Developing a support and response mechanism for enhancing food security and reducing vulnerabilities in conflict-stricken regions.
Introduction

At the 1996 World Food Summit it was concluded that "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

According to the World Health Organisation, food security is built on three pillars.

1. Availability: the availability of sufficient quantities of appropriate quality
2. Access: access by individuals to adequate resources for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet on a regular basis
3. Utilization: utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met

The relationship between conflict and food security is complex and dynamic. Food insecurity can be both a cause and consequence of conflict. With more and more countries increasingly facing conflicts, the ability to ensure a secure food supply has been threatened. Most of the 1 billion people currently facing food insecurity live in countries affected by conflict. The most severely affected countries in 2009 Global Hunger Index include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and East Timor. Over 100 million joined the ranks of the world’s desperately hungry between 2008 and 2009. Conflict activities and the resulting mass displacement of people have led to reduced food supply from food-producing areas and increased food demand in relatively safe (urban) areas; this in turn has led to sharp food price rises in local markets.

Climate related disasters can intensify food insecurity and intensify social grievances by increasing the scarcity of available resources or by deepening inequalities among groups. The figure below indicates that, on a broader scale, violent civil conflict events on the African continent were more frequent in countries that were also harder hit by climate- and weather-related disasters.
There is also anecdotal evidence that climate- and weather-related disasters—and specifically the inability of governments to mitigate their impacts—have contributed to civil conflict in Middle Eastern countries. The Syrian civil war, for example, broke out after the country faced devastating droughts between 2006 and 2010.

**History of the Topic**

The modern origin of the concept of Food Security came to be after the Health Division of the League of Nations submitted a report on “Nutrition and Public Health” in 1935. The report showed that there was an acute food shortage in the poor countries, the first account of the extent of hunger and malnutrition in the world. This led to the League of Nations to recognize the need for coordinated nutrition policies in a number of countries.

During WWII at a Conference on Food and Agriculture convened by the then US president, it was decided that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations would be established. At the same time governments reversed their attempts to control farm output and efforts were made to increase the food production in order to reduce the dependency towards outside as, due to the war, the supply was not ensured. After World war II Europe adopted policies to reinforce self-sufficiency and increase the agricultural production.

In its first World Food Survey in 1946, the FOA concluded that at least one third of the world population (in 1945) would not get sufficient amount of macronutrients. This data together with the trauma left by the lack of food in many European and North American countries as a postwar consequence.
elements pushed governments in the world to care about the increase in food production with an aim to ensure that there would eventually be enough food for everybody on earth. The success of these policies led to production exceeding consumption hence creating surpluses.

The surpluses were then managed by utilizing them as food aid through programmes such as the WFP which was established by the United Nations General Assembly resolution on “the provision of Food Surpluses to Food-Deficit people through the United Nations Systems”.

During the 1950’s and the 1960’s the world food production increased by more than 50 percent and the production per capita increased by more than 20 percent. But by the late 1970’s food aid dropped from about 17 millions tons of cereals per year in the late 1960’s to some 7 millions tons. Quantities of food aid purchased by donor countries, at higher prices, decreased as the budgets were not brought up as would have been necessary to maintain the quantities transferred.

In 1974 The United Nations World Food Conference took place with the objective of ensuring that ‘within a decade nobody would suffer from food insecurity’. The Conference approved an International Undertaking on World Food Security which for the first time recognized that food security was a common concern of all nations. Food Security, however, was perceived and defined mainly as the availability of adequate food supply at all times and all efforts to improve food security were mainly to be concentrated on increasing the production of food commodities and ensuring an increased availability of food.

The conference also saw the establishment of IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development now playing an increasingly important role in food security, the creation, within FAO and as part of its governing body system, of a Committee on Food Security (CFS), which has now become the world focal point for food security governance, the Global International Early Warning System (GIEWS), the World Food Council, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programme (CFA) to serve as the WFP governing body as well as the world focal point for food aid governance, the International Emergency Food Reserve, (IEFR), now one of the major source of funding of WFP’s emergency operations.

The 1992 International Conference on Nutrition, was a major milestone in the recent development of food security. The member states declared “[their] determination to eliminate hunger and to reduce all forms of malnutrition. Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world that has both the knowledge and the resources to end this human catastrophe.” They further recognized that “access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a right of each individual” and also that “globally there is enough food for all” and that “inequitable access is the main problem”.

The conference approved a Plan of Action which recommended to government that “each nation must adopt a strategy consistent with its resources and capacities to achieve its individual goals and, at the same time, cooperate regionally and internationally in order to organize collective solutions to global issues of food security”. The Plan of Action which aimed at eradicating hunger in all countries, included, among other resolutions, the intention to reduce the number of malnourished people in the world by half not later than 2015. The Conference also somehow approved the principle of the “Right to food” although without the support of the United States of America.

In 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit approved 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the first of which refers to “Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger”. Practically, one of the target of this goal is to reduce by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
The year 2014 was a stark reminder that conflicts often worsen food and nutrition insecurity. Millions of lives were affected, even lost. Reports of destroyed houses, roads, schools, and hospitals in Gaza, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Yemen, and other conflict-affected places permeated the news throughout 2014. In addition to the humanitarian tragedies associated with these conflicts, the destruction of infrastructure, together with disruptions in access to markets, often renders goods and services prohibitively expensive or makes them unavailable altogether. Both investors and tourists often abandon conflict-affected areas, and clashes between conflicting parties force millions of refugees to flee either to safer places within the affected countries or across the border to neighboring countries. As a result, economies often contract, instability and insecurity spill over national borders, and food and nutrition insecurity rises. For example, almost the entire population of Gaza is in need of assistance, and about half of the people in Syria and Yemen are suffering from severe food insecurity.

