

# COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

## COPING WITH ARMED CONFLICT AND HUNGER

MALI AND SOUTH SUDAN



welt  
hunger  
hilfe

**CONCERN**  
worldwide

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This publication is a supplement to the 2015 Global Hunger Index and is published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe.

# INTRODUCTION

The 2015 GHI confirms that 52 countries across the globe are experiencing “serious” or “alarming” levels of hunger. In a world of abundance, 795 million people are going hungry and millions are forced to leave their homes each year. By the end of last year, almost 60 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence, or human rights violations. Moreover, millions of innocent men, women and children live through the horrors of armed conflict every day.

As we mark the tenth anniversary of the Global Hunger Index, it is time to focus on the threads which bind together the two human tragedies of hunger and armed conflict. When people are affected by violent conflict which separates them from their homes and land, disrupts planting schedules or results in the destruction of crops, their food and nutrition security inevitably suffers. Though much progress has been made in the fight against hunger, the international community continues to struggle to resolve conflicts quickly enough so that hunger and the need for humanitarian response are minimized.

Concern and Welthungerhilfe work in some of the most challenging and remote places on the planet. We witness the combined reality of hunger and armed conflict. Over the following pages, we look more closely at the links between the two in Mali and South Sudan.

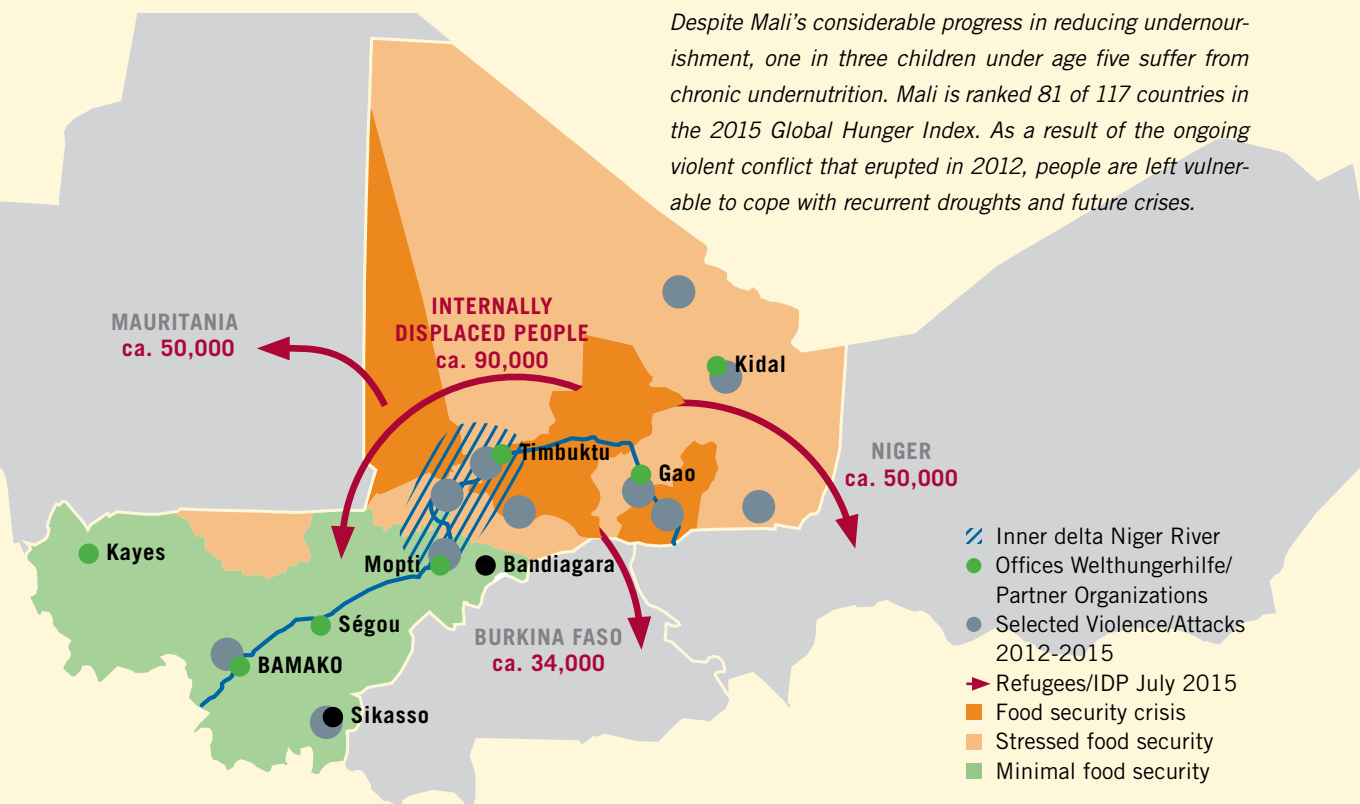
Both organizations have been implementing humanitarian and long-term development programs for decades. Welthungerhilfe has worked across Mali since 1968, while Concern Worldwide has been present in South Sudan since 1994, working primarily in the wider Bahr el Ghazal region.

Both countries present many of the challenges of working in so-called ‘fragile states’: weak governance, protracted crises, cyclical environmental hazards, lack of security, an underdeveloped infrastructure and, in the case of South Sudan, a weak civil society. Both countries are also places of beauty with people of great passion and resilience living their lives in the face of tremendous hardship. The following pages give an account of the challenges faced and the struggle to overcome them on a daily basis.



# MALI: HUNGER, HARASSMENT AND HOPE

Despite Mali's considerable progress in reducing undernourishment, one in three children under age five suffer from chronic undernutrition. Mali is ranked 81 of 117 countries in the 2015 Global Hunger Index. As a result of the ongoing violent conflict that erupted in 2012, people are left vulnerable to cope with recurrent droughts and future crises.



**SURROUNDED BY SAND DUNES**, Toya, a small village southwest of Timbuktu, is located near the Niger River in the Sahara Desert of northern Mali. People depend on the river for their survival. Its tributaries irrigate their fields. They fish in the river. Their cattle graze along its banks.

