

11 Political instability and food security: the long view towards 2050

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1 Introduction

Political instability and conflict reduce the capacity of people to access healthy diets, sustain an active and healthy life, and ensure food security through productive activities. Political instability negatively affects agriculture, health, and education facilities, weakens social cohesion, and limits families' access to resources and basic needs for sustaining food security including production and value chains.

Chronic malnutrition, not only as a result of conflict, was estimated at 795 million people in 2015 worldwide, with 161 million children under five years old being stunted (Loewenberg, 2015). Most of the malnourished people live in areas affected by both violent conflict and ecological fragility leading to recurrent natural disasters (FAO, 2019).

According to the World Bank, 30 out of 48 sub-Saharan African countries have experienced at least one situation of fragility, conflict, or violence since 1998.¹ In addition to their serious repercussions on the population's well-being, conflicts hamper the ability to reduce food insecurity. By causing loss of life and material damage, conflicts destabilize economic activity, disrupt food supplies, and increase the risk of famine. At present, many of these violent conflicts are transformed into protracted crises² and exacerbate the consequences of natural disasters, trigger crises and chronic hunger, and cause the breakdown of livelihoods and infrastructure.

In addition, the nature of present-day conflicts has changed. They are hardly ever neat and clear-cut wars between clearly defined parties. Often, conflict and insecurity stretch out over long periods of time in diverse configurations, coalitions between rebels, regular armies, organized crime, militias, and extremists (Kaldor, 2013; see also Bøås, 2015). These conflicts are not confined to national states but spread over multiple countries and may even attain regional dimensions such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict originating in North Uganda, and subsequently spreading into South Sudan and Central African Republic, the Boko Haram insurgency starting in northeast Nigeria and then affecting Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The Liptako-Gourma region straddling Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali is another example of a trans-border controlled by Jihadists. In these cases, rural areas (OECD, 2022) are most vulnerable to food security and marginal from a human development perspective.

Countries emerging from conflict face enormous challenges in reaching stability and peace (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2012; Malejaq, 2016). Usually, political instability exacerbates local patterns of vulnerability and increases socioeconomic inequities, injustice, and oppression. As a result, endemic conflict zones experience severe long-term food insecurity, due to the weaknesses of food system coordination and innovation systems, and the education deficit of their youth.

Researchers and policy circles often are focused on the short-term consequences of conflict, centring on emergency aid and refugee care. Yet, little is known about the impact on agriculture

and food production in the long run (Adelaja & George, 2019). There has been even less attention to the long-term consequences of conflict for food security. Retrospective studies of long-term protracted crises are rare (Blattman & Miguel, 2010). Looking towards 2050, conflict may have severe long-term consequences for income and economic growth, because it might reduce productive capacity, interrupt socialization and school careers, and impair the physical and mental development of children and youth. Despite the possible magnitude of the problem, we have little information and micro-level data on the mechanisms leading to long-term food insecurity and the magnitude of the impacts (Blattman & Miguel, 2010).

This chapter attempts to provide insight in the nexus between political instability, protracted crises, and food security. We present a case study from Chad, a context in which long-term protracted conflict has profound impact on food production, social cohesion, and the future production capacity of a generation who grew up in this situation (see also Djindil, 2021).

We start with a note on terminology and the complexities of pinning down the nature of political instability and protracted crises. The short- and long-term mechanisms leading to long-term food security are then discussed, focusing on social cohesion, natural resource management institutions, and the physical development of children growing up in protracted conflict. We conclude by discussing possible ways forwards and setting a research agenda to build more knowledge.

2 Political Instability and Protracted Crises

The emergence of protracted crises in Africa has mainly been attributed to the weakness of African states. Many African states struggle to exert sufficient authority over their territories, resulting in the so-called “ungoverned spaces” (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010). Violent conflicts are no longer regular interstate wars fought by regular armies. Most wars in Africa are what has been labelled “new wars” fought in “varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors – regular armed forces, private security contractors, mercenaries, jihadists, warlords, paramilitaries, etc.” (Kaldor, 2013: p.2). These wars are related to hybrid forms of state formation (Boege et al., 2009) where non-state actors fill the holes in the state’s monopoly on violence. These holes in the security system are filled by violent actors that provide non-state governance and alternative forms of security (Boege et al., 2009; Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010).

