



No Conflict Exists in a Vacuum - Food insecurity and the consequences of the Ukraine crisis on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in West and Central Africa

On the 14th of March 2022, the United Nations Secretary General warned of “a hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system” as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis¹². Inequalities, together with distribution and logistics problems linked with the consequence of the crisis in Ukraine, have disrupted global supply chains. In a globalized world already experiencing unprecedented levels of food insecurity, the crisis in Ukraine will impact food security everywhere. **Few places will experience this more forcefully than the countries of West and Central Africa; and women and girls of West and Central Africa will once again bear the brunt of conflict and crisis, even one thousands of miles away.**

Globalized World - Ukraine, West and Central Africa and Food Insecurity

Even before the Ukraine crisis, it was projected that, in the absence of appropriate measures, 33.4 million people in the Sahel and West Africa could be in immediate need of food assistance during the hunger season (June-August 2022); this figure is nearly double the number of people who were affected in the 2020 hunger season³. This is a clear violation of millions of individual’s right to food, as well as a potential human tragedy on an enormous scale⁴.

Now, West and Central Africa must contend with Ukraine being one of the largest producers of wheat in the world. 45 African and least developed countries import at least a third of their wheat from Ukraine or Russia; with 18 of those importing at least 50%⁵. Global supply chain disruptions are impacting the ability to export wheat now and the current war is projected to disrupt Ukraine’s agricultural production for at least the next year.

In West and Central Africa, Senegal (51%), Cameroon (45%), Mali (36%) and Mauritania (32%) are the most dependent on imports from Russia and/or Ukraine for wheat and muslin⁶. The region of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is overall dependent on Russian wheat at 21%, while the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is dependent on the same import at 54%.

No Crisis is Gender Neutral

When food insecurity arises, women and children are the most at risk of malnutrition and hunger as well as associated rights’ violations. Last year, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, reported that the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity was 10% higher among women than men in 2020 and

¹ The United Nations Secretary General also convened on the 23rd of March the first meeting of the Steering Committee of the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/node/262571> Last accessed 25 March 2022

² Global Humanitarian Overview. 2022. <https://gho.unocha.org/trends/hunger-rise-unprecedented-levels-food-insecurity-require-urgent-action-prevent-famine>

³ Food Crisis Prevention Network (FCPR) - Published: December 2021

⁴ The right to food and to be free of hunger is expressed in numerous internationally agreed conventions, resolutions and international humanitarian law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11) and others.

⁵ UN News. 14 March 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113882>

⁶ International Trade Centre - 2020 data <https://www.trademap.org/> Last accessed 25 March 2022

that the food insecurity gender gap widened from 2019 to 2020.⁷ Food insecurity is not only affecting women disproportionately, but has a range of gendered impacts, including well-established links to gender-based violence (GBV). Food insecurity exacerbates already existing GBV risks and creates new ones for women and girls. In the countries of the Sahel, food insecurity, due to drought and temperatures rising even faster than the global average, is combining with displacements, widespread insecurities due to violent extremism and communal conflicts to act as “threat multipliers,” increasing levels of intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child marriage. Additional situational factors must also be considered when assessing the gendered impacts of food insecurity; for instance, soaring food prices will impact the ability of women to fulfill the social responsibility of preparing food to break Ramadan fasts, which could lead to violence between intimate partners and affect the mental health of women and girls during this time of intense devotion.

The impacts of food insecurity go even beyond GBV for women and girls. In many cultures, access to food is gender dependent, with women and girls eating last and eating less⁸. For instance, during drought periods, households tend to prioritize food related needs over the protection of women's and girls' dignity, reducing women's and girls' agency when deciding on menstrual hygiene management methods. Furthermore, lack of access to food in quantity and quality has serious consequences on sexual and reproductive health, including increasing the likelihood of and worsening existing anemia, especially among pregnant and lactating women. 12 West African countries feature among the 20 countries with the highest prevalence of anemia in the world, with huge impacts on maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity⁹. The lack of food also amplifies the number of early and forced marriages as households use this human rights violation as a negative strategy to reduce the number of mouths to feed. These human rights violations and health concerns have been extensively reported and have become major concerns for humanitarian actors beyond the GBV sector¹⁰.

In Focus: Burkina Faso and Central African Republic

In Central African Republic (CAR), 43% of the population is food insecure¹¹. The latest projections for April to August 2022 estimate about 2.4 million people, or 49% of the population, will face a high level of acute food insecurity, of which about 689,000 people will be in the emergency phase¹².