In 2012, everyday life here was suddenly disrupted when violent insurgents invaded the village and attacked those who could not escape. Sixty-five-year-old Hadi Mahamane vividly remembers: “I also tried to flee. But I soon ran out of money and had to return after two months only. I went back home and took care of my children’s children. We were ten people in the house, living from what was left behind and through our neighbors’ solidarity. Those who had a sheep or a bag of rice shared it. Gardening was not possible. Even if women would have been allowed to leave the house, the spirit wasn’t there. We lived, were physically present, but the fear paralyzed us. I never ate to my satisfaction, in order to give to the children. But it was still not enough. They were weak and I took them to the local health center. There, they told me, that the children aren’t sick, they’re hungry.” Her story says much about Mali’s recent crisis, which saw women and children isolated in their houses while men went in search of money and food. Others left in shame, as they had no way to oppose the rebels’ arms and so were forced to watch the insurgents harassing their wives and children.

#### Security deteriorating in the north

Mali’s northern territories fell under control of Tuareg separatists when soldiers launched a military coup against the government in March 2012. Low-ranking officers had been unsatisfied with the government’s inaction, and felt underequipped for the fight against the northern Tuareg rebellion since January 2012. Tuaregs traditionally live a nomadic pastoral lifestyle across the Sahara and the northern Sahel Region. In April 2012, Tuareg separatists allied with criminal networks and Islamist extremists who partly originated from neighboring countries. They used the existing power gap to attack major towns in the north and advance further south.

At the beginning of the violent insurgency in the north, around 4.6 million Malians were already suffering from food insecurity caused by a lack of rains in 2011 (UN OCHA 2012). This drought in conjunction with the return of unemployed and highly armed Tuareg soldiers from Libya finally triggered the crisis in the north. Tuaregs have always fought for more autonomy in the north and have claimed as independent Azawad the traditional Tuareg territory across the Sahara and Sahel Region. This claim dates back to colonial times. However, within a few days of the insurgency’s start, the Tuareg-dominated National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) invaded Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu with the support of Islamist extremists. Extremists took over and imposed their own Islamic rules and regulations on local population. Many human rights abuses were reported. The violations that took place reduced social cohesion and undermined the respect for the rule of law.



“We lived, were physically present, but the fear paralyzed us. I never ate to my satisfaction in order to give to the children.”

#### Hadi Mahamane

from Toya, a small village southwest of Timbuktu

# 4.1%

of the Malian population is **undernourished**.

# 12.7%

of children under five are **wasted**.

# 38.3%

of the children under five are **stunted**.

# 12.3%

of children **die** before the age of five.

Map page 4: Food security: CILSS June 2015; selected violence/attack 2012-2015: ACLED 2015; refugees/IDPs: UNHCR July 2015.

“When the rebels of the MNLA invaded Toya in April 2012, they took everything they could find: Motor pumps, fuel, motorbikes, tools, etc. People were seriously afraid. Some fled; others were locked in their houses. No one actually slept,” describes the village chief Yacouba Mahamane Touré. “The majority of the villagers are farmers who rely on agriculture. Everybody farms, even the Peul [cattle herders], and the Bozo [fishers]. But even if your things hadn’t been robbed, no one cultivated. Everybody was afraid to go to their fields nearby the village. Those staying further away, a bit isolated, took refuge in our village. Cattle was popular, rebels often snatched the livestock for their own consumption.”

During the nine-month occupation of the north, stocks were carefully consumed and not sold. Petrol and water pumps for irrigating paddy fields and land were removed or sold in favor of cash. Agricultural fields were abandoned, chemical fertilizer restricted and infrastructure such as dykes intended to prevent the Niger from flooding were left unserved. Livestock was stolen or died from weakness and disease as a consequence of limited movement, restricted pasture and an absence of veterinary services. Fishermen lost their livelihoods, as did those who worked alongside them. Administrative officials fled, including policemen and teachers. Cash flow halted. Shops and banks were closed. Development projects were suspended.

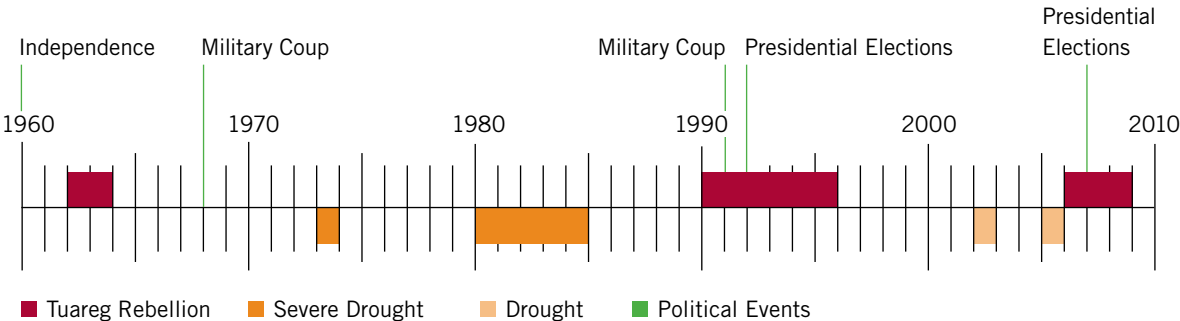
Women were particularly badly affected. “With the rebel’s rigid policy and dressing codes, we were seriously afraid and hardly went out. We were forced to stay in the house. That means we neither had sufficient

water nor food in the house. With the little we had, we managed and survived. Most of us reduced the number of meals from three to one per day. Vegetables were not available,” explains Fatimata Dicko, a community leader at the health center in Kabara, a village 7 km south of Timbuktu town. Children became so weak that they often succumbed to diarrhea or fever. Around a quarter of Timbuktu’s 45,000 people fled in 2012 (UN OCHA 2013).

In January 2013, the Malian army with the support of French troops regained control from the extremists over the northern territories. People celebrated their “liberation”. An African-led International Support Mission (AFISMA) was quickly established and later transformed into the United Nations peacekeeping mission Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), encompassing about 12,000 personnel. To restore constitutional democracy, presidential elections were organized under enormous international pressure and held in July 2013. First peace negotiations were conducted in 2013 in Burkina Faso and a ceasefire was reached in summer 2014. Both broke down repeatedly. In June 2015, after months of intense discussions in Algier, Tuareg separatists and the Malian Government signed the present peace accord. This brought hope to the people but will take time to reach all parts of the vast north. Being trapped in an asymmetric conflict with different factions, the MINUSMA, working to support the accord’s implementation, has become a target of violent attacks themselves. With nearly sixty deaths since 2013, it is currently the UN’s most dangerous peacekeeping mission (UN MINUSMA 2015).

