GIRLS AND HUNGER

There is evidence that **the effects of food, land and water insecurity are not gender neutral,** and that it is girls and women who are more likely to suffer from undernourishment and malnutrition in times of disaster and food scarcity.

It has also been shown that girls and women who often have the primary responsibility for growing and preparing food and collecting fuel and water in many societies, are disproportionately impacted by a **lack of available and accessible water and fuel sources** due to the additional burdens in terms of time, physical hardship, increased exposure to violence and stress that this climate-related resource scarcity may entail.[71]

Women's differential access to power and control of resources is central to this discrimination in all institutional spheres, i.e. the household, community, market, and state.

Within the household girls and women can face discrimination in the sharing out of household resources, including food, sometimes leading to higher malnutrition and mortality indicators for girls and women.

Because of their lower social and economic status, as well as their physiological needs, girls and women are often more vulnerable to nutritional problems.[72]

Considering the roles that girls and women play in the household, with regard to food production, food preparation and childcare, gender inequality in access to and control of resources may well result in misallocation of scarce resources, increased healthcare costs, lowered productivity, and poor human development trends.

Investment in girls' and women's nutrition has significant returns to improving household nutrition and overall human development capacity for a country.[73]

As a result of discriminatory laws and social norms, girls and women often have less access to secure land tenure and their farmlands tend to be of inferior quality and more prone to flooding or other climate-related events. Increasingly, women are also left with de facto responsibility for living and farming in drought-affected areas, as men often migrate first, but without the rightful and/or socially recognised authority over the land that would allow them to adapt to changing climate

Girl cooks at her home in Guatemala.

conditions.[74] Girls and women are also indirectly and disproportionately affected by the impacts that climate-related events have on the price of foodstuffs.[75]

Although the provisions of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are applicable, as appropriate, to girls, the main instrument that is relevant for children's rights is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). **The CRC transformed children's moral claims to food into legal rights to food.** Several articles of the CRC deal directly with the child's right to food and nutrition: Article 24 provides "States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health…. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures…to combat disease and malnutrition, including…through the provision of adequate, nutritious food." Article 27(3) obliges that "State Parties…shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing."

A number of other provisions, including on best interests, non-discrimination, the right to life, survival and development as well as children's participation have relevance for the rights of girls in the context of hunger. For example, the CRC

Committee has underscored that taking the best interests of the child as an obligation "is crucial when States weigh up competing budget allocation and spending priorities".[76] In this regard, states are required to "demonstrate how the best interests of the child have been considered in budgetary decision-making, including how they have been weighed against other considerations".[77]

The obligation to address inequalities among children not only by reviewing laws and programmes, but also "by increasing or reprioritizing certain parts of the budget"[78] is an obligation that emanates from the CRC.

It is worth highlighting here that Article 2(1) further affirms that the primary obligation for ensuring the rights listed in the CRC falls on the state (when the child's family or caregivers cannot or will not adequately provide for the child). Moreover, Article 5 and other provisions underscore the need for international assistance and cooperation for the realisation of the right to food. General Comment No. 5 reiterates the fact that states have assumed responsibilities to implement the CRC domestically but also to aid in its global implementation through international cooperation.[79]

When analysing the rights of girls in the context of hunger (and the current food crisis), there are a number of questions that would benefit from a gender lens. For example: how much of girl's hunger and food insecurity is a matter of health alone and not one of life, survival and development? and how much is denial of food for girls a matter of violation of "children's rights" rather than one of "women's rights"?

Such analysis should aim at highlighting what is possibly the prevailing legal opinion with regard to girl's right to food, in parallel with the reality of violations of such right.

Moreover, what should be the role of "best interests" in respect of preventing and addressing child hunger, especially that of girls? What should be the role of non-discrimination in this respect?

Also, given the fact that there are a number of non-state actors whose actions have implications for the rights of girls in the context of hunger, what are the child rights obligations of such actors. Since disaggregated data is a critical element for understanding, preventing and addressing the rights of the girl child in the context of hunger, it also deserves attention.

PROTECTION ISSUES INCLUDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

As families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms in the context of food shortages, pre-existing child protection problems and gender-based violence risks become more acute and widespread.

Girls are susceptible to increased violence, including trafficking and child marriage, during a food crisis.

They face heightened risks of sexual exploitation, while women are often forced into selling and exchanging sex – a factor contributing to increased HIV prevalence in drought-ridden areas of rural Africa.[80]

The closure of schools in the context of COVID-19 and Ebola outbreaks, has exacerbated these risks.Given the direct link between conflict and food crises, as discussed above, it is important to note that some of the six grave violations of children's rights, especially sexual violence and abduction, disproportionately affect girls.[81] There is growing evidence that child, early, forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) may increase in times of food insecurity when parents are struggling to make ends meet and feed all family members.

