

Famine: The end point of a global protection crisis

The world knew it was coming. The warning signs were there long before an alert was issued in January 2017: an ever-widening gap between humanitarian need and available funding; the largest number of forcibly displaced people since World War II; an increase in the number and severity of protracted conflicts; and greater numbers of vulnerable people hit by an increasing frequency, severity and intensity of climate-change-related disasters. The 2011 famine in Somalia left 260,000 dead, half of whom were young children. Conflict and blatant violations of international humanitarian law, blocked access to highly vulnerable populations and delayed humanitarian funding all were exacerbated by drought. This shameful and deadly outcome led a collective cry of 'never again'.

'Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat.'

– Dr Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate

failure to protect the rights and entitlements of the world's most vulnerable citizens, the majority of whom are children. A failure to protect their right to the most fundamental basic needs – nutrition, protection and health. A failure to protect children's right to a life free from violence and to grow up feeling safe and secure. A failure to protect children by addressing the structural causes of extreme poverty, hunger and deprivation, so that they can realise their full potential over a lifetime.

'Famine is already a reality in parts of South Sudan. Unless we act now, it is only a matter of time until it affects other areas and other countries. We are already facing a tragedy; we must avoid it becoming a catastrophe. This is preventable if the international community takes decisive action.'

– António Guterres,
United Nations Secretary-General

Yet, here we are again, this time at a scale not seen in recent memory. Twenty million people across four countries – South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria – are on the brink of famine, with large numbers of people already highly food insecure in Syria, Malawi and Zimbabwe at heightened risk. All told, at the beginning of 2017, the number of people requiring life-saving food assistance was 108 million, a 35 per cent increase from 2015.¹

Since renowned economist Dr Amartya Sen's seminal work on the nature of famine,² we understand that famine is no longer primarily a shortage of available food but is, at its core, a

At no time has a global protection crisis been more visible than at the present – with 20 million people on the brink of starvation. The year 2017 marks one year into the historic 2030 Agenda era, underpinned by pledges to 'Leave No One Behind' and 'Put the Last, First'. The ability to meet our collective responsibility to prevent famine, protect children and provide durable solutions to the many millions facing a severe food crisis will be the first real test of the international community's ability to translate the 2030 Agenda's ambitions from vision to action.

World Vision is working directly with the children, families and communities at risk of famine in Somalia and South Sudan to address hunger, malnutrition and protection needs through integrated, multi-sectoral action to improve food security, nutrition, livelihoods, health, protection, water and sanitation, and education. World Vision is also supporting displaced Nigerians who had to flee across the border into Niger and Chad in search of help.

¹ Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crises 2017* (2017).

² A. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), http://staging.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1981/81B09_608_engl.pdf.

World Vision recommends:

1. Protect children from hunger

Young children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) are at heightened risk of death – nine times more likely to die from simple, preventable diseases than other children. Poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days, from pregnancy to age 2, can have irreversible lifelong negative physical and cognitive consequences, undermining long-term development and resilience for individuals, households and nations. Prevention and treatment of malnutrition must be priorities.

National governments, humanitarian actors and donors should:

- Fully fund life-saving food security and nutrition needs across the four countries on the brink of famine and neighbouring countries hosting refugees, as articulated in

the country response plans, which are grossly underfunded.

- Rapidly expand funding for prevention and treatment of child undernutrition, with a focus on the first 1,000 days, including support to improve health services and water and sanitation facilities.
- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support into programmes designed to prevent and treat child malnutrition. Integrating psychosocial stimulation during young children's feeding results in improved physical and cognitive outcomes for children in both the short term and long term and makes them more resilient to future shocks.
- Implement 'safety net' interventions to support nutrition, health, education and protection status of vulnerable children and families. These include reliable cash and/or food transfers of sufficient size and duration which will help reduce negative coping strategies and address widespread low purchasing power due to weak livelihoods and high prices in many food markets.
- Ensure access to affected populations and support the strengthening and/or re-establishing of key trade routes that supply food markets. Efforts to address short-term needs and build long-term solutions will be severely hindered if there is no access to affected populations. All parties to these conflicts must allow unimpeded, safe and unconditional access to all children and families in need.



2. Protect children from violence

In all four countries at risk of famine, people are already facing life-threatening protection risks as a result of decades of conflict. The risk of hunger and famine have also caused protection risks or exacerbated existing ones, illustrating the link between hunger and conflict. Children are facing increasing physical threats, family separation, gender-based violence (including sexual abuse and exploitation), as well as recruitment by armed forces and groups across affected countries. Against a backdrop of dire humanitarian needs and a precarious security environment, the imperative to recognise child protection as a life-saving intervention and fully fund protection needs across the affected countries has never been more urgent.