## Timeline

The timeline reflects the chronology and sometimes concurrence of significant political events, droughts, and stages of Tuareg rebellions in Mali throughout its younger history since gaining Independence from France.



Half of Mali's population is younger than fifteen

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Mali's population has experienced tremendous hardship resulting from chronic food insecurity and political crisis. Regional disparities and weak governance, especially in the north, have led to recurrent cycles of violence. Natural hazards, like droughts, flash floods or locust disasters, tend to occur in shorter sequences. They weaken progress made over time, and make people more vulnerable to crises, aggravating food and nutrition insecurity.

Mali still ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world and its hunger situation is considered “serious” in the 2015 GHI. The country is trapped in a vicious circle of persistent hunger and endemic poverty. Mali's population growth is one of the highest worldwide, with nearly half of all Malians younger than fifteen years of age. Struggling to receive adequate education and generate income or to support their families, almost half of the population is unemployed, leaving them with scarce future prospects. Economic development cannot keep pace with the population growth. Half of the population is living in poverty, on less than US\$ 1.25 a day (Breisinger et al. 2015, von Grebmer, K. 2015, UNDP 2014, Wee et al. 2014).

“During the occupation, everybody had to support the family. I used to be a tailor before but lost my work. So, I went to support someone producing local bricks. We had to earn something. The little we received, we used to buy food for our family,” reports 32-year old Sory Ibrahim from Diré, a small town on the Niger River's left bank, 120 km south of Timbuktu. He travelled to Timbuktu by boat, which is a one-day's journey. In July 2015, roads are still too dangerous and people prefer the slower but safer journey on the Niger.

Young people are particularly exposed to Mali's crisis, facing enormous social and economic strain. Eager to take up their responsibilities in society, they lack even simple administrative documents



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Sory Ibrahim

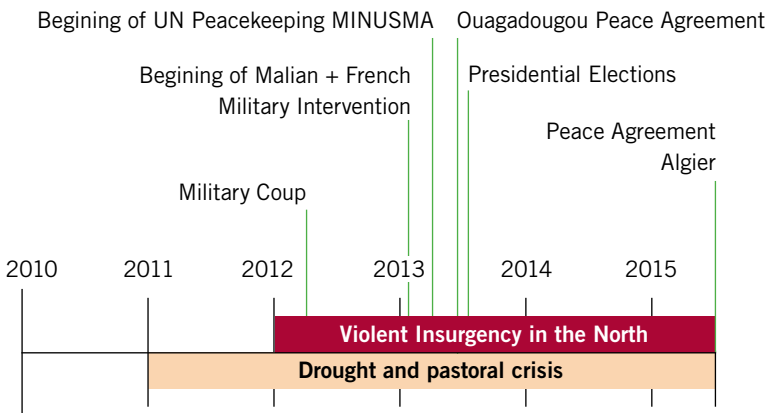
from Diré, a small town on the Niger River's left bank



“With the rebel's rigid policy and dressing codes, we were seriously afraid and hardly went out. That means we neither had sufficient water nor food in the house. Most of us reduced the number of meals from three to one per day.”

Fatimata Dicko

a community leader at the health center in Kabara, south of Timbuktu





like birth certificates needed to apply for official identity cards. Unregistered and unemployed, the young continue to be excluded from active citizenship and economic development. They remain especially prone to plans promising fast and good money. Trapped by the economic pressure and increased lack of security, many have felt forced to collaborate with violent insurgents.

### Increasingly scarce resources fueling conflict

The Saharan desert covers two-thirds of Mali's territory, and around 10 percent of the total national population of 16 million. The geographical conditions alone are challenging: Providing basic services like roads, health facilities and education, and connecting such a vast area to the country's south, is difficult and expensive. "When the road from Douentza to Timbuktu is blocked, Timbuktu is like a prison. Nothing comes in and nothing goes out. But one has to understand that Timbuktu's people are nomads and traders. As history shows, we have always moved freely. Farmers from the surrounding villages, even the whole region, come to Timbuktu to sell their agricultural products," recalls Timbuktu's Mayor Hallé Ousmane Cissé. Not willing to leave the population of his town, the mayor had stayed throughout the crisis. "People were afraid to leave their houses. They were humiliated and demoralized," adds Cissé. At that time, he admits that he felt disconnected from the interim government in Mali's capital Bamako.

This feeling of being left behind is characteristic of the relationship between the north and south, and has often led to unrest. Even though the decentralization process led to important improvements, governments have not succeeded yet in overcoming all structural and geographical obstacles. In the absence of greater autonomy for northern territories, the traditionally nomadic Tuareg in particular have remained dissatisfied, reflecting the rebellion of various separatist Tuareg groups since independence (Etang-Ndip, et al. 2015, Institute for Economics and Peace 2015, Wee et al. 2014).

Despite all demographic, socio-economic and geographical difficulties, Mali has the greatest agricultural potential of the wider Sahel Region. Around eighty percent of the population is engaged in agriculture. Most of them are smallholder farmers relying on rain-fed agriculture, keeping cattle or sheep or making a living

from fishing (Wee et al. 2014). Since only three percent of the rural land is either irrigated or located along the Niger River, Mali's agricultural output relies mainly on rainfall. While people in the dryer northern part of the country keep livestock and move around to find fertile land, people in the south live mainly from crop production.

With the main rainy season occurring between June and September, the rainfalls usually provide enough water to live by throughout the rest of the year (WFP 2015, USAID 2014). But with a changing climate, the rainfall seasons change, temperatures rise, bushland and fields turn into deserts, and people struggle to harvest their crops and feed animals. Conflicts over scarce resources are growing. With disputes over land and water, the risk of violent clashes between farmers and herders is also increasing. Rising food prices following a weak harvest or livestock deaths increase the difficulties people face feeding themselves and their families. Lack of income and unemployment reduce the purchasing power, and hunger is on the rise.