Often, these security holes appear in ecologically and politically marginal food-insecure rural areas and are accompanied by other emergencies such as droughts caused by erratic rainfall (Anderson et al., 2021). In the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, insurgencies originate in remote dryland areas with low population densities where poverty and food insecurity are rampant and government presence and services are poor.

So, the affected populations are often extremely vulnerable. Even in relatively low-intensity conflicts (i.e. where the number of casualties is relatively low) such as in the Central Sahel, many people are at risk for long-term food insecurity. UNICEF (2023) estimates that 10 million children are at risk in this region.

In many cases regular armed forces collapse and cede control over a large part of national territory to insurgents or use proxy forces such as self-defence militia and vigilantes (Wolff, 2011). However, some regular African armies have been operating on a regional basis (Wolff, 2011), such as the Uganda People’s Defence Force operated in South Sudan to neutralize the rebels of the LRA (Schomerus, 2012), or the Rwandan army that intervened in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to protect Tutsi-related groups (Auteserre, 2008) and Chadian forces that operated in Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria in counterinsurgency operations against the Muslim extremists of Boko Haram (Albert, 2017). As a result, pockets of political instability

and violence are often regional and concentrated in border areas (Wolff, 2011). These armies are not as regular and disciplined as they should be. In some instances, human rights abuses, racketeering and extortion by these armies are reported, adding to the burden of violence rather than relieving it (see, e.g., Schomerus, 2012; Auteserre, 2008).

Other violent actors are harder to pin down, as they manifest themselves in very diverse ways, and may also transform over time. In Mali, Muslim extremist movements started as small remnants of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) terrorists on the run from Algeria under the pressure of counter-insurgency operations. These small isolated groups transformed into more home-grown rural insurgencies affiliated with Al-Qaida, as they were able to recruit among local rural discontented youth (Thurston, 2020; Van Dijk & de Bruijn, 2022). At the time of writing, foreign elements related to Islamic State (IS) are slowly taking over these rural insurgencies with more radical and violent insurgency strategies (Cold-Ravnkilde & Ba, 2022). These groups use a variety of tactics and means to ensure the flow of resources, weapons and recruits for the continuation of their operations (Bøås, 2015)

Other armed groups that are organized for self-protection, such as vigilante groups, tend to degrade into violent behaviour, including human rights abuses and other crimes against the people they are supposed to protect (Meagher, 2012; Hagberg et al., 2019; Poudiougou, 2023).

3 Political conflict and long-term food insecurity

This raises the question to what extent acute and chronic food insecurity is not the result but a driver of conflict, given that insurgencies in rural peripheries can also be understood as revolts against the government and the international community, who failed to address poverty, absence of public services, and governance challenges (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2013).

Globally, the risk of food insecurity contributing to conflict is higher in some countries depending on the level of oppression and the numbers of suffering populations. Within the 19 countries the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) classifies as being in a protracted food crisis, many are also affected by conflict and violence (Holleman et al., 2017). In conflict-affected countries from sub-Saharan Africa, the number of undernourished people increased by 23.4 million between 2015 and 2018 – and at a faster rate compared to countries not exposed to conflict (FAO, 2019).

Given the complexity of the conflict-food insecurity-development nexus (see Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2019; Kemmerling et al., 2022) and the fragility of many of these areas it is hard to predict whether the number of people, countries, and regions affected will expand or contract towards 2050. What is the scope for rebuilding peace and stabilizing states and institutions in countries affected by protracted crises? Given that underlying causes for insurgencies are present in many situations, do we foresee a further proliferation of protracted conflict? To what extent will external interventions, focusing on food system transition and rebuilding resilient livelihoods, successfully redress the impact of conflict and reduce the vulnerability of the populations? What will be the influence of the population growth in these conflict areas on the pressure on natural resources and competition for land?