Today, across the Horn of Africa, populations are faced with desperate choices to survive. An increasing number of parents and caregivers are marrying off girls to secure dowries to help support the rest of the family, to have one less mouth to feed, or in an attempt to help the bride enter a better-off household.[82]

Girls as young as 12 are being forced into CEFMU and female genital mutilation (FGM) at "alarming rates" in the Horn of Africa, as the most severe drought in forty years pushes families to the edge.[83]

Poor access to essential amenities such as safe water is another problem contributing to increased safety risks, particularly for girls and women.[84]

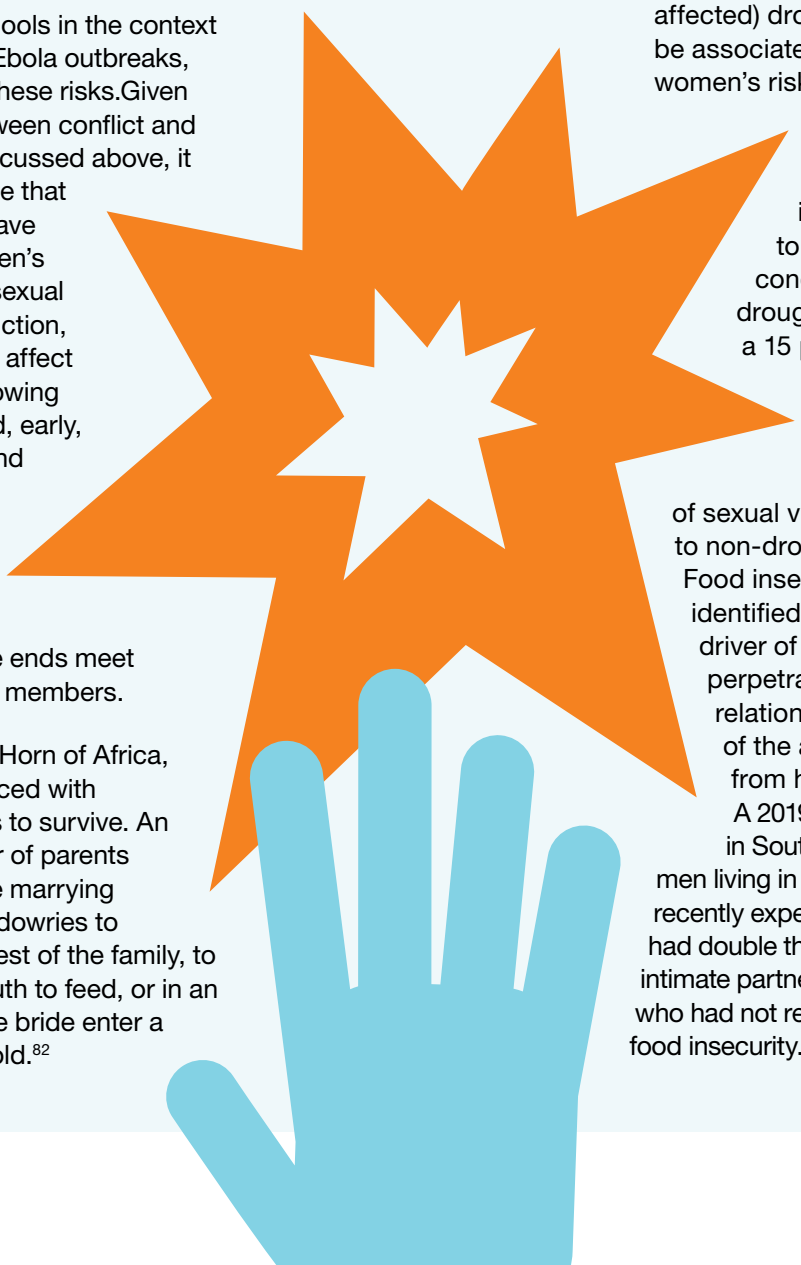
Within the Horn of Africa, women and girls in drought-affected areas have to walk longer distances to access water and other basic resources such as firewood, leaving them vulnerable to sexual violence.

In Kenya, girls and women are walking more than three times longer than before — more than 18 miles in some locations.[85]

In one study of the relationship between drought conditions and violence across 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (some of which are conflict-affected) drought was found to be associated with girls' and women's risk of physical and sexual abuse.[86]

The risk of violence increased according to severity of drought conditions, with severe drought associated with a 15 per cent increase in reports of physical violence and 29 per cent increase in reports of sexual violence compared to non-drought settings.[87]

Food insecurity has also been identified as an underlying driver of domestic violence perpetrated by men in relationships, although most of the available evidence is from high-income settings. A 2019 study conducted in South Africa found that men living in households that had recently experienced food insecurity had double the odds of perpetuating intimate partner violence than those who had not recently experienced food insecurity.[88]



Drought in Somalia has left ponds dry, cracked and without water

Studies have also shown that pregnant girls and women in food insecure situations are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, as pregnancy is a time of increased financial dependence, with women being more likely to lose their jobs, homes and partners.[89]

Food insecurity is also associated with other forms of family violence against girls and women, such as violence by in-laws and siblings.