### The armed conflict spills further south

Since the 1990s, Mali's northern territories had seen an influx of criminal and extremist networks, undermining the relationship between government and society. Illicit financial flows, initially through cigarettes and arms trafficking and later through drug and human trafficking, led to the establishment of multiple governance structures at local levels. These illicit businesses also threatened the fragile peace, and laid the foundation for 2012's violent insurgency.

Historically, unrest was an issue associated with the north. However, in 2015, the crisis took a new dimension, when Islamist extremists attacked towns like Sikasso, Mali's second largest city and economic hub, less than 400 km south of Bamako.

Even before the crisis, many people in southern areas had suffered from structural poverty and food insecurity. "But the whole situation became aggravated. The food security situation worsened," explains André Kanambaye, coordinator of Welthungerhilfe's local partner organization Molibemo, based in Bandiagara. "And the conflict seriously increased mistrust amongst the people. People only trust those they have known a long time. Any stranger is suspiciously regarded or easily reported to the police."



### Consequences of the armed conflict

Following 2012's political crisis and violence, people lost their agricultural production, and livestock and became more vulnerable to the annual lean season in the middle of the year. Due to displacement and a lack of investment, they missed the cultivation period in mid-2013, which aggravated the already stressed food security situation. While conflicts in Gao and Kidal were more violent than in Timbuktu, more than 520,000 people left their place of origin in the north – 32 percent fled to neighboring Burkina Faso, Mauritania or Niger, and 68 percent to friends and family members in Mopti, Ségou or Bamako (UN OCHA 2013). Mali, in contrast to other countries, has not seen the establishment of large displacement camps inside the country, even in the midst of the crisis. Still, people lost their personal belongings and were traumatized, having never before experienced such humiliation. Staying with families or friends also affected their ability to feed their own children. The most vulnerable who did not have any means to move stayed in their villages. The three northern regions experienced a tremendous loss in staple food. More than 90 percent of those who were internally displaced and 75 percent of those who fled to other countries lost their animals. At the end of 2013, between 70 and 90 percent of the population in the north needed assistance from international organizations in the form of food rations (Etang-Ndip et al. 2015, WFP 2015, Coulibaly 2014, Kimenyi et al. 2014, Wee et al. 2014).

### Indirect affects across regional borders

The lack of security had a negative impact on food security in other regions, too. Trading in vegetables and fruits between the south and the north was disrupted, as Mamoudou Nantoumé from Toignon, Bandiagara, explains. “In Toignon, we used to sell our vegetables to Gao, mainly tomatoes, aubergines, cucumbers and onions. We sold the products to the traders in Bandiagara, who then organized the transport and commerce with the north. In the past, they agreed to any price that we proposed. But with the crisis, they did not have the means. We used to sell the onion for 500 FCFA [80 US cents] a kilo. Today, it has reduced to 300 [50 US cents], maximum 360 FCFA [60 US cents]. There are no traders anymore. Everybody was afraid of attacks and traders stayed back. Even today, things have not changed. People are afraid. They stopped travelling.”

Supra-regional livestock markets were also distorted. Between 2011 and 2013, the price of cattle more than tripled, the price of sheep quintupled and the price of goats more than doubled (Kimenyi et al. 2014).

Tourism, another important economic sector in Mali, has totally collapsed due to the northern crisis. Many foreigners around the globe used to be attracted by the beautiful Dogon Plateau and impressive Dogon culture of the Bandiagara area, a UNESCO World Heritage site. “Tourists visiting Bandiagara and the Dogon Plateau disappeared. Guest-houses and restaurants are closed, tour guides, drivers and other service

In mid-2013, more than  
**520,000**  
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origin in the north.

Around  
**170,000**  
fled to neighboring  
countries.

More than  
**350,000**  
were internally displaced,  
looking for refuge with  
relatives within Mali.

providers jobless. Many became unemployed, lost money, and the means to buy food stuff on the market. They were forced to go back to the field or left the area to search for new jobs in urban areas,” explains Molibemo coordinator André Kanambaye.

### A fragile peace

In 2014, the security and the food situation began to improve. People started returning to their places of origin, cultivating their land. Many humanitarian organizations picked up the work they had to leave due to the crisis. But at the beginning of 2015, ahead of peace talks in Algier, the situation worsened again. Violence reemerged, with further attacks on civilians, police and UN peacekeeping personnel. Out of fear, many are leav-

#### A FLEXIBLE APPROACH IN TIMES OF ARMED CONFLICT

In 2013, Welthungerhilfe and its Malian partners were among the first to return to the north, providing emergency food assistance. At the same time, communities and displaced returnees received agricultural equipment to revive their livelihoods. To rehabilitate their agricultural infrastructure and generate initial income, people participated in cash for work programs. Community health centers were supported to prevent and treat cases of acute malnutrition and provide nutrition education for mothers. Aside from the food and nutrition security aspect, Welthungerhilfe and its partners also aim for projects focusing on conflict prevention and providing future perspectives for the youth. As an example, young adults were offered professional training and skills development, brought together for theatre and musical projects and trained in conflict resolution skills. Until now, security in the north is shattered, and access remains difficult. To minimize risks of violent attacks and loss of goods, transport is being organized in convoys or on the Niger, and distributions are announced on a short notice. Armed conflict requires more flexibility of the international community, combining emergency aid with long-term perspectives. The Malian government and civil society have to be supported in their efforts to restore a long-lasting peace in the country.

ing their homes again, with up to 100,000 being internally displaced, in addition to the 137,000 refugees who fled to neighboring countries (UN OCHA 2015). Leaving behind their land and livestock disrupts their daily lives and erodes the little progress they made since the first outbreak of the crisis in 2012. The rains began late, as has the planting season, and there is a lack of pasture for the livestock. The recurring shocks resulting from droughts and violence are eroding the little means people had to survive before the armed conflict.

