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Food Systems Conceptual Framework

Companion Guide on Fragility, Conflict, and Violence

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Food Systems Conceptual Framework: Companion Guide on Fragility, Conflict, and Violence

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Front cover: Photo by Tope A. Asokere. Egbado, South Nigeria

Back cover: Photo by Kate McDonald Polakiewicz, USAID. Jefferson Solutions Center for Agriculture-Led Growth. Central market in Jinja town, Uganda.

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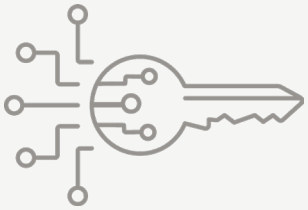
Introduction

This is a companion guide to USAID's food system conceptual framework. It aims to provide guidance on how to think about food systems in the context of fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). Key questions it attempts to answer include:



- How can key food system drivers generate FCV?
- How do different types of violence lead to different outcomes for food systems?
- What are the implications for food system investments in FCV contexts?

Why is it necessary to understand FCV dynamics when considering food systems?

There are alarming trendlines associated with conflict and food insecurity metrics. State-based, non-state, and one-sided violence occurred more frequently from 2011 to 2020. The 110% increase in the total worldwide number of deaths from conflict only tells part of the story—there were 89.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2021, which was more than double the 42.7 million who were displaced at the end of 2012. Hunger metrics, meanwhile, are on a similar upward climb—an estimated 702 to 828 million people worldwide experienced hunger in 2021, a jump of 150 million since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

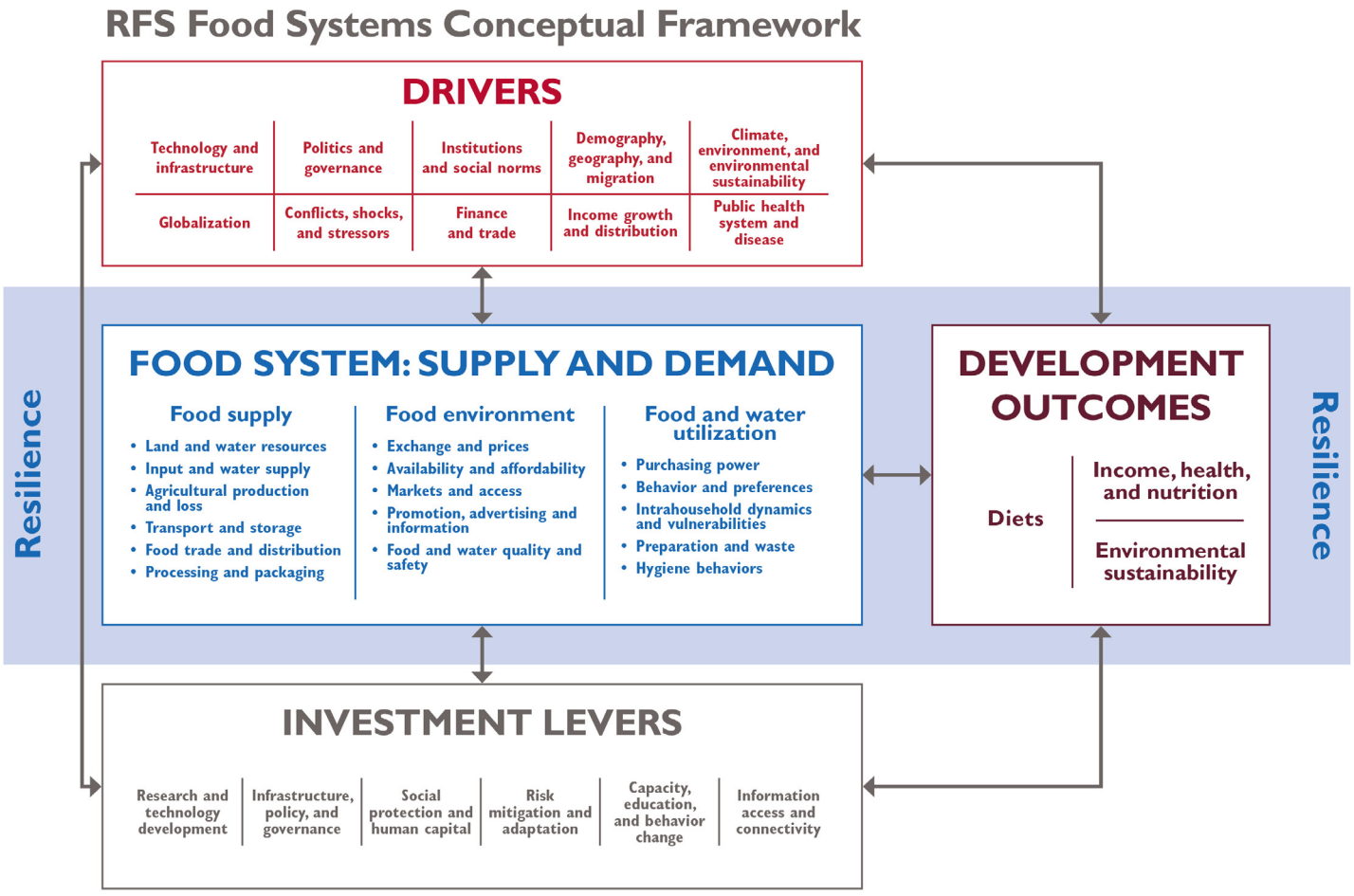
Conflict is a key driver for rising food insecurity, alongside other important factors such as climate variability, economic downturns, and poverty and inequality. Conflict is often the primary driver of the world's most severe food crises. It also interacts with these other key drivers in complex ways that have significant repercussions on food systems.

