



**WORLD VISION FOOD SECURITY
AND FAMINE PREVENTION
POLICY BRIEF**

January 2026



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PART I. INTRODUCTION

The 2026 [Global Humanitarian Overview \(GHO\)](#) paints a sobering picture: one in five children worldwide live in or are fleeing from conflict zones, while 239 million people need humanitarian assistance. [Across 16 hunger hotspots](#), food insecurity is expected to further deteriorate with several countries and territories facing or at risk of facing catastrophic hunger.

The GHO also underscores a widening gap between needs and resources. The global development and humanitarian landscape is undergoing a structural transformation, marked by a sharp decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) from major bilateral donors. It is estimated that the [abrupt decline in ODA could result in more than 22 million additional deaths by 2030](#), including 5.4 million children under five. [Funding cuts to the World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) in 2025 alone and resulting caseload reductions, could push between 10.5 million to 13.7 million people relying on assistance from IPC 3 to IPC 4, meaning the number of people experiencing IPC 4 could increase by 31 percent.

There are two main drivers of rising food insecurity globally, both of which are man-made and could be reversed with concerted and collective action: conflict and climate change. In 2025, [69 percent of acutely food-insecure people – 219 million people – lived in fragile or conflict-affected countries](#). Armed violence is expected to worsen food insecurity in 14 out of 16 hunger hotspots, including all those of highest concern: [Haiti, Mali, Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen](#). Disregard and [widespread violations](#) of international humanitarian law (IHL) and impunity for international crimes are eroding the protection

of civilians, with restrictions and impediments severely curtailing humanitarian access. Today's conflicts are also more entrenched and protracted, pointing to a clear breakdown of political will to address underlying root causes and systemic challenges, coupled with a faltering and fragmented accountability mechanism.

Climate change is worsening and geological events are impacting communities already in crisis, exacerbating acute food insecurity in many regions. Globally, [three in four people](#) who are forcibly displaced live in countries facing high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards and weather-related disasters, which have caused some 250 million internal displacements, equivalent to around 70,000 displacements per day, over the past ten years. [With the IPCC iteration 7](#) indicating that the world is entering a new era above the 1.5 degrees Celsius of the [Paris Agreement temperature goal](#), the situation could become worse unless urgent interventions to increase the adaptive and resilience capacities of communities are made.

Behind each of these trends, numbers and statistics, there are alarming stories and voices of communities, first and foremost children, caught by a relentless 'hidden hunger', the lack of diverse and nutrient-rich diets, which leads millions of girls and boys to micro-nutrient deficiencies and undermines their development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where there is a reliance on low-cost food staples and [where the dietary diversity is limited](#).



PART II. DEFINING THE PLIGHT OF FAMINE

The Integrated Food Security Phase

Classification (IPC) system defines famine as an extreme deprivation of food, the most severe form of food insecurity, classified as IPC Phase 5. Famine can be declared if there is clear and compelling evidence that certain thresholds have been reached.

Currently, multiple famines are unfolding, in Palestine (the Gaza Strip) and parts of Sudan (El Fasher and Kadugli), the first time where populations in two countries have faced famine simultaneously since modern tracking in the IPC system. In these contexts, children face the greatest risk of experiencing food deprivation, severe malnutrition, and the threat of dying. The ripple effects of famine and malnutrition on children have profound impacts, which extend to diminished immune function as well as poor physical growth, brain development and learning capacity.

Famine also forces women, households and communities to adopt negative strategies to cope with deprivation, including the selling of assets and increases in child labor, school dropout, and domestic and gender-based violence. Overall, famine is the result of a multisectoral collapse, with basic human needs for health services, water, food, nutrition, shelter and protection not being met.

Yet, famine is not an inevitable natural hazard, but primarily a human-induced crisis. The availability of food and a population's access to food are often directly affected by the conduct of hostilities. For instance, fighting can damage or destroy essential infrastructure (e.g. wells, irrigation systems, dams), foodstuffs, crops and livestock. The risk and degree of food insecurity can also increase in the event of sieges and blockades, or if humanitarian assistance is delayed or deliberately blocked by the warring parties.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system is:

- 1) a standardised scale of food insecurity;
- 2) a process for building interagency technical consensus on the state of food insecurity in a specific country at a given moment and aims to inform evidence-based decision making.