### Building bridges and contributing to a rich food basket

Despite the crisis, people are fighting to regain control over their lives. At the time of this writing, the situation in the town of Timbuktu has calmed, with motorbikes and cars back in town, electricity stable, banks functioning, shops and markets opened again, and even the old city hall renovated and fully functioning. With the support of the German Foreign Affairs Office, the Peace Garden established in 1996 on the outskirts of Timbuktu was rehabilitated by Welthungerhilfe and its partner organization Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (AMSS) in 2013. The Garden is a positive symbol: Women of different origin work together to overcome distrust, growing vegetables, increasing the diversity of foods they eat at home and selling products at the market which generates income for the families.

“Without noticing the entrance, one could easily imagine being in the bush. When we started rehabilitating the garden before the rainy season in mid-2013, there was only sand, old and dead trees, but no garden,” remembers Zarin Yattara, president of the Women Group Alhamdouhlaye. Today, Zarin is one of the 460 women cultivating the Peace Garden throughout the year. To rehabilitate the garden, cash for work was organized, women groups revived, cash transfers and inputs provided. “Today, we consume vegetables in our families again. Another part is given to neighbors and sold at the market in Timbuktu. With this, our children are healthy again. Even the men demand vegetables today. In the past, they denied anything apart from meat and rice. We made them taste it and they liked it. With the money we earn, we can send our children to school or buy medication,” says Zarin. The Garden serves the markets in Timbuktu with long beans, salad, beetroot, carrots, tomatoes and potatoes. “All over town, you can now find vegetables from the Peace Garden.

Its rehabilitation increased vegetable supply in the whole district,” adds Timbuktu’s mayor Cissé.

Nowadays, the Peace Garden in Timbuktu is famous beyond regional borders. Four hectares are cultivated and forty-two women associations are involved. But the garden is not only about vegetable production. As forty-year-old Tita Maïga vividly describes: “The idea of the Peace Garden is to bring people together. Women from all ethnic groups jointly cultivate, no matter if locals, displaced or returnees. We get along very well and regained our dignity. Women particularly suffered from the harassment and the inability to nourish our families.” With their successes, the women hope that the spirit of the peace garden may spread throughout the country.

### Conclusion

Mali is a worrying example of a country’s destabilization by recurrent crises. Longstanding conflicts between farmers and cattle holders are intensified by a number of natural disasters. Livelihoods in the north are in danger, aggravated by a lack of food, assets, cattle or basic services. People who are used to living with scarce resources might be able to cope with one shock. But living through deficient years, in addition to insecurity imposed by armed conflict leaves them more vulnerable to any further crisis. People who are displaced and deprived lose the chance to grow enough food for the following year.

Armed conflict further destabilized already weak governance structures. Extremists and criminals used the power vacuum to take over in the north. It is generally an explosive mixture: with millions of young people across west and northern Africa left without future perspectives, extremists or bandits easily find recruits.

Signing the Peace Agreement by all parties was an important step forward. However, it needs to be backed up: Political and institutional reforms have to be implemented. In addition to the decentralization process, access to basic infrastructure for the people in the north must be further improved. To measure and address food and nutrition insecurity, access to the northern regions is critical.

Restoring security and the rule of law should be another priority to prevent a vicious circle of hunger and armed conflict in Mali. A national reconciliation process is hardly possible without ensuring justice and human rights.

Ending dependency on emergency aid is equally important. People need to be enabled to feed themselves and to start restoring their livelihoods supported by seeds or cattle, for example. Improvement of farming and irrigation is required. Long-term and context-specific solutions should aim for a better infrastructure and a socio-economic development offering a perspective for the unemployed youth.

Combining these development efforts with peace building and conflict resolution is a crucial step toward moving forward, but much more needs to be done to enable the people in Mali to live in peace and dignity.



“The idea of the peace garden is to bring people together. Women from all ethnic groups jointly cultivate, no matter if locals, displaced or returnees. We get along very well and regained our dignity.”

### Tita Maïga

one of the women working in the Peace Garden in Timbuktu



“Even the men demand vegetables today. In the past, they denied anything apart from meat and rice. We made them to taste it and they liked it. With the money we earn, we can send our children to school or buy medication.”

### Zarin Yattara

President of a women’s group working in the Peace Garden

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# SOUTH SUDAN: CATTLE, CONFLICT AND COPING

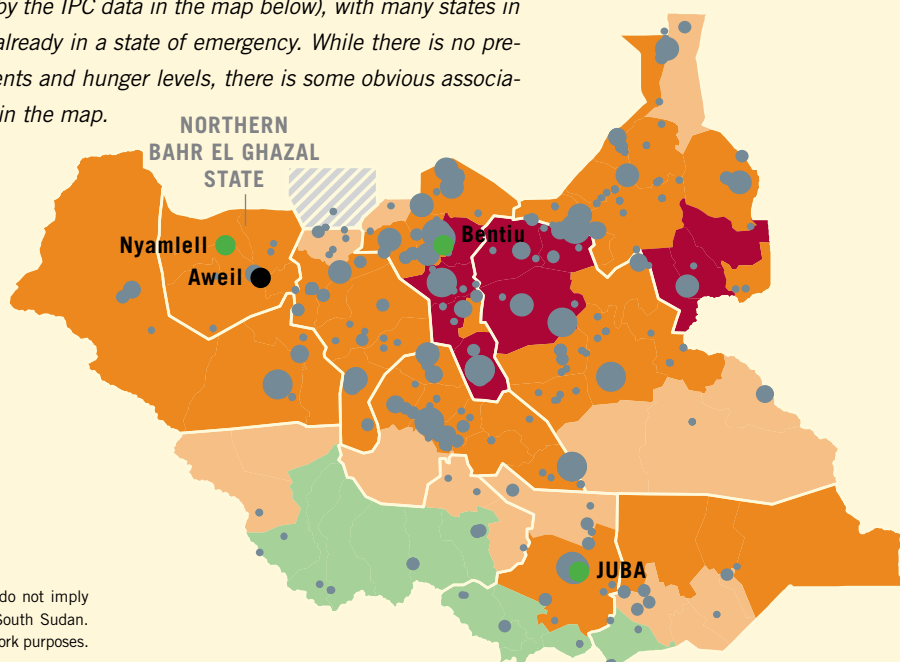
The outlook for food security in South Sudan in July 2015 is bleak, as represented by the food insecurity situation (described by the IPC data in the map below), with many states in crisis phase and a smaller number already in a state of emergency. While there is no precise correlation between conflict events and hunger levels, there is some obvious association or contribution, as represented in the map.