This document emphasizes how food systems and conflict dynamics are intimately related. Strengthening food systems demands understanding fragility, conflict, and violence. Groups that are most at risk for FCV are often the same groups that are most likely to be marginalized, excluded, or isolated from participating in—and benefiting from—the food system. The upshot is food systems investments could inadvertently favor certain groups over others and inflame tensions, or even offer incentives for recruitment by violent extremist organizations. Food system investments must take FCV dynamics into account not just to promote peace for peace's sake but to meet development outcomes. To put it plainly: food systems and conflict exist within the same set of human experiences and cannot be understood in isolation.

How does USAID define 'food systems'?

The term "food systems" attempts to capture the complex interactions that determine how—and at what cost—people access food. The Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) defined food systems as the "the intact or whole unit made up of interrelated components of people, behaviors, relationships, and material goods that interact in the production, processing, packaging, transporting, trade, marketing, consumption, and use of food, feed, and fiber through aquaculture, farming, wild fisheries, forestry, pastoralism." Broadening, it also notes food systems operate "within and [are] influenced by social, political, economic, and environmental contexts."

The USAID conceptual framework illustrates how key elements of the agency's work come together as part of the food system. The Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) designed the food system conceptual framework specifically to inform USAID programming. The framework not only depicts where RFS' equities influence the food system and its role in inclusively, equitably, and sustainably reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, but it also illustrates the range of ways RFS and other donors might take action through various investment levers. These investments can work to support priority development outcomes: diets, health, incomes, nutrition, and environmental sustainability.



How does USAID define 'FCV'?

Fragility: The vulnerability of a country or region to armed conflict, large-scale violence, or other instability, including an inability to manage transnational threats or other significant shocks. Fragility results from ineffective and/or unaccountable governance, weak social cohesion, and/or corrupt institutions or leaders who lack respect for human rights.

Conflict: Present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals. "Conflict" is a continuum. When channeled constructively into processes of resolution, conflict can be beneficial; however, conflict can also be waged violently, as in war.

Violence: The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

PHOTO CREDIT: MOHAMED ABDULLAH ADAN. PACT. CLANSWOMEN PLAN TOGETHER IN SOMALIA

How can key food systems drivers within USAID's conceptual framework interact with fragility, conflict, and violence?

The external forces that help give food systems their shape can have both positive and negative effects. Many of these forces—depicted as "drivers" in the USAID conceptual framework—interact in complicated ways that can stress the resilience of the entire system. When food systems falter, it not only threatens outcomes identified by USAID—diets; income, health and nutrition; and environmental sustainability—but can also elevate FCV risks. Some of the ways key food system drivers can interact with FCV dynamics include the following:

- **Disruptions to international trade can have profound implications for elevating risks of domestic instability.** International trade is an embedded feature of global food systems.[1] The reliance on foreign markets leaves certain locations particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks that might disrupt imports of staple crops and potentially lead to increases in food prices.

  Food price spikes have been linked to social unrest and urban violence (Bellemare, 2015; Hendrix et al., 2009; Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2019). The relationship between the political turbulence associated with the Arab Spring and global wheat failures is a prominent example of the overall dynamics—supply shocks in key production regions such as Russia led to trade disruptions that contributed to high bread prices in Egypt and elsewhere (Johnstone & Mazo, 2011).

  Conflict can also disrupt trade. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the concerns about a "hurricane of hunger" offers an immediate example. While the system has stabilized to a degree since the shock—the FAO's food price index has been on a steady downward trajectory since February 2022—there are still risks associated with having production concentrated in certain export markets.