For example, a randomised controlled trial in Afghanistan found that physical violence by mothers-in-law, siblings and siblings-in-law was associated with household food insecurity and having to borrow money for food.[90]

Moreover, while the interlinkages are often not highlighted, girls in Benin, Togo and the Philippines have highlighted how lack of food affected their mental health.[91] Multiple reports in the context of disasters have shown the increased vulnerabilities of women and girls to the exploitation and abuse by non-state actors. An example is the accusations of sexual exploitation and abuse of girls by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic reportedly, in some cases, in exchange for food.[92]

Preventing and addressing violence against children in the context of a food crisis requires multiple, targeted, rights-based interventions.

Advocating for legal and policy reform and implementation that also pays adequate attention to girls; investing in administrative data collection systems to track cases of violence against children; implementing programmes to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies; implementing adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights services; and the provision of remedies for violations, not only by state actors but also by non-state actors and individuals are all critical.

Girl learning at community school in Togo.

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GIRLS' EDUCATION

Food insecurity not only affects physical growth and health of girls but also their intellectual development, school attendance and academic performance.

The link between low provision of food at home, and its impact on girls' education and learning at school is an issue that concerns many families.[93]

A study conducted in Ethiopia also suggested that in food insecure situations, girls are more likely to be absent from schools compared to boys.

This might be related to the social norms in the community that give lower value to girls' education, and which are potentially exacerbated when resources are constrained. Hence, in food insecure households girls are removed from schools as a coping mechanism, often to help with household labour or to be married.[94]

According to the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, the education of women is "the single most important determinant" of food security.[95]

A cross-country study of low-income countries covering the period 1970-1995 found that 43 per cent of the reduction of hunger was attributable to the progress of women's education.

An additional 12 per cent of the reduction of hunger was attributable to increased life expectancy of women, so in total 55 per cent of the reductions in hunger during those 25 years were due to improvements in women's situation within societies.[96]

Lack of access to education undermines girls' long-term wellbeing and future prospects, with evidence showing losses in lifetime productivity and earnings of between US $15-30 trillion for girls who do not complete 12 years of education.

On average, women with secondary education earn twice as much as those without education while the gains from primary education are much smaller.[97] The loss of education also has consequences for future generations. According to one study, South Asian mothers with no education and those with short stature were most likely to

have stunted children,[98] suggesting that gender inequality is part of the explanation of South Asia's persistent undernutrition.[99]

The multiple disadvantages faced by women in South Asia have been shown to contribute to food and nutrition insecurity, not only for themselves, but also for their children.[100] Conversely, evidence shows that in the more than two decades between 1970-1995, at least 50 per cent of the substantial reduction in child malnutrition in low income countries was directly related to improvements in a women's education and social status.[101]

Addressing education through a rights lens, including in times of food crisis, requires multiple interventions.

For example, viewing education as an "essential service" even during a crisis is important. When school meals programmes are integrated with health and nutrition programmes, they can transform lives and communities.[102]

They can support local farmers and markets who sell food to schools, make communities more resilient; create jobs locally; improve health and combat all forms of malnutrition; get children into school, especially girls, and help them learn.[103]

Closure of schools due to COVID-19, combined in some contexts with hundreds of schools rendered non-functional because of conflict and insecurity, is interrupting school feeding programmes and general food and cash distributions to families in need. School feeding initiatives not only improve children's nutritional status, and support household food security but also help increase enrolment, performance and attendance, particularly among adolescent girls.[104]

Research shows that school meals can positively promote gender equity by supporting girls to attend, increase learning capacity and graduate from school, thereby reducing the risk of child marriage, early pregnancies, and gender-based violence.

In middle and low-income countries, every dollar invested in school meals yields 9 dollars back in social returns including promoting women smallholder farmers and creating jobs for preparation of the meals: healthy and educated children are more productive adults.[105]

The provision of cash incentives as well as fortified school meals, as has been shown in many countries including Chad and Niger, can help to address the barriers to schooling faced especially by girls.[106] Tailored support can go a long way if it includes services for sexual and reproductive health and rights, services to address gender-based violence, as well as mentoring to empower both boys and girls.[107]

Meal being prepared at primary school in Kenya.

THE RIGHT TO WATER

Clean drinking water is critical for the purpose of preventing both hunger and malnutrition. Even in instances where adequate food is available, water borne diseases, which often prevent the body from absorbing and using vital nutrients, contribute to the death of thousands of children a day.[108]

SDG 6, to "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation" aims to achieve, among other targets, "universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all".[109]

That food and water are inseparable is recognised by the International human rights framework. The right to water has been described as "indispensable for leading a life in human dignity" as well as a "prerequisite for the realisation of other human rights".[110]

CEDAW obliges states parties to "…take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:…(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to … water supply....".[111]