The 5 'phases' of the IPC scale are:

- Phase 1 (None/Minimal)
- Phase 2 (Stressed)
- Phase 3 (Crisis)
- Phase 4 (Emergency)
- Phase 5 (Catastrophe/Famine)

The most severe form of food insecurity, famine is only declared when three things happen:

1. At least 2 people per 10,000 (or 4 per 10,000 children) die daily of starvation, disease and malnutrition;
2. At least 20 percent of households face extreme food shortages;
3. At least 30 percent of children suffer from acute malnutrition.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) protects against food insecurity in armed conflicts and prohibits the use of starvation as a weapon of war. Full respect for the rules of IHL from the outset of a conflict can help prevent the situation from deteriorating into an acute food crisis or famine. Respect for these rules hinges on the preparation, behavior and decisions of parties to conflict regarding the conduct of hostilities. Stakeholders with influence over the parties to conflict have a primary role to play in ensuring respect for IHL, and in reducing many of the other pressures created by armed conflict on food security. In 2018, the [landmark Resolution 2417](#) condemning the use of starvation as a weapon of war, created an important framework to prevent and protect civilians from conflict-induced hunger and highlighted the need for early action to address situations where civilians are at risk.

Starvation. What does the legal framework say?

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) establishes fundamental protections for civilians in armed conflict. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols prohibit the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. [Article 54 of Additional Protocol I](#) explicitly prohibits attacking, destroying, or removing objects indispensable to civilian survival, including foodstuffs, agricultural areas, crops, livestock, and drinking water installations. [Article 18](#) mandates that relief actions for civilians in need “shall be undertaken,” and that parties must allow and facilitate the rapid passage of humanitarian relief.

[Article 11](#) of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR), enshrines the right to adequate food. States must respect, protect and fulfil this right. UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General [Comment 12](#) clarifies that states must not use food as political or economic pressure and should provide international assistance during emergencies. Non-derogable core obligations persist even during armed conflict, including ensuring freedom from hunger and providing emergency food aid.

Famine is preventable and predictable, with the right resources, political will, and action across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Effective famine prevention therefore depends on several factors, including:



Robust early warning systems that integrate food security and nutrition indicators, climate and environmental data, conflict and insecurity analysis, market prices and supply chain disruptions, population displacement trends. One of the main causes of famine is a failure to act early, before hunger reaches catastrophic levels.



Involvement of local communities and integration of local knowledge and solutions linked to pre-agreed triggers that automatically activate preventive measures, including funding, food assistance, and livelihood support.



Political will, action and accountability to address famine as a primarily human-induced crisis. Deliberate political choices are essential to prioritise hunger and famine prevention in governance, ensure adequate funding allocations and willingness to address long-term systemic vulnerabilities, including lack of sustained humanitarian access. Humanitarian assistance and protection are lifelines- without them, famine can take hold.



PART III. WORLD VISION'S APPROACH TO FOOD SECURITY AND FAMINE PREVENTION

With a dual mandate, working in both humanitarian and development contexts, **World Vision is uniquely positioned to lead integrated, multisectoral efforts that can be delivered early and at scale to prevent famine**, placing children, women, and vulnerable populations at the center. Our core value, 'we are partners', places equitable partnership with local actors, and the strengthening of local capacity and solutions like agroecology at the core of **World Vision's approach to famine prevention**.

With 75 years of expertise, **World Vision is an experienced global leader in food security and nutrition** and employs a diverse range of food assistance modalities and early livelihood recovery interventions to support people enduring food crises and exposed to the risk of famine. World Vision strategically analyses and adopts its most effective role in each context, ensuring that solutions are locally identified and driven and that diverse voices in communities and ownership are prioritised.

World Vision interventions combine in-kind food assistance with cash and voucher programming, enabling those we support with the choice of how they spend the assistance, providing food item choices, leveraging local market mechanisms and vendors. As highlighted in the latest [School Meals report](#), in FY25, World Vision's School Meals Programme delivered daily meals to over **one million children in 20 countries and drove 17 policy changes** to strengthen national feeding systems.