**MAP 1. ARMED CONFLICT EVENTS (DEC 2013 – JUNE 2015) AND PROJECTED FOOD INSECURITY (JULY 2015)**

- Concern
- Armed Conflict Events
- Emergency
- Food security crisis
- Stressed food security
- Minimal food security
- ▨ Abyei Area

Note: State and County Boundaries on this map do not imply acceptance or recognition by the Government of South Sudan. They are shown on the map only for humanitarian work purposes.

(Sources: Armed Conflict Events: ACLED, 2015; and Projected Food Insecurity: IPC TWG, April 2015.)



## Introduction

The potential of South Sudan is enormous. It is blessed with rich natural resources and deep agricultural potential. It has a young and vibrant population embarking on a newly independent future. Widespread and often intense armed conflict, however, is preventing the South Sudanese people from realising their hopes and dreams.

In mid-2015, South Sudan is facing another hunger crisis, one triggered by late rains and the many consequences of conflict, including spiraling inflation, interrupted trade and the lack of cultivation due to displacement. Together, these create a perfect storm and leave a large swath of the population at risk of extreme hunger. There is a strong folk memory of previous hungry years and widespread fear that 2015 will match some of the worst years on record.

## Conflict in South Sudan: A Potted History

The South Sudanese people have experienced armed conflict almost continuously since the 1950s. Over 2.5 million lives have been lost and the livelihoods of tens of millions of people have been affected (MOHDAM, 2010) over two particularly intense periods of armed conflict.

The first was the civil war between the government of the Republic of Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) which lasted from 1983 to 2005. This was largely regarded as a North–South conflict for control over resources and, from the perspective of the SPLA/M, for political autonomy, self-determination and secularism. The conflict intensified after the discovery of oil in the South in the 1980s. Political negotiations in the early 2000s led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and ultimately to a referendum in South Sudan on independence. In 2011, South Sudan proclaimed its independence and became the newest state in the world.

The second and current conflict within the newly independent Republic of South Sudan erupted in December 2013 with a split in the SPLA government. This split is associated with ethnic divisions between the Dinka, led by President Salva Kiir, and the Nuer, led by ex-Vice President Riak Machar. As of mid-2015, the fighting continues across South Sudan, especially in Unity and Upper Nile States in the north of the new country. There has been major population displacement. As of July 2015, there are 1.6 million internally displaced people, 607,608 recorded South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries and 4.6 million people severely food insecure in South Sudan. The number of civilians seeking safety in PoC sites in UNMISS bases is 166,142, including 103,913 in Bentiu. This represents an increase of about 64,000 people since December 2014 (UNOCHA, July 2015).

**“Money falls through your fingers but cattle are forever.”**

**Dinka proverb**



**“In the past, the fighting was only between soldiers. Civilians, children, cows, gardens and houses were not targeted. This conflict is totally different.”**

**Naditne Thoch**  
from Guit

There is insufficient data for calculating the 2015 GHI score for South Sudan. While figures are available for stunting (at 31.1%) and wasting (at 22.7%) in children under five, the absence of data on proportion of undernourished in the population means that a GHI calculation cannot be made.

## The Link between Armed Conflict and Hunger

Much has been written about the link between armed conflict and hunger, both the obvious impact of conflict on hunger as well as food insecurity as a contributory factor in conflict (Messer et al., 2001; Teodosijević, 2003; Messer and Cohen, 2006; World Bank, 2010; Brinkman and Hendrix, 2011; Simmons, 2013; Breisinger et al., 2014; Breisinger et al., 2015; de Waal, 2015).

Tufts University and the Overseas Development Institute have written much on the Sudanese and South Sudanese contexts, examining issues of secure livelihoods in the context of a protracted conflict (Maxwell et al, 2012; Gordon, 2014; Maxwell and Santschi, 2014; Santschi et al., 2014; d'Errica et al., 2014) and looking at lessons from Operation Lifeline Sudan (Maxwell et al. 2014, 2015). The learning from these and other studies informed the nature of the enquiry of this case study.

## Glimpses of Reality in South Sudan

The following pages reflect the memories, experiences and coping strategies of ordinary South Sudanese people who have been living through a violent era. Their perspectives were captured in discussions over the summer of 2015 involving over 150 people, some through Focus Group Discussions and some through individual interviews. These took place in or near Nyamlell, Aweil and in Bentiu. The intention of this piece is to amplify the views and voices of community members regarding the link between hunger and armed conflict, and to reflect the choices they face and how they make decisions when faced with limited choices.

## Context 1: Indirectly Affected by Conflict: Northern Bahr el Ghazal

Northern Bahr el Ghazal is in the northwest of South Sudan bordering the South Darfur state of the Republic of Sudan. It lies in the western flood plains and the main livelihoods are based on livestock and sorghum cultivation.

## Memories of Hunger

Members of the community there remember vividly the direct attacks from the North and the worst years of those attacks. They experienced the trauma of fleeing for their lives, witnessing friends and family killed, houses burnt down and cattle raided. The worst years in their memo-

ries were those when rains failed or flooding resulted in a poor harvest, and they also were attacked and unable to cultivate the land. Those periods were followed by severe food shortages.

Attacks were particularly bad in 1993. People reported that all the cows were looted; the chiefs were killed; the houses were burned down leaving people to live under trees. The current Paramount Chief said: "I can tell you that there used to be 1,543 people here in this village but after those attacks, only 89 remained."

Worse still was 1998 when people actually starved as a result of an intense drought combined with violent attacks during which their grain was burned.

Many said that 1988 was the worst year of all, due to a massive invasion by the Misseriya (Arab cattle herders from Kordofan who frequently migrated south into Dinka territory.) The invaders looted cattle and burnt crops and the granaries. Then, flooding occurred in July. Many people left their homes, starving to death on the roads en route to North Sudan. The remaining community had to feed the SPLA creating another draw on food. In those days, people used to bury food beneath their houses or in the bush to keep it out of the hands of the army.