National governments, humanitarian actors and donors should:

- Recognise child protection as a life-saving intervention and fully fund protection needs across the affected countries in a timely manner, including protection of children on the move. Provide free and accessible identification and registration for all, especially displaced children and families, and provide appropriate services, including education, psychosocial care and services for those affected by gender-based violence.
- Systematically include child protection in humanitarian assessments and child protection mainstreaming strategies and site-specific referral pathways in each child protection sub-cluster, in collaboration with all sectors and government ministries where possible.
- Make full use of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and place child protection specialists in the field



to provide stand-alone quality services as well as coordination and integration of children protection concerns into other sector/cluster assessments, response plans and monitoring.

- Invest in psychosocial support and care for children in extremely vulnerable situations, family tracing services, support for community-based protection mechanisms, and advocacy for children associated with armed forces and armed groups and others exploited in child labour.

3. Protect children by addressing the underlying drivers of hunger

Before the current crises all the countries currently facing famine already suffered from high levels of extreme poverty; chronically high levels of hunger and malnutrition; and poor health, education and protection outcomes. All of these



have been exacerbated by protracted, recurrent conflict and, in most countries, climate-related natural disasters such as drought. Addressing the underlying drivers that will lead to sustainable, long-term change in these 'hard to reach' places will be the true litmus test of the strength of the collective political will that underpins the 2030 Agenda's vision to 'Leave No One Behind'.

National governments, humanitarian actors and donors should:

- Invest diplomatic resources and use political capital to resolve conflicts peacefully

Conflict is the common denominator across the four countries facing famine. These are largely human-created disasters, with drought playing an important conflating factor in Somalia. Armed conflict significantly

increases child protection risks, and specific attention must be paid to assessing such risks and heightened vulnerabilities. Children are especially vulnerable when displaced, including increased risk of separation from parents and disruption of education. In particular, World Vision calls on all parties to the conflict to take immediate measures to protect civilians from both direct attack and the indirect effects of conflict, respecting calls for an end to the human rights violations that are key drivers of the famines.

- Significantly increase investment in national 'safety net' programmes

While humanitarian assistance is urgently needed to meet life-saving needs in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria, greater investment in national safety-net programmes is needed to address the systemic nature of widespread extreme poverty and vulnerability in these fragile states. Safety-net programmes, as part of comprehensive social protection systems, are one of the best documented and cost-effective ways to promote equity and inclusion, reduce vulnerability and invest in human capital development, particularly for the extreme poor. Safety nets such as general social transfers, public works, and school meals programmes help households reduce negative coping strategies such as eating less, pulling children out of school, or selling assets in order to meet their immediate needs, all of which undermine their ability to recover and prosper over the long term.

- Improve and diversify household and community livelihoods

The majority of food-insecure people in the four countries facing famine live in rural areas and derive the majority of their food and income from smallholder agriculture and/or livestock. In addition, most rural households purchase a significant proportion of their annual household food requirements from local markets, so improving income-earning opportunities is critical. Greater support to

productive, resilient livelihood opportunities for smallholder farmers and pastoralists is needed to improve their skills and access appropriate tools and technologies; and to increase market opportunities, financial services and employment opportunities. Over the long term, this will lead to improved incomes for poor families so that they are able to eat enough nutritious food, afford basic services such as health and education, and invest in improving their livelihoods.

FAMINE, A SYMPTOM OF CONFLICT AND A GLOBAL PROTECTION CRISIS

20 MILLION PEOPLE ACROSS 4 COUNTRIES
are on the brink of famine

1.4 MILLION CHILDREN
suffer from severe acute malnutrition

CONFLICT
— is the —
KEY FACTOR
— in all —
FOUR CRISES

6.8 million people in need of urgent food assistance ^[1]

2 million internally displaced persons, 55% are children ^[8]

3.3 million children acutely malnourished ^[9]
460,000 severely acutely malnourished ^[1]

YEMEN

SOMALIA

SOUTH SUDAN

NIGERIA*

*Northeast Nigeria

5.1 million people in need of urgent food assistance ^[1]

2 million forcibly displaced persons ^[2]

2 million children acutely malnourished ^[3]
450,000 severely acutely malnourished ^[1]

5 million people in need of urgent food assistance ^[1]

3.93 million forcibly displaced persons ^[4]

1.1 million children acutely malnourished ^[5]
270,000 severely acutely malnourished ^[1]

2.9 million people in need of urgent food assistance ^[1]

2.1 million Somalis forcibly displaced ^[6]

944,000 children acutely malnourished ^[7]
190,000 severely acutely malnourished ^[1]

[1] UN OCHA: Famine 2017, http://interactive.unocha.org/emergency/2017_famine/
[2] UNHCR Data: Operation Sahel
[3] OCHA: <https://www.unocha.org/nigeria>

[4] UNHCR: South Sudan SitRep, 31 March 2017
[5] UNICEF: South Sudan SitRep, 15 March 2017
[6] UNHCR Data: Refugees in the Horn of Africa

[7] UNICEF: Somalia Appeal, March 2017
[8] OCHA: Yemen Humanitarian Snapshot, April 2017
[9] OCHA: Humanitarian Needs Overview, Yemen 2017

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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