In a global landscape increasingly driven by transactional approaches and return on investment, World Vision's project models, such as climate-resilient agriculture and [farmer-managed natural regeneration \(FMNR\)](#) and [Vision Fund's Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment programmes](#), offer compelling, evidence-based solutions that align with these evolving priorities.

The [Cash Waves research](#), commissioned by World Vision's MEER office in partnership with Qualisus Consulting, documents how **World Vision Cash and Voucher Programming** contribute to resilience and well-being, particularly for women and children.

The study findings offer valuable context for interpreting the lived experiences of recipients, shaped by their unique expectations, personal histories, and broader environmental factors. In particular, the study highlights that **strengthening shock responsive social protection systems** and **ensuring timely access to cash transfers** shields families from the worst economic impacts of a crisis, helping them and their children access nutritious and safe foods, benefit from essential health, nutrition and water and sanitation services.



At a unique moment when every corner of the planet is strained by multiple compounding crises which require bold action and decisive leadership, World Vision has the advantage of being able to leverage its largest-ever [global hunger response](#), its historical leadership in the field of hunger and nutrition, a successful local to global advocacy, and the opportunity to amplify child voices in a traditionally technical and adult-dominated area.

Over the next three years, World Vision will unite and intensify these efforts through its ENOUGH campaign, which aims to amplify World Vision's programmatic impact and successes, and drive resources to scale.

ENOUGH aims to position girls and boys at the centre of relevant decision-making and policy processes around hunger and malnutrition in 82 countries, ensuring that child hunger and malnutrition problems are visible in statistics at all levels, and that evidence and children's own perspectives are able to shape policies, funding and interventions.

Through evidence-based and local to global humanitarian advocacy:

- World Vision will continue to address and shape the overall public conversation around hunger and famine prevention, to openly acknowledge their underlying root causes, as well as the negative coping strategies affecting girls and boys;
- In areas where the organisation is not present, famine prevention can be addressed as part of multilateral platforms. As an example, World Vision co-founded and is a steering committee member of the global Coalition against Conflict and Hunger, a group of civil society organisations committed to working on the prohibition of starvation as a weapon of war, the protection of civilians and the humanitarian space in conflicts. To achieve these goals, the Coalition undertakes coordinated advocacy at global, regional and national levels and builds evidence through joint data collection, sharing and analysis, which is used in private and public contexts.

As we enter 2026, millions of girls and boys continue to face a preventable famine and millions more children and families are forced to make impossible choices. Families must choose between the most basic food items and other essentials, like medicine and healthcare, school supplies or keeping a roof over their head. If not addressed now, child hunger and malnutrition will continue to be transmitted from one generation to the next, creating a perpetual cycle of disadvantage.



PART IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADVOCACY MESSAGES ON FAMINE PREVENTION

In a world facing escalating humanitarian needs and mounting challenges such as increasing inequality, persistent conflict, climate change, and a shrinking space for civil society, coupled with inadequate and restricted aid funding, programmatic solutions planned and implemented in isolation will not be enough to prevent and respond to famine. This policy brief aims to formulate key recommendations and advocacy messages that:

- a). call for bold coordinated measures in famine prevention and mitigation;
- b). shape the overall public conversation, raising awareness and influencing the public discourse and high-level conversations around the topic, and;
- c). foster the adoption of a comprehensive approach, bridging interventions across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

National governments should:



Improve and expand anticipatory, multi-year funding for famine prevention and response that make the humanitarian-development nexus a reality to produce more flexible and predictable funding arrangements.



Strengthen access to and delivery of equitable quality essential services for the most vulnerable, including food, nutrition, health and improved water and sanitation, and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure the most vulnerable children and families are able to safely and equitably access those services.



Establish and/or strengthen national, child-sensitive, equitable protection systems, and ensure that adequate budgetary allocations and accountability mechanisms are in place to make certain the most vulnerable children receive transfers of sufficient size and duration to meet lifesaving food and nutrition needs. Multipurpose cash transfers are particularly effective and efficient in supporting vulnerable families to meet immediate needs in contexts where multiple, overlapping shocks are the norm.