In March 2022, 16% of the population of Burkina Faso - or 3.4 million people - are facing acute food insecurity, of which some 600,000 are in the emergency phase. Children and pregnant and lactating women are at highest risks of severe and acute malnutrition, as the United Nations counts 28% overall increase of children at risk and 25% more women through 2022.

⁷ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for all” <https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/cb4474en.pdf>

⁸ Action Against Hunger. Gender Inequality. <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/why-hunger/gender-inequality#:~:text=Women%20are%20often%20more%20vulnerable,nutrient%20rich%20foods%20than%20men>.

⁹ Sahel and West Africa Club. 2019. <http://www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/women-suffering-anaemia-%E2%80%93-major-challenge#:~:text=Anaemia%20is%20reaching%20extremely%20high,highest%20prevalence%20in%20the%20world>.

¹⁰ UNFPA, March 2020. “West and Central Africa, a forgotten region – Women and girls pay the heavy burden.”

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wcar_humanitarian_gbv_context_march_2020.pdf

¹¹ E.g. the population with an elevated IPC index major to 3. Referring to acute food insecurity means IPC Phase 3 or higher. IPC Phase 4 is the emergency phase.

¹² Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Central African Republic: Acute Food Insecurity Projection Update April - August 2021 - Published March 2022

Protracted armed violence has had disruptive effects on the functionality of markets, impacting prices and supply chains in both countries. These, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are the main factors for the deterioration of food security, which will be further aggravated by the Ukrainian crisis on freight and fuel costs in both countries.

In CAR, trends observed in reported GBV incidents over the last 2 years show an increase in reports of intimate partner violence in the lean season, during drought periods and in areas where food insecurity is higher. In Burkina Faso, GBV actors were able to provide GBV specialized services to only 21% of priority areas in 2021. These same areas reported the highest risks of child marriage and child survivors constituted 35% of caseloads for sexual assault.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the high rates of GBV and prevalence of “threat multipliers” in the region, the prevention, risk mitigation and response to GBV in emergencies in West and Central Africa is among the least funded sectoral interventions in the world. Last year, humanitarian response plans¹³ requested 136.5 million USD to protect 4.6 million people, mainly women and girls, from GBV. GBV actors obtained approximately only 19% of such demands, which is disproportionately low compared to the 28.3% of met requests at the global levels. In Mali and Cameroon, less than 5% of the request was met; Chad and Burkina Faso remained below 17% of met need.

At the high-level event: *“Food and Nutrition Crises in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions: time to act now and better mobilize in West Africa for the future”* on 6 April, ***the trend of underfunding GBV interventions cannot continue.***

The GBV Working Group in West and Central Africa calls for the international community to recognize that the exacerbated global food crisis will increase risk of GBV against women and girls of West and Central Africa and commit to the following actions:

- **Donors should** increase support to the comprehensive GBV response to the planned interventions in 2022 humanitarian response plans (HRPs), preferably with longer term interventions, and while demanding that risk mitigation interventions are integrated and budgeted into non-GBV specialized interventions and clusters planning; in light of the region’s food insecurity, this is particularly critical in the Food Security and Nutrition clusters;
- **Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams in the region should** strengthen the use of the GBV Accountability Framework¹⁴ in operations, taking positive measure to address identified gaps;
- **Food Security and Nutrition Actors should:**
 - Reinforce use of GBV IASC Guidelines in food security programme cycles, alongside or in support to mainstreaming IASC Gender Guidelines;
 - Organizations with global commitments to the Call to Action on the Protection from GBV in Emergencies are invited to lead their peers in sharing learning and practices that

¹³ Countries with the HPC cycle in West and Central Africa are : Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

¹⁴GBV Accountability Framework is available here:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GBV%20Accountability%20Framework.pdf>

have shown results in reducing GBV and successfully applied gender transformative approaches;

- Work with local GBV actors, including women-led organizations and communities directly affected by the crisis, to better understand the specific needs of women and girls and resource their efforts to address the root causes and gendered impacts of food insecurity and malnutrition in an appropriate and effective manner;
 - Better integrate prevention of child marriage, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in nutrition and food security programs.
- **GBV actors should:**
- Invest more in data collection and analysis to better identify needs in reducing risks and improve women and girls protection from GBV, and ensure that the voices of women and girls and qualitative data about risks they face are included in assessments, including the use of rapid gender assessments and other tools;
 - Engage more in prevention opportunities with food security and nutrition actors as well as with local feminist organisations for the sustainability of the responses to food insecurity and malnutrition.
- **All Actors should:**
- Work more collaboratively across sectors to address the root causes of food insecurity and respond to them in a holistic way;
 - Approach food security and nutrition response from an intersectional lens to better target the specific needs of the most excluded groups.

the present note is endorsed by the GIHA

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