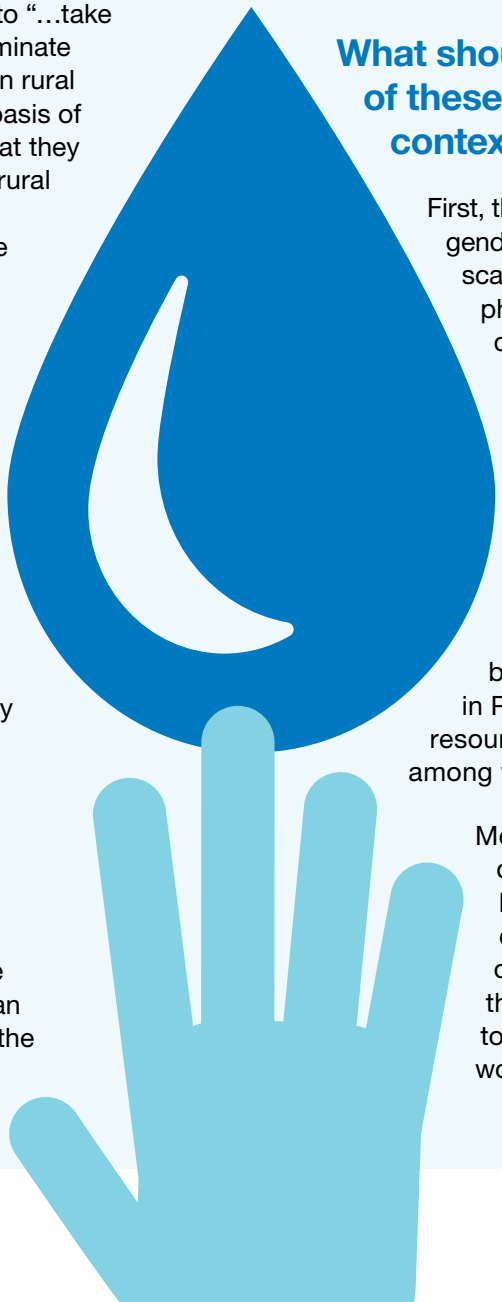
Likewise, the CRC obliges States to "[c]ombat disease and malnutrition, …, through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water…".[112]

It is noteworthy that this obligation is almost immediately preceded the obligation to "take appropriate measures: (a) To diminish infant and child mortality".[113]

While a July 2010 UN General Assembly Resolution formally recognised for the first time the rights to water and sanitation, an argument has been made that the resolution recognised but did not specify that the rights entailed legally binding obligations.[114] This doubt was put to rest in September 2010 when the Human Rights Council reaffirmed that the right to water is legally binding and called upon states "to achieve progressively the full realisation of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water…".[115]

Some of the obligations of states, as per the resolution included respecting principles of equality and non-discrimination;[116] integrating human rights into service provision impact assessments;[117] as well as providing accountability mechanisms that may effectively remedy human rights violations.[118]

While the operative word in respect of upholding the right to water is "progressive realisation", immediate obligations include guaranteeing that "the right will be exercised without discrimination of any kind" as well as the obligation to take steps that are "deliberate, concrete and targeted towards the full realisation of the right to water".[119]



What should be the implication of these obligations in the context of a hunger crisis?

First, there is a need to acknowledge the gender differentiated impacts of water scarcity. Girls and women are more physically vulnerable to waterborne diseases, which is in part related to their disproportionate role in supplying household water and responsibility for domestic chores.[120]

Decreased water resources may also be a cause of increased work burden for girls and women- a good example being the 1997/98 El Niño event in Peru, which reduced water resources leading to malnutrition among women.[121]

Moreover, in the aftermath of disasters, access to water has been identified as being a contributor to reducing the risk of sexual violence, underscoring the need to pay closer attention to the particular needs of girls and women in emergency responses.[122]

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND HUNGER: FINISHING THE JOB?

Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which aimed to "Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" included the target to "halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger". This, and other proportion-based targets were criticised as being non-compliant with the human rights obligations of states.[123]

For example, a strong argument was made that, on the basis of the ICESCR, states parties have the obligation to recognise "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger".[124]

Girl walking to school in Tanzania.

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Fortunately, under the SDGs, the links to international human rights law have been made much clearer. For example, the ICESCR has been described as "a fundamental pillar of the 2030 Agenda".[125]

The common objective between the SDGs and the ICESCR lies in the coordinated efforts to lift everyone out of poverty and hunger.

SDG 2 on "Zero hunger" includes targets on ending hunger and malnutrition; improving sustainable and resilient food production as well as improving agricultural production. SDG 2 also has a strong basis in international human rights.[126]

Even though SDG 2 has significant links with several other Goals,[127] such a link is not being made adequately in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) process at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Monitoring progress (or the lack thereof) towards Goal 2 should be done in a rights- and gender-sensitive manner.[128]

Questions such as: "How are the conceptualisation, implementation, as well as monitoring of programmes on food assistance gender sensitive?" and "What mechanisms are available for accountability (including remedies) for rights violations in the provisions of such services, especially persons in vulnerable situations such as girls?" should be addressed.