- **Shocks such as COVID-19 can impair livelihoods and food access, which can elevate FCV risks.** Food security is determined by the stability associated with *food availability* and *food access*.[2] While the most immediate disruptions associated with food availability and the COVID-19 pandemic may have abated, longer-term implications remain. COVID-19 has had negative consequences on worldwide food access and diet quality by increasing global food prices and damaging livelihoods, pushing tens of millions into debt and extreme poverty.

  Changes in food access have nuanced relationships with FCV dynamics. Conflicts between communities often occur in food insecure areas, with violence

1 Imported food composes more than half of total calories consumed in some regions and is increasing in others where domestic agricultural production is not keeping pace with population growth (SSA countries, for example).

2 Food availability captures where there is adequate supply at local markets; food access refers to whether individuals or groups have the resources to secure food. Despite the initial shock associated with COVID-19, global supply chains have proven to be resilient, sustaining global food availability.

more likely in urban settings, especially in democracies (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2013; Hendrix & Haggard, 2015). While the most food insecure tend not to instigate riots, volatility associated with food access can unite disparate social groups, especially if there are underlying grievances that might enflame tensions.

- **Linkages between climate stress and FCV are often transmitted through food system.** The GFSS identified climate change as both a stressor and risk multiplier for Feed the Future (FTF) programming, describing how it contributes to crop failures, water insecurity, and the depletion of natural resources, among other detrimental outcomes. USAID's recently released Climate Strategy frames climate change as an overlapping and compounding risk, emphasizing how it decreases adaptive capacity to climate shocks.

CREDIT: USAID. SEVERE DROUGHT IMPACTS HONDURAN AGRICULTURE

When considering the relationship between climate, food systems and FCV dynamics, causal relationships are difficult to ascertain and somewhat extraneous. Regardless of whether a particular climate shock is the result of natural fluctuations or human-induced change, climate stresses have core linkages with FCV dynamics that can be transmitted through different channels in the food system. Conflict may emerge when production areas experience changed rainfall patterns—formerly fertile lands experience droughts—or when pests decimate crop yields in an agricultural exporting nation, diminishing supply and pushing up prices.[3]

Syria and Honduras illustrate the importance of considering climate shocks as overlapping and compounding risks instead of drawing a direct, linear line with conflict. While it cannot necessarily be tied to climate change, Syria's recent droughts played a role in the deterioration of livelihoods and internal migration, both of which preceded the outset of hostilities (Selby et al., 2017). In Honduras, attempted migration to the US has been linked with decreases in rainfall in important agricultural regions as well as higher violence rates in larger population centers. The implication is that Hondurans apprehended at the US border have been fleeing both drought and endemic violence within Honduras' larger population centers.

Other food system drivers can also generate FVC dynamics. Income growth and distribution for smallholder farmers have been shaped by globalization and market forces that can impair livelihoods (Clapp, 2021; Clapp & Purugganan, 2020); livelihood failure and contribute to conflict by increasing tensions between groups, fraying social compacts, or changing the perceptions of costs associated with risky of unlawful behavior. Technology and ICT infrastructure can be used to improve agricultural practices, yet social media and digital technology have also been weaponized in places like Myanmar, which can heighten tensions over the delivery of food aid and development programming.

3 Alternatively, policy responses might exacerbate the issue. Countries might respond to climate stresses with export bans or diverting trans-boundary water flows.

How do different kinds of fragility, conflict, and violence interact with the food system and potentially impair development outcomes?

The USAID policy brief on Resilience and Food Security amidst Conflict and Violence examined how food crises are often concentrated in FCV contexts. Many characteristics of conflict's effects on food systems can be generalized—from their implications for diets, income, health, or nutrition, they are almost always negative.

Yet context is still critical, and specific features associated with conflict can influence its relationship with the food system. Different types of FCV have engaged with the food systems and impaired development outcomes in the following ways:

- **High-intensity conflicts over government control often involve significant disruptions to formal markets and food security.** Conflicts that have the most significant disruptions to food systems can often be traced to certain conditions: 1) government control is an animating issue (civil wars); 2) casualty numbers are high; and 3) institutions are weak or failing (Brück & d'Errico, 2019). When all three persist, there is greater opportunity for supply-and-demand channels within the food system to break down.