Strengthen the functioning of local and national food and agriculture market systems, with particular attention to local food systems and markets where the majority of poor people buy and trade food. This requires greater investments in infrastructure, access to quality agricultural inputs and post-harvest storage, training and market information, savings and credit services and off-farm employment opportunities. It also requires increased access to financial services and business-training opportunities for small and medium enterprises.



Support the most vulnerable households and communities to adapt to and build their resilience to climate change and weather-related hazards, which are key drivers of food and nutrition crises and disproportionately affect children. Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans must explicitly recognise children as rights holders, integrate their needs and perspectives and ensure monitoring and evaluation frameworks include data disaggregated by age and gender and by child-specific indicators.

Parties to conflict should:



Take immediate measures to end conflicts and sustain peace through diplomatic and political solutions. This is a critical element to prevent and respond to hunger and nutrition crises faced by children in conflict settings, particularly in situations also further exacerbated by climate change or socioeconomic drivers.



Adhere to IHL and human rights law, cease attacks on civilians, especially children, aid workers, and on civilian infrastructure.



Stop the use of starvation as a method of war in alignment with UN Security Council Resolution 2417.



Facilitate the safe and unimpeded provision of principled humanitarian assistance to affected populations to ensure the timely delivery of lifesaving aid.

Implementing agencies should:



Urgently scale up humanitarian food, cash and/or vouchers, and other multi-sectoral responses to protect the nutrition, health and food security status of girls, boys, women and men experiencing Emergency and Catastrophe/Famine levels of food insecurity.

Support the national social protection system strengthening by:



- committing to develop harmonised, coherent mechanisms to coordinate cash transfers in humanitarian contexts, including common targeting and monitoring criteria and interoperability of systems and tools and approaches, in line with Grand Bargain commitments.
- prioritising the use of multipurpose cash transfers through digital systems which will support better integration with existing social protection mechanisms or serve as building blocks to support a transition to national social protection systems.

Support interagency efforts to work across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus through:



- providing greater support for productive, resilient livelihood opportunities for smallholder farmers and pastoralists to improve their skills; access appropriate tools, technologies and financial services; produce more nutritious foods; and increase market opportunities and off-farm employment opportunities throughout the food system
- Integrating famine early action 'trigger' indicators into planning, emphasising prevention and disaster risk reduction and 'no regrets' programmes; and increasing the use of crisis modifiers in development programming. Early warning must be linked to global accountability mechanisms for action in order to ensure a rapid response and consensual buy-in of member states.

Donors should:



Mobilise additional, comprehensive humanitarian funding to address urgent and growing humanitarian needs.



Increase support for strengthening or establishing equitable national social protection systems that are inclusive and child-sensitive. This includes providing more funding as multipurpose cash transfers so they can be accessed by all citizens and vulnerable people. Safety nets, as part of comprehensive social protection systems, are one of the most cost-effective means to minimise the impact of shocks and to protect and promote proper nutrition for children.



Take diplomatic action to prevent famine, protect civilians in all emergencies, and ensure humanitarian access in conflict situations, now and in the future. Actions should comply with IHL, respect humanitarian principles and be aligned to UN Security Council Resolution 2417, which prohibits the deliberate starvation of civilians as a weapon of war, promotes early warning and seeks to protect agriculture and related infrastructure from attack.



Support interagency efforts to work across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus to reduce humanitarian need, build resilience and promote sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable people. This requires multi-year, flexible support for community-based programmes that assist poor female and male smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and the urban poor to improve their livelihoods and increase investments in inclusive, sustainable and resilient food systems.



Support programming that is needs-driven, context-specific, flexible and accountable to affected populations.

Contact Information

Amanda Rives
Senior Director, Humanitarian Policy, Advocacy and Partnerships, Disaster Management
amanda_rives@wvi.org

Paul Kinuthia
Senior Director, Food & Cash, Markets, Disaster Management
paul_kinuthia@wvi.org

Viviana De Annuntiis
Sr. Advisor, Humanitarian Policy, Advocacy, and Partnerships, Disaster Management
viviana_deannuntiis@consultant.wvi.org



Food Assistance and Livelihoods in Emergencies



Cash & Voucher Assistance | Global Capacity Statement



Food Assistance Programming | Global Capacity Statement



World Food Programme and World Vision Partnership



World Vision's Integrated Approach to Child Protection and Food Security