It is argued that the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs was designed to finish the job and get to a statistical zero on many of the world ills.

It is also notable that in a world where around 11 per cent of the total population (more than 800 million) is affected by hunger, and where reportedly "hunger kills more people every year than malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS combined",[129] the goal of achieving a world without hunger and malnutrition by 2030, unless decisive and urgent measures are undertaken, seems to be slipping away.

COLLECTION OF DISAGGREGATED DATA ON HUNGER AS A CHILD RIGHTS OBLIGATION

There are significant general gaps in data that prevent reporting on the full range of countries of concern. This is one of the reasons why it is assumed that the global number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity in food crisis contexts is likely higher than the estimates.

Moreover, lack of consensus and comparable data on acute food insecurity could lead to a potential imbalance in the attention that different crises receive.[130]

Furthermore, one of the hard lessons from monitoring the implementation of child rights standards as well as tracking measures aimed at achieving the MDGs is that **data collection focused on "national averages"** has deflected attention from the disparities behind the averages.

In the context of hunger, national averages mask the widening disparities among and within regions and even countries.

Moreover, and directly of relevance to girls and hunger, even when global or national averages have been achieved, often the most disadvantaged and most vulnerable children have been left behind.

It is then no surprise that both the Committee on the Rights of the Child as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women emphasise the obligations of states to collect age and sex disaggregated data.

As a UNICEF report aptly underscored, the CRC "does not deal in averages or aggregates: The rights it enumerates and elucidates apply to every child in the human family, wherever and into whatever circumstances they happen to be born".[131]

Family sharing a meal together in Burkina Faso.

Understandably, collection of data in the midst of a crisis is a difficult task.

However, the limited amount or even absence of sex-and age-disaggregated data on hunger has been a serious limitation, despite the fact that such data is critical for informing policies and programmes as well as laws, with a view to offsetting the impact of the hunger crisis.

In the context of sex-and age-disaggregated indicators, one limitation is that national (even international stakeholders) statistical offices only collect data on food assistance and services provided at the household level.

This means that all household members are tagged as needing or recipients of a programme or service and the same amount of transfer (for example wheat in kgs) is reported for all members alike.[132] In such cases, disaggregating data by sex, or by age, is difficult and efforts to establish the direct beneficiary of the programme within the household will not be easy.[133]

Questions can be posed about whether efforts to generate sex-and-age-disaggregated data concentrate only on household survey data or whether it should include programme administrative data.

Service providers (governments, UN agencies, humanitarian organisations and other international entities, CSOs, NGOs and other actors) should consider reengineering their household data process to automate the generation of sex-disaggregated indicators for those programme variables that capture information for direct beneficiaries in the context of hunger and related food crises.

The intention here should be to strengthen the capacity of decision-makers to better understand the gendered needs, as well as impacts of food crisis related interventions on girls. It is also important to consider the role played by administrative data collection tools that capture important programme parameters such as the sex of the recipient, or whether services beyond food assistance (such as to address GBV or other needs) are needed by girls.

Girl carrying a basin in Burkina Faso

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There are a few exemplary developments in this respect. For example, in the Philippines child-centred organisations identified the lack of post-disaster disaggregated data at the national level and by some local authorities.

Despite the presence of a reporting template for collecting this data, it is reported that many local authorities did not collect the data.[134] In a positive development, as part of a new children in emergencies law (R.A 10821, Section 9), collecting disaggregated data by age, gender, ethnicity, and special needs is now mandatory for all relevant local government agencies and the national government in the aftermath of a disaster.[135]

THE RIGHT TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Article 26 of the CRC, which is focused on the right to social security and social insurance obliges states to