- **Intercommunal conflicts over resources often endanger agricultural production.** Agriculture's economic importance in rural areas can elevate tensions over physical resources. Those resources might be lands with high crop yields (Ang & Gupta, 2018), grazing and water rights (Odhiambo, 2012), or access to land (Abegunde, 2011). As agricultural production is often a driver of intercommunal conflicts, it also regularly sustains the most damage. The output of staple crops has unsurprisingly fallen in places where fields and farmlands may be mined or targeted, water contaminated or polluted intentionally, or crops destroyed (Adelaja & George, 2019; Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). Even in places where production may remain stable, the influx of displaced people may lead to deficits in food availability as demand surges.

- **Urban protest is often associated with shocks in the food system in weakly institutionalized democracies.** Increases in food prices have been tied to social unrest. The risk for urban violence is more pronounced in democracies or semi-democracies—especially weakly institutionalized democracies or democratizing states. Relative to autocracies, democracies pursue policies that are more favorable to rural areas and less favorable to cities (Hendrix & Haggard, 2015). Urban areas may also have the ability to mobilize mass protests more effectively, and there may be more tolerance for public dissent.

- **Autocratic governments and leaders in fragile states might use the food system as a weapon or as a strategy for maintaining support.** There are various levers: regimes could tie the provision of food to political loyalty as a form of social control, state-owned enterprises may dominate critical segments of the food system to guarantee provision of key supplies and staples, or agricultural producers may receive higher levels of material support, especially when land or income inequalities persist (Thomson, 2017). They also subsidize food prices in the face of global fluctuations while also being less tolerant of organized dissent (Rudolfsen, 2020).

- **Groups that resort to violence may target agriculture for revenue.** Armed groups may use strategies that endanger food security and increase the risk for additional violence. In Afghanistan and Colombia, farmers have been encouraged by market signals—or forced by militant groups—to shift from the production of staple crops to illicit products as a strategy for generating revenue (Messer & Cohen, 2006; Nilsson & González Marín, 2020). The dynamics are not altogether different in Mexico, where illegal narcotics trade has crowded out traditional agriculture (Dube et al., 2016).

- **Prolonged conflict can lead to displacement and forced displacement, which can stress food systems in multiple ways.** Conflict is the largest driver of internal displacement and external refugees. Generally, conflict and large numbers of IDPs disrupt agriculture, markets and trade, compromise food security, and contribute to poverty. Local circumstances can alter outcomes. Nigeria has experienced recent conflict over governance considerations (the Boko Haram insurgency) and intercommunal grievances (farmer-herder disputes). The relationship between conflict type and the impact of displaced people has divergent effects on overall agricultural production (negative for insurgency; positive for communal violence), labor profiles (households work more hours in environments where displaced people are fleeing insurgencies), and crop selection (high-nutrient cash crops such as beans are favored with insurgencies, while heavier items such as potatoes are produced less) (George & Adelaja, 2021).

PHOTO CREDIT: UN. UNMISS MEETING WITH LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES IN SOUTH SUDAN

What are the implications for food system investments in FCV contexts?

The interplay between FCV and food systems is complex. To consider how it can support the development outcomes identified in its food system conceptual framework—diets; income, health, and nutrition; environmental sustainability—as well as strategically plan programming in FCV settings, USAID can consider the following steps.

CONDUCT A CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT

The better we understand the connections between conflict and food systems, the better we can meet our programming goals. Carefully understanding the context is the first and most critical step to strengthening resilience and inclusive agriculture-led growth in FCV contexts. Understanding the context includes, but is not limited to, understanding the history of a place (and recognizing that history will be understood differently by different groups), the causes and logic of violence, and opportunities for building peace.

For FTF programming, special attention is needed to understand how the dynamics that fuel conflict interact with agriculture, the food system, and different groups (e.g., seeds, supply chains, crop management, storage, and markets). Since conflict-affected and fragile contexts are highly dynamic, conflict assessments may quickly go out of date. It will be important to frequently collect information from multiple sources, including perception information from different groups and segments in society.

ALWAYS BEGIN WITH CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Conflict sensitivity is an essential first step in conflict integration. Conflict sensitivity builds on a fundamental best practice: it centers on carefully understanding the context and the two-way relationship between programming and the context. The goal of conflict sensitivity is to both minimize potential harms and to maximize opportunities for peace. There are always opportunities for food and agriculture investments to be leveraged towards peace. We can identify specific ways in which USAID programming can create opportunities to bring communities together (or at least not exclude them) as well as ways in which planning programming might lead to diversion, substitution, or other conflict and corruption-related consequences.