It is clear then why conflicts are likely to seriously threaten our ability to achieve the ambitious development goals that the international community has been discussing in the context of the post-2015 agenda, including the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2025. While some countries—like Bangladesh, Brazil, China, and Vietnam—have demonstrated that rapid reduction in hunger and chronic child undernutrition is possible, there is a general perception that reaching these goals may be particularly difficult in countries affected by civil conflict and political instability. As of 2013, an estimated 46 percent of the developing world’s population lived in countries affected by civil conflict—compared with 38 percent two decades ago.
Discussion of the Topic

The majority of the WFP’s operations, as high as two-thirds of it, is carried out in conflict affected countries. The WFP focuses on emergency assistance in the form of food aid and relief, as well as strengthening the resilience of communities in protracted conflicts and crises. The Programme also works towards capacity building post emergencies, to ensure long term food security in those affected regions. Thus mechanisms must be created to not only respond to the immediate needs of those vulnerable to food insecurity, but also to ensure long term enhancements to food security, or at the very least not adversely affect long term sustainability.

The three of the four pillars of food security, namely availability, access and stability will be our main concerns under this topic. The enhancement of each pillar will lead to greater food security. However the approach taken to achieve these enhancements must be feasible in the long term as well, and not short sighted. For example when looking at availability, which concerns itself with the food stock and production in an area as well as the capacity to bring in food through trade and aid, measures that may bring greater short term results may cause long term shortages. These measures include increasing production using unsustainable farming practices which adds strain to already limited resources of water and land, rendering them unusable for future production. This is especially worrisome as in the recent past these resources have been significantly shrinking due to climate change. Thus measures adopted must be environmentally sustainable.

Measures must also be economically sustainable. The liberalization of markets and the reduction and elimination of taxes on food imports maybe essential to combat fluctuations in food security and acute food insecurity. But measures taken to reduce the volatility in availability should be careful not to distort the market and destroy local production capabilities. Many small scale farms are unable to compete with the food aid sold in the blackmarket, thus essentially eliminating them from the market, and increasing the reliance of further food aid. Any response or support mechanism adopted must not create this vicious cycle or add to it.

The provision of food aid is one of the main tasks of the WFP. But the provision of such aid has become political issue and is fraught with controversy. Critics have pointed out that it facilitates corruption and even prolongs conflicts. In most conflict zones the distribution of food aid is controlled or restricted by government forces or strong rebel forces. More often than not, these forces will disproportionately distribute the aid, with preference given to their military and their supporters, resulting in the most vulnerable, women, children and rural populations, receiving little or no aid. A recent example is the conflict in Syria, where it was reported that the Syrian regime distributed food aid from international donors to it’s military first before distributing it to affected civilians. Studies have also shown that emergency food aid strengthens warring parties and allows for longer military operations. Food aid has also been used as a weapon by corrupt governments and warring parties to suppress dissent and for political coercion. Thus the neutrality of food aid and its distribution must be achieved in order to provide for the most vulnerable of people in conflicts and disaster zones.

Food insecurity has also been used as a method of counter-insurgency. This leaves the WFP and other international donors in a conundrum as to provide food aid to affected civilians will conflict with the measures adopted by legitimate governments to halt conflicts. The fact that the right to food is considered a human right by the UN and several countries creates an international obligation to intervene in situations of chronic and acute food insecurity. The extent to which the
international community must go to discharge this obligation must be discussed, and the effect this intervention has on sovereignty of states may have to be looked into.

The responsibility of governments to adopt proactive and reactive policies to food insecurity and shortages and the role which international organizations and the international community in the planning and adoption of these policies should be discussed. The issue must be viewed from peace and security perspective as well as a humanitarian one, as food insecurity is a threat multiplier, which drastically increases the risk of conflicts, economic migration and the weakening of borders. Further, it must be noted that the WFP has thus far adopted an approach where rather than intervening, it assists governments in order to achieve its long term goals of food security and the eradication of hunger.

Past UN actions and resolutions

- **1943:** UN Conference on Food and Agriculture
- **1945:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is established
- **1961:** World Food Programme is established - A/RES/1714(XVI)
- **1974:** First World Food Conference
- **1979:** Plan of Action on World Food Security
- **1981:** World Food Day established - A/RES/35/70
- **1992:** First International Conference on Nutrition - World declaration and plan of action for nutrition
- **1996:** World Food Summit - Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action
- **2000:** UN Millennium Declaration
- **2002:** World Food Summit +5
- **2008:** UN Secretary General High Level Task Force on Global Food and Nutrition Security (HLTF)
- **2009:** Rome Declaration on World Food Security
- **2012:** RIO+20 - Zero Hunger Challenge
- **2012:** Food Assistance Convention
- **2014:** Second International Conference on Nutrition
- **2015:** Milan Declaration on Enhancing Food Security and Climate Adaptation in Small Island Developing States
- **2015:** United Nations Sustainable Development Summit : Goal 2
- **2016:** High-level side event on pathways to Zero Hunger
Conclusion

Food and nutrition insecurity are becoming increasingly concentrated in conflict-affected countries, affecting millions of people. Policies and interventions that build resilience to these shocks have the power to not only limit the breadth and depth of conflict and violence around the world, but also strengthen national-level governance systems and institutions. The ability of food insecurity to precipitate and prolong conflicts requires the international community to react in a timely manner to avoid humanitarian crises and maintain peace and security in vulnerable regions. Mechanisms and infrastructure must be established to achieve this end.

Research Links
https://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/gfpr/2015/feature_3086.html
http://www.wfp.org/policy-resources?_ga=2.85987224.1840917660.1502898247-1831131211.1502898247
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/foodagriculture