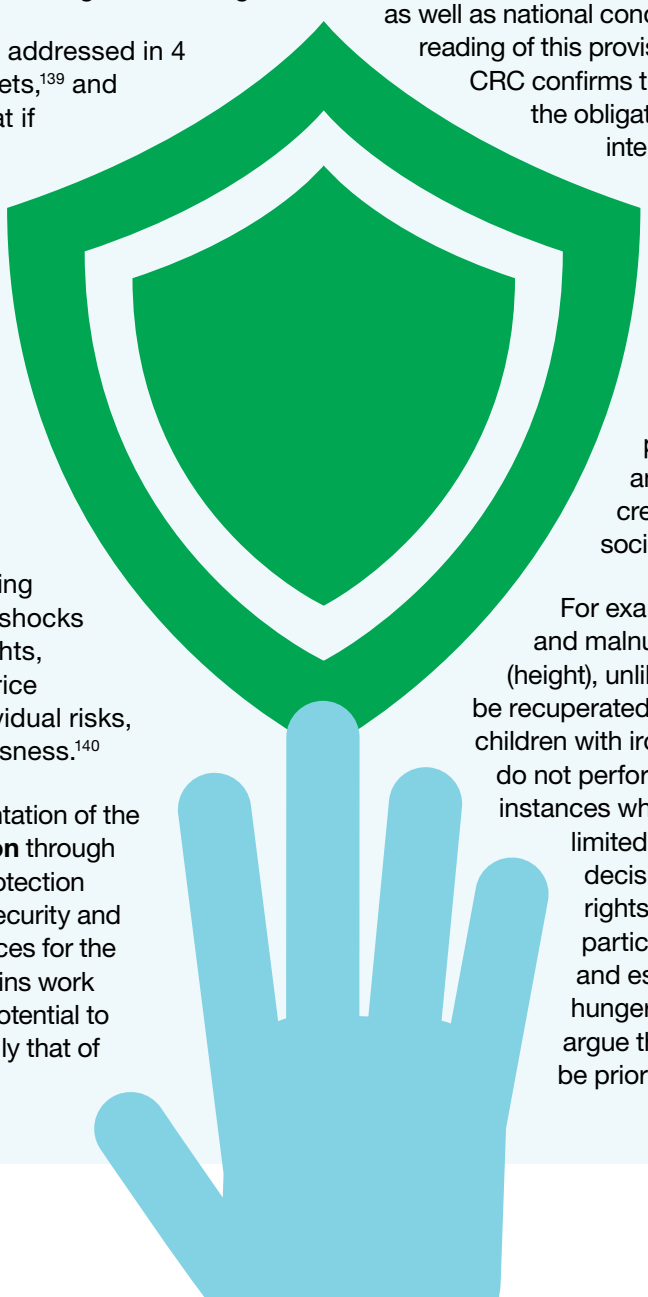
> "...recognise for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance…[136]"

and to "achieve the full realisation of this right in accordance with their national law".[137]

Article 27 on adequate standard of living obliges that "States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing".[138]

Social protection is also addressed in 4 out of the 169 SDG targets,[139] and there is an argument that if we are serious about the cross-cutting aim to "Leave no one behind", social protection deserves closer attention. There is ample evidence of the important role that social protection programmes play in protecting the people living in poverty from destitution and in reducing vulnerability to external shocks such as localised droughts, floods, or commodity price volatility, as well as individual risks, such as illness or joblessness.[140]

The call for the implementation of the **right to social protection** through the adoption of social protection floors as basic income security and access to essential services for the whole population[141] remains work in progress, despite its potential to address hunger, especially that of girls and women.



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 1,400 social protection measures have been adopted by 208 jurisdictions to cushion the shock.[142] Unfortunately, many of these schemes have been described as not gender sensitive, for example, for not acknowledging the significant burden women shoulder when schools close or when the healthcare sector is overwhelmed.[143] As shown above, apart from COVID 19, the food security of girls and women could be disproportionately compromised by climate change and conflict.

Nevertheless, **three in four children in the world do not benefit from social protection, and only around 45 per cent of women with new-born babies receive a cash maternity benefit.[144]** Moreover, a majority of children affected in the current food crisis live in one of the 67 countries that the ILO has identified as having no national statutory cash benefit.[145] The obligation to provide social protection to children is dependent on "the resources and the circumstances of the child" as well as national conditions and means. A joint reading of this provision and Article 4 of the CRC confirms that such means include the obligation to actively pursue international cooperation.

Apart from the child rights arguments supporting the provision of social protection, there is a strong moral and economic case that can be made for it; children's complex physical, psychological, emotional and intellectual development creates particular needs that social protection can support.

For example, in the context of hunger and malnutrition, children's stunting (height), unlike weight, cannot usually be recuperated once nutrition improves, as children with iron and iodine deficiencies do not perform as well in school. In the instances where domestic resources are limited and a state has to make a decision to prioritise few social rights over others,[146] some of the particular vulnerabilities of children, and especially those at risk of hunger, can be a strong basis to argue the case for why they should be prioritised.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

International humanitarian and development cooperation plays a unique role in preventing and responding to the current food crisis. In fact, it stands to reason that countries afflicted by famine are often unable to meet the needs of the afflicted populace on their own.

A 2018 report attributes the increase in the number of undernourished people around the world to failures in food policy reform due to a lack of international cooperation.[147]

For example, African countries have had to work together to reduce food insecurity in the region: Under the Malabo Declaration commitment to "Mutual Accountability to Actions and Results," African leaders have committed to ending hunger and reducing stunting to 10 per cent and the number of underweight children to 5 per cent by 2025.[148]

At the UN level, the Food Security Cluster (FSC) is one of 11 function-based clusters of the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster System used to coordinate humanitarian and emergency relief during disasters.[149] The cluster is chaired by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).[150]

This shared leadership ensures that long-term agricultural stability and security receive the same emphasis as immediate food relief.

Several low-income countries around the world have had to rely on international cooperation and assistance during food insecurity crises. For instance, in 2017, Somalia had to rely on the Somalia Emergency Drought Response and Recovery Project (SEDRP) to tap into a US $50 million IDA Crisis Response Window (CRW) grant) for its drought response.[151]

The CRC also envisages the implementation of its provisions, "where needed, within the framework of international cooperation".[152] This could take different forms including bilateral, regional, or multilateral cooperation. On the part of recipient states in need of both financial and technical resources to implement the CRC, it is crucial that they demonstrate that they have made every effort to seek appropriate international cooperation for the realisation of the rights of the child. Political will from all parties involved in international cooperation is critical.