## Current Conflict Situation

Community members in Aweil are currently affected by two conflicts, the internal fighting in South Sudan and the sporadic attacks from groups in the Republic of Sudan or allied factions.

Both of these conflicts are having very serious indirect impacts on family household food economy. The Nutrition and Monitoring System Field Report's preliminary findings (FSNMS R15) painted an alarming food insecurity situation in the four months from May until August 2015. According to the key information, triangulated with monthly market survey data, a combination of factors such as poor yields in 2014 due to erratic rainfall, insecurity along supplies routes, multiple taxations and high food prices as well as a high inflation rate mean that the food situation looks very bleak.

Other impacts include not being able to get money transferred from family members who have migrated or who work in the army and are fighting far away, and loss of (male) labour to cultivate the land.

The importance of cattle movement as a livelihood strategy in South Sudan should be noted and the 'cattle camps' are central to the fabric of South Suda-



nese society and culture. Conflict has seriously impacted cattle movement for dry and wet season grazing, and such disruptions have social and cultural knock-on effects.

### Coping Strategies

Hunger is a recurring reality for the people living in Northern Bahr el Ghazal. They encounter lean years on a regular basis, mainly due to drought or flooding which ruins the crops.

Responses to food shortages are many. They begin with people reducing the quantity of food they eat, and then the frequency of their meals from twice to once a day. They may collect firewood and sell it in the market to get cash to buy food. They may collect wild foods, such as palm tree seeds or wild green vegetables growing in the forest, consuming some and selling the rest. A lesser known coping strategy involves alternating wild foods and sorghum in order to make the sorghum last longer. Some borrow food or beg from relatives or neighbours, perhaps doing labour for the relative or neighbour such as 'opening land' or weeding for which they can get cash or food. Other coping strategies include selling chickens, then goats and finally cows. Given the importance of cattle in the culture and the economy, selling cattle is seen as a major negative coping strategy. But it is done in order to buy basic food. Another extreme coping strategy is collecting wild cassava in swampy areas which are two to three days walk away. At home, the cassava is processed into flour for cooking. Some reported that this wild cassava causes diarrhoea in children.

When all of these coping strategies have been exhausted, people migrate. Usually male members of the family move away for seasonal labour and send remittances home. A worse scenario is when people are forced to abandon the land altogether and move away permanently. Since Independence, transferring remittances from the Republic of Sudan is increasingly difficult, and since December 2013, transferring remittances within South Sudan has also become more difficult.

### Food & Nutrition Security Today

In July 2015, the sorghum crop was seen to be in a very poor state due to late rains. It is unlikely to recover this year and community members in Northern Bahr el Ghazal are already selling goats, calves and cows to buy food from the market. Traders have stopped lending food because they know that people cannot repay them. Respondents gave plenty of examples of recent inflation. Over the first six months of 2015, a 3.5 kg bag (malwa) of sorghum has gone from 10-15 to 35 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), while groundnuts (1.5 kg) went from 5 SSP in 2014 to 20 SSP.

The community expects significant hunger in the coming months; they are already deep into their coping strategies and a failed harvest will see them in serious trouble.

**"Men can find easily reason to fight, while finding food is more difficult."**

**Nuer proverb**



**"...for now, we are worried about two major consequences, hunger and the death of our children..."**

**Angelina Abuk Nyibek**  
from Langich, Marial Bai

## Context 2: Direct Impacts of Conflict: Bentiu POC Camp

Bentiu is the capital of Unity State in the north of South Sudan, bordering Southern Kordofan State in the Republic of Sudan and the contested Abyei area. It lies close to the Nile and its tributaries, and is in a water-rich flood zone where the livelihoods derive from live-stock, sorghum, maize, simsim and fish. Concern has been responding since early 2014 to the humanitarian needs of displaced people at the Bentiu UNMISS Protection of Civilians (POC) camp and in 2015 has expanded to provide emergency nutrition services in rural areas in Unity state.

### Memories of Hunger

The residents of this POC camp have many memories of flooding and drought. In 1988 after a very bad flood, they ate flood resistant traditional plants like 'chesh' (linked to the coconut), coconut and water lilies and leaves. They drank cows' milk and killed cows for meat.

Mary Nyakuan, from Bentiu, remembered: "The worst hunger we had was in 1988. The flooding destroyed our crops. There was also too much tsetse-fly which disturbed the cattle, and calves drowned in the water."

People also have memories of drought. Ntabuok Wated, age 30, from Guit, stated: "In the last ten years, we have had too much drought. We did not plant at all sometimes, but we always had our cows with us and could depend on their milk."

### Current Conflict Situation

The POC residents all reported that the only reason they had fled to UN protection was out of fear for their lives. They felt that they were being targeted for abduction and killing. Most significantly, they noted that the targeting of civilians differentiated this from previous outbreaks of fighting. In both fighting between the SPLA and the Sudanese Armed Forces (1982 – 2005) as well as during previous splits within the SPLA, combatants were the primary targets, though some 'collateral' killing of civilians occurred. In this conflict, interviewees reported that houses were burned down, crops were deliberately destroyed, cattle and other livestock were taken and elders, women and children were either abducted or killed. Community members also reported the rape of women.

These effects of armed conflict are the worst imaginable, and hunger was in fact seen as a secondary effect.

### Coping Strategies

In fleeing such horrors, people's coping strategies were limited. They said that when the fighting came to them, they fled to the bush; when the fighting came to the bush, they fled to the POC camp. They took from one to 20 days to reach the protection of the UN POC. They came from places like Koch, Guit, Nhialdiu and as far away as Leer in the south of the State. On these precarious journeys, people ate water lilies from the rivers and wild foods from the forest, and suffered days and days of hunger. They described eating the 'gum,' the part of the tree exposed when one cuts a branch diagonally. They reported surviving solely on that at times. They also ate the leaves of trees and mentioned the lalup tree, the buaw tree, the nyat tree, the koat tree and also mango leaves. They said that they were familiar with some wild foods from before, but not so many since they had previously depended on milk more in times of shortage. The only water they could get was from swamps and they neither boiled nor filtered it. The people we interviewed reported witnessing one woman who died of hunger on this long walk to the POC camp, and hearing of others.