It is impossible to predict how current protracted crises will develop from here to 2050, given the geopolitical situation and how food system interventions and rehabilitation policies will mitigate and address the consequences of these conflicts. What are the consequences of protracted crises for human resources, i.e. life chances and capacities of children growing up with hunger, with no access to education and adequate healthcare? The African population will double by 2050 (van Wissen, this volume). In the absence of industrial development (see Pieters, this volume), the question emerges: how people will be able to eke out an existence in rural areas?

4 Short-term consequences of violent conflicts for food security

The most immediate and obvious disruption of food security is when major conflicts cause massive numbers of displaced refugees, such as the Darfur conflict in West Sudan, and the LRA insurgency in Northern Uganda. This sudden displacement disrupts food production activities over large areas. Areas where refugees and internally displaced persons settle become dependent on emergency aid and international assistance. The influx of large numbers of people increases pressure on local food markets causing price hikes and shortages (Alix-Garcia & Saah, 2009).

In many cases, people remain in their home area, because they either lack the means to leave, are unsure where to go, or simply decide to ride out the conflict. As a result, these victims often remain out of reach for humanitarian assistance and face severe food insecurity. In addition, some have to carry the burden of feeding insurgents who are present in the area and imposed all kind of unwanted taxes and demands for food. This threat may also come from the side of the regular army (see, e.g., de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2007).

Such was the impact of the Boko Haram uprising in Northern Nigeria, and the long-term crisis in South Sudan (Loewenberg, 2015, 2017; Lokosang et al., 2016). The denial of access or the deliberate disruption of transport and food supply may also be strategies of warfare and are labelled ‘famine crimes’ (de Waal, 2018).

Second, in many cases, common resources like forests, shrublands, and rangelands essential for sustaining livelihoods become less accessible. These areas are often used as hiding places by insurgent groups or patrolled by the army and other armed groups. Sources of income and sustenance, such as wood, fruits, resins, and pasture, are crucial, especially for women, marginal farmers, and pastoralists. They supplement diets and provide additional income. However, local people may face cattle rustling, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence when venturing outside the relative safety of villages and small towns. For pastoralists, rangelands controlled by hostile actors become inaccessible, disrupting normal livestock grazing patterns. This can lead to loss of livestock because of cattle rustling and reduced production, posing an existential threat to many pastoralists in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2023).

Third, inevitably, there is an increase of female-headed households in conflict zones. Men are more likely to be killed, displaced, or forced to flee to avoid recruitment by armed groups. Some migrate to other areas in search of additional income or join rebels. As a result, female-headed households are exposed to all kinds of risk and become extremely vulnerable. They face heightened food insecurity due to labour shortages and are more susceptible to sexual and economic exploitation.

Fourth, an important factor contributing to food insecurity is the destruction of crucial infrastructure, such as wells, food processing, roads, and storage facilities. Water, electricity, and energy facilities may also be destroyed and exacerbating the difficulty of rural households to earn an income. Markets depend on secure supply lines and reliable institutions. With increasing risk, traders avoid markets and increase prices, compounding food insecurity.

5 Long-term impact of conflict and political instability

The short-term consequences of conflicts can be overcome once peace is restored and people can rebuild their lives. Yet often emergency cases become decades-long protracted crises with many people becoming permanently dependent on international assistance such as in the case of the Darfur conflict and Somalian and South-Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda (see, e.g., Jansen, 2018). It is impossible to estimate the number of people affected by long-term food insecurity in their youth and the impact pathways consequences in later life.

While the link between food insecurity and instability is intrinsically understood in policy and academic circles, there is less attention to protracted crises and the nature of conflicts. Often researchers rely on anecdotal evidence to capture these situations.

Analysis of food insecurity in countries that have experienced decades of violent conflict is essentially historical, and the experience should be considered to understand the present. Notably, the onset of peace must not be confused with the end of food insecurity. Few post-conflict countries have achieved credible stability and peace (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2012; Malejaq, 2016) to sustain the local economy and food production. Often, the reduction or mitigation of violence, the intervention of international diplomacy, and the establishment of democracy as a governance system mask structural violence which continues to harm the living conditions of inhabitants, especially those who live in rural areas and do not have the power of decision and action, such as unemployed wandering youth who remain opposed and question the legitimacy of these regimes (De Bruijn & Both, 2017). Most of them perpetually live under the pressure of insecurity and do not have access to healthcare systems and education.