Of relevance to the food crisis context, one of the important recommendations of the CRC Committee is that "States parties should comply with their obligations under the Convention and the Optional Protocols when engaging in development cooperation as members of international organizations and when signing international agreements".[153]

Such engagement should not impact negatively on children, especially those who are most vulnerable.[154]

For example, in 2009, the CRC Committee commended Sweden for allocating more than 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product to official development assistance but recommended that the state party should conduct child impact assessments in respect of its international cooperation activities.[155]

Girls hold the world in their hands in Uganda

STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR INCLUDING THE DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The world has witnessed multiple examples where starvation has been used as a weapon of war. These include relatively older examples such as the 1967-1970 Biafran famine, and the four famines that took place between 1984-1998 in the Second Sudanese Civil War, and the more recent conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan.

For the first time, in May 2018, a landmark resolution on preventing hunger in conflict zones was adopted by the UN Security Council.

It is notable that Resolution 2417 was adopted unanimously. It called on all parties not to use starvation as a tool of war, and allow humanitarian access in a safe and timely manner to civilians, and emphasised that "using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare may constitute a war crime".[156]

It has been recommended that one of the strategies for breaking the links between conflict and hunger, which can advance both food security and peace, is to address conflict on a political level and take legal action, including penal measures, against those who use starvation as a weapon of war.[157] Denial or unlawful use of humanitarian access have reportedly increased.[158]

The 2022 annual report on children and armed conflict recorded 3945 incidents of denial of humanitarian access in 2021, taking place in countries such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria where disruption to water facilities also occurred.[159] Denying humanitarian access to children may violate several basic human rights, including the right to be free from hunger and the right to life. Girls who might be subjected to negative coping strategies as a result of hunger might be disproportionately affected if, for example, needed sexual and reproductive health and medical assistance is not allowed to reach them.

Girl picks mangoes from a tree in Zambia.

Although uncommon, there are examples of good practices where child protection provisions on humanitarian access have been included in UN-brokered agreements with parties to conflicts.

These include the Ground Rules agreement between the UN's Operation Life Line Sudan and various non-state armed groups (1995/1996); the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UN and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Sudan; and the 2020 action plan between the UN and the Government of South Sudan.[160]

There are also good examples of peace agreements, such as the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (6 February 2019) and the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (17 August 2015), that contain provisions that prohibit the disruption or prevention of the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance.[161] So far, inclusion of gender in peace agreements has been mostly focussed on sexual abuse and violence.[162] The recognition of the disproportionate negative effect of denial of humanitarian access on girls, for example in respect of food, is warranted.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hunger has been described as "by far the most flagrant and widespread of all serious human rights abuses".[163] Children, in particular girls, are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and hunger.

The right to food summons the binding obligations of states or other duty-bearers to address child hunger. In the current context of a global food crisis, where levels of hunger are surpassing all previous records and the outlook is grim, it is argued that adopting a rights-based approach offers the international community powerful tools to enhance its response. This report aimed to unpack the links between hunger and girls' rights - providing an overview of the impacts of hunger on girls' rights, and some of the key human rights obligations of States that should be taken into account in the international community's response to the current hunger crisis. It has also discussed the value of a human-rights based approach in the response to the current hunger crisis, with a particular focus on the advantages of such an approach for girl's rights and gender equality. Beyond the right to health, food insecurity and hunger undermines a host of girls' rights.

The links between violence against girls and hunger is also well established. Hunger also threatens girls' intellectual development, school attendance and academic performance. Even though there is evidence to show that the education of women is 'the single most important determinant' of food security, girls' education is likely to be further deprioritised in crises, including in the context of hunger, exacerbating the gender gap in education. There is a common tendency to portray combating hunger as a moral duty or a policy choice. Such an approach is not wrong, but also masks the important element that addressing hunger and malnutrition is also a legally binding human rights obligation.

This report has put forward arguments about the powers of the rights-based approach to addressing hunger, and in particular the value of this approach for girls. These added advantages include the focus this approach places on addressing inequality, especially gender-based discrimination which exacerbates the food insecurity of girls; holding not only states but also non-state actors to account; and the provision of remedies for violations.

The report has underscored the critical and even heightened role to be played by the right to social protection in the context of food crises, especially to prevent and address the food insecurity of girls. Apart from the rights arguments, there is a strong moral and economic case that can be made for the provision of social protection measures especially to those that are at risk of hunger. Moreover, given the inseparable link between food and water, which is recognised by the human rights framework, the recognition of water as a right is also critical to preventing and addressing the food insecurity of girls.

Since conflict is the main driver of hunger in many contexts, it has also been recognised that international human rights framework should be supplemented by the relevant obligations under International Humanitarian Law.