Before they were forced to flee, their coping strategies were varied. They ate the same foods but less quantities. After reducing portion size, they began to reduce meal frequency to once a day. When they were short of food, they prioritised who got it. Children between the years of 2 to 5 were the first to be fed, then children over 5 years, then grandparents, followed by the men and finally the women. Their proximity to rivers was also important. "We would plant in the summer and irrigate. We planted near the river banks so it was easy to irrigate. We would also dig wells in the river beds, for drinking water and for irrigation. We did not migrate." The most dangerous coping strategy was to go into the bush for firewood or grass, due to the threat of attack by wild animals.

### Food & Nutrition Security

The impact of the conflict on people's food and nutrition security has changed over time. Before they fled their homes, people's crops and livestock were in the line of fire, quite literally. Armed forces deliberately destroyed crops and stole livestock and seemed to employ what approached a "scorched earth" policy. Once the women

and their children arrived at the camp, they were starving but not dying. They had to register and get a biometric ration card and then wait for their turn in the queue. While they were waiting, they were given food by people who they knew, and some degree of lending or sharing took place. Those who had been in the camp for longer than three months reported being happy with the ration and had enough food. However, they had become reliant on external support by humanitarian agencies, in terms of both protection and food and water.

There appears to be a worsening of nutritional status of children from arrival to several weeks later. Concern staff expressed worry over the rates of global and severe acute malnutrition (GAM and SAM) being below the emergency thresholds on arrival, but exceeding them up to a month later. This could be related to delays in getting the POC ration or perhaps to other reasons. Mothers suggested that the environment and weather in the POC is different from at their homes so their children got

### CONCERN INTERVENTIONS

Concern supports improved food and nutrition security in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and strengthens the health service in Aweil West and Aweil North. In Bentiu, recent humanitarian intervention includes emergency shelter, emergency nutrition and infant and young child feeding as well as water and sanitation in a camp of over 100,000 IDPs. Concern has also carried out emergency nutrition activities in rural areas in Unity state. In Juba, Concern works in emergency nutrition and food and voucher distributions in the POC camp at UN House.

The response of the 1998 hunger crisis in South Sudan prompted discussion and promoted new thinking within Concern which allowed the organisation to test new approaches. The difficulties of community access to Therapeutic Feeding Centres and of getting food to people through flooded areas prompted discussions on how to address severe acute malnutrition more effectively. Concern was therefore ready to test and implement the community-based therapeutic care approach when it was proposed, and this led to the breakthrough of Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM). Much of our work in nutrition in South Sudan since then has implemented this approach through the government health departments.

South Sudan presents most of the challenges of working in a so-called 'fragile state': protracted conflict, cyclical environmental hazards, weak capacity in remote rural areas, underdeveloped infrastructure and a weak civil society. Concern is striving to find realistic and durable solutions to these challenges while balancing the need to keep people alive during crises.



"The worst hunger we had was when there was bad hunger in 1988... the flooding destroyed our crops. There was also too much tsetse-fly which disturbed the cattle, and calves drowned in the water."

**Mary Nyakuan**  
from Bentiu



"If I was not worried for my life, I would have stayed in the village with the cows."

**Ntabuok Wated**  
from Guit

diarrhoea, fever and eye pain. We also heard reports that mothers who received a lot of PlumpyNut (a ready-to-use therapeutic food for children over six months to treat severe acute malnutrition) and PlumpySup (a lipid-based nutrition supplement for children, used to treat moderate acute malnutrition) sold some of it in the market in order to buy food for their older children. This obviously undermines the nutritional aims of these products.

## Conclusion

In Unity State, the main obstacle to the camp residents returning home was the lack of a secure peace. If lasting peace came, they felt optimistic that they could regain their original livelihoods in a matter of six months, which seems surprisingly quick and would depend in part on the timing in terms of planting season.

In Northern Bahr el Ghazal, poor members of the community use a very analytical balancing of risk and opportunities related to their household food economy. The community lives a roller-coaster from the highs of food sufficiency and asset accumulation to the lows of asset depletion, negative coping strategies and severe hunger. The lowest point of this curve seems to be when climate variability coincides with the impact of armed conflict. The hope in this story of recurring disasters and frequent knock-backs is in the community's ability to bounce back and rebuild an asset base to protect themselves against future disasters.

Justino's (2008) suggestion that indirect effects of conflict on households are channelled through markets, political institutions and social networks seems relevant. The markets and the social networks continue to operate quite dynamically, but the political institutions seem distant and ineffective. This is reflective of commentaries on the weak functioning of state institutions in many African countries (Andrews et al., 2012; Andrews, 2013.) The conclusions of Alinovi et al. (2007) suggesting that dysfunctional institutions lie at the heart of structural food insecurity seem apt in the context of South Sudan.

The causes of conflict are manifold and complex, relating to an array of aspects of the human condition including identity, economic need, greed and insecurity. Often, small differences are amplified by those seeking power, beautifully articulated by the phrase "the narcissism of minor difference" (Ignatieff, 1998). Preventing and putting an end to armed conflict in particular are huge tasks requiring leadership and mediation skills that require

high level political skills. Stability and economic growth may be the best drivers of peace and security. Conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution must be given much greater prioritization by the international community.

In terms of their resilience to recurring shocks, be they climatic or conflict-based, the communities have regularly experienced these and have been able to both absorb them and to adapt at some level. They have not been able to transform their livelihoods to eliminate or minimise these risks, however. What is clear is that whenever these two forms of shock, climate and conflict, coincide, the communities suffer severely and it takes them considerably more time to recover. The situation in South Sudan in mid-2015 suggests that such a perfect storm is upon us again.



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Page 4: Jens Grossmann/Welthungerhilfe Mopti, Mali. Due to an armed conflict in 2012, many people had to leave their homes and fled to neighboring countries or within the country. The two women try to provide a meal to their families in a provisional camp in Mopti, 2012.  
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Page 14: Crystal Wells/Concern Worldwide, People wait in line to check into a general food distribution in protection of civilian (PoC) site one in UN House, a UN base on the outskirts of Juba, 2014.  
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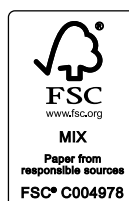
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