5.1 Human resources

The most important long-term impact of protracted crises is on the health and development of children affecting their long-term capacity to be productive adults. Close to 80% of the World's 155 million stunted children and about 60% of undernourished people live in conflict-affected countries (FAO et al., 2017, p.29). Especially in remote rural areas, chronic malnutrition can lead to high rates of child mortality. Those who survive are damaged for life.

According to some studies, an individual's height is a key indicator of well-being. In childhood, it helps to track growth rate and identify any potential growth disorders or deficiencies, and adequate nutrition. The growth in height of an individual depends highly on the genetic potential for growth, and also on environmental conditions, particularly nutrition and health, which is why height is the best outcome indicator of a child's well-being early in life (see Melse-Boonstra et al., this volume). As argued by Golden (2009), children can only reach their growth potential if they have adequate nutrition and a healthy environment, and receive appropriate healthcare. The first 1,000 days are critical for the continuity of this physiological process, followed by episodes of rapid growth during infancy and puberty (see, e.g., Cusick & Georgieff, 2016). Adverse conditions manifest themselves in stunting and depress life chances in the form of education and income-earning opportunities later in life (Hoddinot et al., 2013). Even experiencing sudden and severe malnutrition *in utero* has life-long effects as was shown in a study of adults born during the Hunger Winter in 1944–1945 in the Netherlands on epigenetic changes and morbidity and blood pressure in later life (Heijmans et al., 2008).

Prolonged exposure to violence and instability can lead to mental health issues, hunger, and damage to healthcare and education infrastructure leading to a decline in education outcomes and increased mortality rates. The loss of culture may disturb intergenerational knowledge transfer.

5.2 Education

There is wide evidence that education (or the lack thereof) is an important predictor of future income and food security (Justino et al., 2013). Short- and long-term conflict disrupts education. School careers of young children are broken and often not compensated later. Research outside Africa (East Timor) suggests that episodes of violence have severe negative consequences for school careers and a significant loss of human capital (Justino et al., 2013). In Africa, a problem is that remote rural areas where most of the conflicts occur are also areas where education is

often absent. In these cases, conflict may wipe out the last remnants of child education, as is for example the case in areas in the Sahel, where Jihadist movements close down schools because they are considered haram. The Boko Haram (literally “Western education is forbidden”) insurgency explicitly turns itself against Western education (Adelaja & George, 2019).

5.3 Long-term impact on institutions, governance of natural resources, and land tenure security

The literature on institutional change provides us with contrasting cases. People in a conflict situation may be able to fall back on all kinds of help and solidarity relations may be reinforced as they are the only basis to cope, as was observed in Somalia (Sexsmith, 2009). However, the opposite may happen when people choose different sides and mistrust enters communities (Sexsmith, 2009).

In a situation of conflict many people are displaced and leave their homes, land, and belongings behind. More often, these vacant places are occupied by other people (most often from outside), and actors may take advantage of the situation and grab land. In Northern Uganda the government increased its presence in the context of the LRA rebellion to gain influence over land and disown communities for the benefit of outside investors (Kobusingye et al., 2017). In South Sudan, post-conflict land reform increased rather than reducing the degree of conflict, which undermined both agricultural production and land tenure security (Justin and van Dijk, 2017). In Burundi, dispute settlement between returning refugees and those who occupied their land was still ongoing even a decade after the Arusha Peace Agreement (Tchatchoua-Djomo and van Dijk, 2022). In Chad, military and ex-rebels have become large cattle owners, and send large herds into agricultural areas with armed herders, which has damaged the relationship between farmers and herders and accentuated conflicts in rural areas.

6 The case of Chad

Chad’s case study is a good example to give insights into the long-term consequences of conflict for food insecurity. After more than three decades of political instability (civil war, violent conflicts) (see Azevedo & Nnadozie, 2019), power was taken over by Idriss Deby on December 1, 1990 and the country entered a period of relative stability, despite numerous rebellions against his regime and despite the harsh living conditions of the majority of the Chadians population (Tubiana & Debos, 2017). In 2021, Deby died in a clash with rebels and his son Mahamat Kaka Deby became the head of the military government.