Yet despite these human rights obligations, and other commitments such as the SDG Goal on Zero Hunger by 2030, the current pace and rigour with which the international community is working towards upholding the right to food for everyone and everywhere falls far short.

Water is in short supply in Somalia due to drought.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Girl with her 4-year-old baby in Ethiopia.

Governments, decision-makers, multilateral and diplomatic bodies must urgently address the drivers of acute food insecurity, ensuring a rights-based response, including through:

Increasing diplomatic efforts to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity while guaranteeing humanitarian access and promoting conditions of peace and security in conflict-affected hunger hotspots. Concerted efforts by all relevant actors are needed to ensure the full protection of the rights of affected populations, particularly girls and young women, and to allow humanitarian workers not only to safely reach those in need, but to stay and deliver.

Increasing accountability and political costs for those who use starvation as a weapon of war through the intentional destruction of crops, unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilians, or other similar methods, as violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law. The UN Security Council should improve collective, meaningful action to address the use of starvation as a method of warfare in all conflict situations, and follow through on their commitments in Security Council Resolution 2417.

Industrialised countries with the greatest historical and current responsibility must **urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep warming to under 1.5 degrees compared to pre-industrial times,** continually raising their ambitions to reduce emissions. Enhance people-centred, rights-based and gender transformative approaches in climate finance and locally-led adaptation measures.

States should uphold their human rights obligations to ensure freedom from hunger without discrimination:

United Nations human rights mechanisms, particularly treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council, should, within their specific mandates, **strengthen their focus, synergies, and coordination to promote the rights of girls in the context of hunger and food crises.**

This includes posing questions related to girls' food insecurity, and providing states with recommendations aimed at preventing and addressing food insecurity of children in a gender sensitive manner.

States should take all necessary steps, to the maximum of their available resources, **to satisfy their minimum core obligations, in particular under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure that everyone under their jurisdiction is free from hunger** and as soon as possible can enjoy the right to adequate food.

Even in the context of severe resource constraints and during emergencies, measures should be undertaken to ensure that the right to adequate food is especially fulfilled for vulnerable population groups and individuals, and states should give particular attention to the need to prevent gender and age discrimination in access to food or resources for food.

Failure to satisfy these minimum core obligations, including through prevention of access to humanitarian food aid, constitutes a violation of states' human rights obligations.

States should **undertake measures to codify, and if possible constitutionalise, the right to food and water in their domestic legal systems** and ensuring that any individual or group who is a victim of a violation of the right to adequate food has access to effective judicial or other remedies. National ombudsmen and human rights commissions should address violations of the right to food.

Given girls' heightened vulnerability to violations of their rights by non-state actors in the context of food insecurity, **states have an obligation to establish accessible, rights-based, independent and robust accountability mechanisms** for all humanitarian actors, including NGOs and private sector actors.

Humanitarian actors, including governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs must urgently respond to the immediate global hunger crisis, ensuring a rights-based response, including through:

Urgently increasing the provision of flexible and unearmarked funding to avert the risk of famine and promoting the resilience of millions of people living in situations of acute food insecurity.[164]

States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights must recognise the essential role of international cooperation and comply with their commitment to take action to ensure freedom from hunger, including proving necessary aid.[165]

Ensuring that food security data is sex-and age-disaggregated, which is essential to meeting age-and gender-specific needs, particularly those of adolescent girls.

Consulting children and adolescents to understand their coping mechanisms and preferences is essential to designing safe and inclusive programmes.

Prioritising child safety, gender equity, dignity and wellbeing during food security programmes to avoid causing harm and ensure that accessible, rights-based accountability mechanisms, including child-friendly feedback mechanisms are established which provide gender-and age-responsive, inclusive, safe and confidential ways for children and young people to receive information, provide feedback and meaningfully participate in influencing humanitarian programming.

Increasing the prioritisation of and funding for **gender-responsive child protection, GBV, mental health and psychosocial support, maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition (MNCHN), and education interventions** integrated into food and nutrition programmes, to ensure that the immediate protection, health and longer-term wellbeing of children, particularly girls, is not undermined in contexts of acute food insecurity.

Ensuring that critical school meals programmes are funded. These should be adapted to ensure they reach the youngest children and adolescent girls – including those that were out of school before the crisis.

Supporting governments to reinforce and scale-up gender responsive, unconditional social protection and income support measures for the most affected and vulnerable people and families, including child-and female-headed households, families with young children, and displaced populations and, where relevant, to create an enabling environment for humanitarian actors to complement the national response.

Design social protection programmes to promote gender equality, for example, considering how they can increase women's empowerment and control over key decisions like household expenditure; reduce household stress and economic insecurity that can drive gender-based violence; and promote girls' enrolment and attendance at school.

Family sharing a meal together in Burkina Faso.

ENDNOTES

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Woman prepares tortillas in Guatemala.

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Cover photograph: Pan of rice which is the main meal of the day for a family of nine in Somalia. ©Plan International / Armstrong Too

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About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

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