RECOGNIZE THE COMPLEX RISK ENVIRONMENT AND BUILD RESILIENCE

In addition to conducting conflict analysis, it is important to understand the multi-risk environment in order to build resilience. Multisectoral resilience approaches can improve well-being and livelihoods in FCV contexts while also addressing conflict drivers and promoting peace. By managing multiple risks at once, programming can better respond to the problems and realities that people face in their day-to-day lives. Conflict-sensitive approaches that strengthen resilience through multisectoral investments are the best way to help people recover from current crises and ensure that they are prepared for the next crisis as well.

IDENTIFY WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY AND PEACE DIVIDENDS

Even in FCV contexts there are almost always windows of opportunity—time periods when things calm down, or buffer regions of relative stability where we can find creative ways to leverage what is working well and find opportunities for peace.

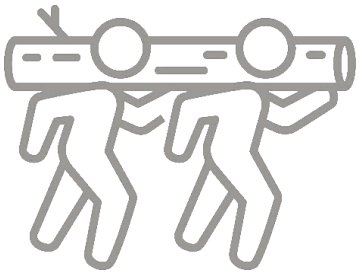
Windows of opportunity emerge within the food system and across scale and time. For instance, programming can focus on the household level to maintain food security (e.g., storage and processing) when violence is increasing or movement is restricted. When freedom of movement resumes, interventions can adapt to focus on systemic impacts on the food system (e.g., land titling, water access, social cohesion).

Beyond windows of opportunity, USAID investments can be leveraged for peace if we think creatively about how they can accomplish important goals like strengthening social cohesion, reducing inequality and grievances, increasing trust, sharing information, and creating a positive relationship between citizens and their government. For instance, support for a community land trust can create new rules for sharing land between farmers and pastoralists and demonstrate the benefits of collaboration for both parties. Investments in agricultural and livestock extension services can build trust between citizens and government around shared problems. By contributing to a more peaceful environment, USAID programming is more likely to achieve its core goals.

PRIORITIZE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Conditions within conflict-affected areas can change rapidly and without warning. It is critical to build operational plans and strategies that make sense within unpredictable environments so pivots can be made when necessary. FTF programming should incorporate Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA), including pause-and-reflect sessions focused explicitly on climate implications and draft Assessment and Authorization documents to incorporate shock-responsive and other adaptive management language to enable programming pivots in response to changing conflict dynamics, such as crisis modifiers. Missions can also develop scenario and contingency planning, or different programming zones based on permissiveness. By increasing the likelihood of ongoing engagement by practitioners, such planning can ensure development gains are not lost.

WORK WITH AND THROUGH LOCAL SYSTEMS AND PARTNERS



Working with and through local food systems is more important than ever in fragile, conflict-affected and violent contexts. Locally led development and direct partnerships with local leaders, networks, groups, and institutions is critical in fragile and conflict-affected places. It is also more complicated, especially when in some contexts USAID cannot formally partner with government actors. This may mean working with and through both formal and informal markets, informal governance, and nontraditional local actors, including private sector actors outside the usual suspects and a diverse set of local partners—from farmers, community leaders, women, men, and youth to government officials, traders, and the private sector—with special attention to strengthening social cohesion and the relationship between citizens and their government. Choosing local leaders, networks, groups, and institutional partners must be grounded in conflict sensitivity.

Transition awards and opportunities like Local Works offer innovative ways of working with local actors, while co-creation processes can also be designed to promote feedback and local ownership. Throughout the program lifecycle, the Local Systems Framework offers an overarching approach to engaging with local systems. The 5Rs (Results, Roles, Relationships, Rules and Resources) framework and CLA writ large also provide useful ways to assess local context and provide guidance on program design and monitoring.

ENSURE HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACE ASSISTANCE COHERENCE

Promoting coherence across humanitarian, development, and peace assistance is key for working in fragile and conflict-affected places. People living amid conflict and violence do not think in terms of sectors or kinds of assistance: they think about the problems they face in their lives. Coherence across humanitarian assistance, development assistance, and peace assistance in pursuit of collective outcomes whenever and wherever possible is critical for maximizing the impact of interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

In 2022, USAID's Resilience Leadership Council developed a set of key principles for pursuing humanitarian, development, and peace assistance coherence:

- Uphold and respect humanitarian principles to ensure humanitarian assistance remains unhindered and effective.
- Plan jointly, and seek a common agenda.
- Create and strengthen communication, coordination, and learning platforms across different kinds of assistance.
- Strategically sequence, layer, and integrate humanitarian, development, and peace assistance where appropriate.
- Promote shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management.
- Champion conflict integration and opportunities for enabling or building peace where possible.
- Ensure programming is with, by, and through local partners and systems.

CREDIT: MORGANA WINGARD. INCREASING PRODUCTION AND NUTRITION IN BANGLADESH

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