Under the regime of Idriss Deby major investments were made by NGOs, EU, and UN agencies to maintain security and peace in the Sahelian region and reinforce rural development including food security (Pegg, 2006). The World Bank provided loans to start up the production of oil in 2003. Despite all Chad remains an extremely fragile country with a Fragility State Index score of 104.6 in 2023 (100–110) (FFP, 2023). Classified as 120th out of 125 countries on the Global Hunger Index (GHI, 2023), with a hunger index of 35.1 and a stunting rate of 47.7%, Chad remains among the poorest and undeveloped in the world. At the sub-national level, the Guéra region in Central Chad is a good example. It is a marginal region vulnerable to recurrent droughts and where the first mass peasant revolt erupted in 1965 against the post-independence government creating a generalized insecurity and fear in the country. Since then, the Guéra region has been embroiled in continuous episodes of violence and conflict combined with drought over several decades until the present day (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2007; de Bruijn et al., 2004). The inhabitants lost most of their assets that underpinned their livelihoods and could not go back to their normal life (Djindil, 2021).

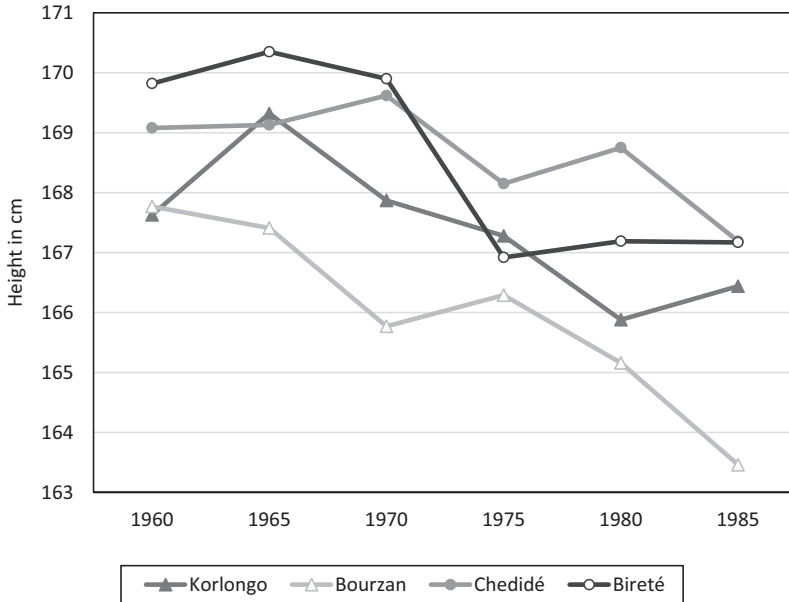


Figure 11.1 Adult height by cohort and village of individuals born between 1960 and 1985.

Source: Djindil (2021).

To assess the long-term impact we collected anthropometric data in four villages that were exposed to violent conflict and mostly dependent on agriculture and local resources. Based on our observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions over several years, villages were differently exposed to violence and this reflected in their livelihoods and income (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2007; De Bruijn et al., 2004; Djindil, 2021).

We used adult height as the main outcome indicator of the combined impact of long-term ecological stress and violent conflict. As described above, adult height is a widely accepted indicator for life-chances and life expectancy (Deaton, 2007). The sampled population was subdivided into different cohorts according to their year of birth. Figure 11.1 presents the average adult height by cohort and village. In all four villages, mean height values varied across cohorts and time. In the 1960s cohort, composed of individuals born before 1960, a period when villages faced the same food problems, the difference in adult height among the villages was not significant ($p = 0.352$) (Djindil, 2021).

In the 1965s cohort, just after independence, and before the outbreak of conflicts, the trends show an increase in adult height with a significant difference between villages ($p = 0.008$). Under the combined effect of political and ecological stresses, all the four villages suffered the same fate manifested in a decrease in adult height (with no significant differences, $p = 0.288$). The years marked by violence continued into the 1980s but the degree vary from one village to another, led to a significant difference in the decrease in average adult height between the four villages ($p > 0.001$). For example, Korlongo fared slightly better in this period, with a 1 cm increase in height compared with the other three villages. According to elder persons, Korlongo was less affected by the violence under the regime of Hissène Habré (1982–1990) because most of the people had enough property to satisfy the demands of the rebels and many had already abandoned their belief in the Margays (the animist religion of the Guéra region) in favour of the

Muslim religion. In Bideté and Bourzan, the population did not have large resources and was subjected to violence and looting by rebels as well as abuse by national military forces. Chéhidé did not experience rebel violence during this period, but the population was exploited by state agents who imposed several taxes (Djindil, 2021).

The average height deficit in the 1975 and 1985 cohorts shows that surviving children carry the scars of growth retardation into adulthood and this may affect their productivity and the households' economy in the future. Children exposed to these hazards miss the opportunity to benefit from optimal growth and a conducive social environment for their physical and psychological development with serious impact on their productivity, and overall well-being, as exemplified by Nigeria's civil war (Akresh, Bhalotra, Leone, & Osili, 2012).

This case study showed a trend linking height growth to conflict episodes in Chad. Selective chance allowed some rural children to reach adulthood with their full growth potential. In rural Chad, physical strength is a key factor for agricultural productivity. Poor nutrition and health resulting from violent conflicts systematically reinforces a poverty cycle that exacerbates food insecurity and social vulnerability.

7 Discussion: more knowledge needed on the long-term impact of protracted crises

As we have shown the consequences of exposure to violence and ecological stress over a long period are manifested in reductions in adult height and productivity with impacts on the capacities of individuals and families to be food secure now and in the future. Village-level differences in experiences of violence were shown to be correlated with income-earning capacity, adult height and directly translated in food insecurity, given the general level of poverty in the villages and the percentages of stunted children which were inversely related to income (Djindil, 2021).

Since data collection, national indicators in Chad relating to political fragility, the Human Development Index (HDI), and malnutrition rates have not improved significantly despite more political stability. None of the villages studied has a school or access to healthcare in its immediate surroundings. In short, Chad is still conditioned by its history of protracted crises. A longitudinal study with precise data on birth years, growth monitoring, integrating health indicators, and infection histories will provide more conclusive results.

Our findings have important implications for other ongoing protracted crises across Africa and the prospects of food security in 2050. The impacts of violent conflict are felt beyond their immediate consequences. The damage inflicted on children in their early years may never be fully repaired in the course of their life. Children born today will bear the consequences towards 2050 and beyond. Such damage is present not only in the physical development and health of adults who experienced trauma, but also in their psychological condition, their ability to relate to and trust other individuals in society, and access to the networks and resources needed to secure their food security. To this we must add the unknown costs of psychological trauma and stress related to violent events and their impact on the future functioning of individuals in society.

The societal damage in terms of the fallout caused by malfunctioning institutions, and the effort to rebuild trust and restore social order, has yet to be researched systematically. Given the increased number of conflicts in Africa, their duration, and the weak prospects for peacebuilding in the medium and long term, it is clear that more serious and systematic attention to the implications of long-term political instability for food (in)security in Africa towards 2050 is required, to identify more focused and efficient policy approaches.

A better understanding of the link between conflicts and long-term productivity deficits and population growth is needed to provide insights into the relation between protracted crises

and long-term food insecurity and lessons for better-coordinated actions for food security by 2050. Following the Food Systems Summit of 2021, the UN established the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus Coalition to support member states affected by food crises and conflict in operationalizing and implementing their National Food Systems Transformation Pathways to promote food security.³ However, this initiative is still far from being an operational and mainstream institution and a smarter and a long-term strategy is needed for promoting food security in conflict areas.

Notes

- 1 Fragility and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa: two sides of the same coin (worldbank.org), viewed September 5, 2024.
- 2 <https://inee.org/eie-glossary/protracted-crisis>, consulted January 20, 2024.
- 3 <https://hdpnexus.fightfoodcrises.net/>, viewed September 5, 2024.

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