



# Fighting Famine

Issue # 2

Milgo Yassin Muhmed, 35 a mother of 5 and residence of Bukoyar village buying food from the market. © WFP

## A Special Update from the UN's Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator

We are now halfway through a year marked by large, sudden-onset emergencies, including the Türkiye-Syria earthquake and the crisis in Sudan. Despite these crises contributing to the growing needs globally, [humanitarian appeals were only 21 per cent funded by mid-July](#), a situation similar to last year's when funding gaps hit communities affected by food crises, notably in the Horn of Africa. In addition, the United Nations Secretary-General has warned that hundreds of millions facing hunger will pay the price following the [recent decision](#) by the Russian Federation to terminate the implementation of the Black Sea Initiative. He further said that the Initiative, "has been a lifeline for global food security in a troubled world".

For many, the past few months have also served as a [wake-up call about the climate emergency](#). People choked through wildfires' smoke in Northern America, while communities in South Asia suffered through yet another historic heatwave. At a time when global hunger remains unacceptably high – as evidenced by the recent report on the [State of the Food Security and Nutrition 2023](#) - it is urgent to act on climate, as one of the drivers, if we want to reach the global goal of zero hunger by 2030.

Vulnerable countries are not only hit hard by the climate emergency but also by the debt crisis. [UNCTAD's recently published report](#) showed that debt servicing is more unsustainable and expensive for low-income countries. These countries face the impossible choice of servicing their debt or serving their people. Contingency financing and debt restructuring are essential to help countries in crises strengthen sustainable food security.

And yet, amid this grim picture we are seeing glimmers of hope. From Niger to Somalia, women-led organizations are [taking the lead](#) in spearheading innovation. Local organizations are building climate resilience on the frontlines. They demonstrate the need for development and humanitarian partners to support change and communities to fight and prevent famine.

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## Global Food Crises - A Snapshot

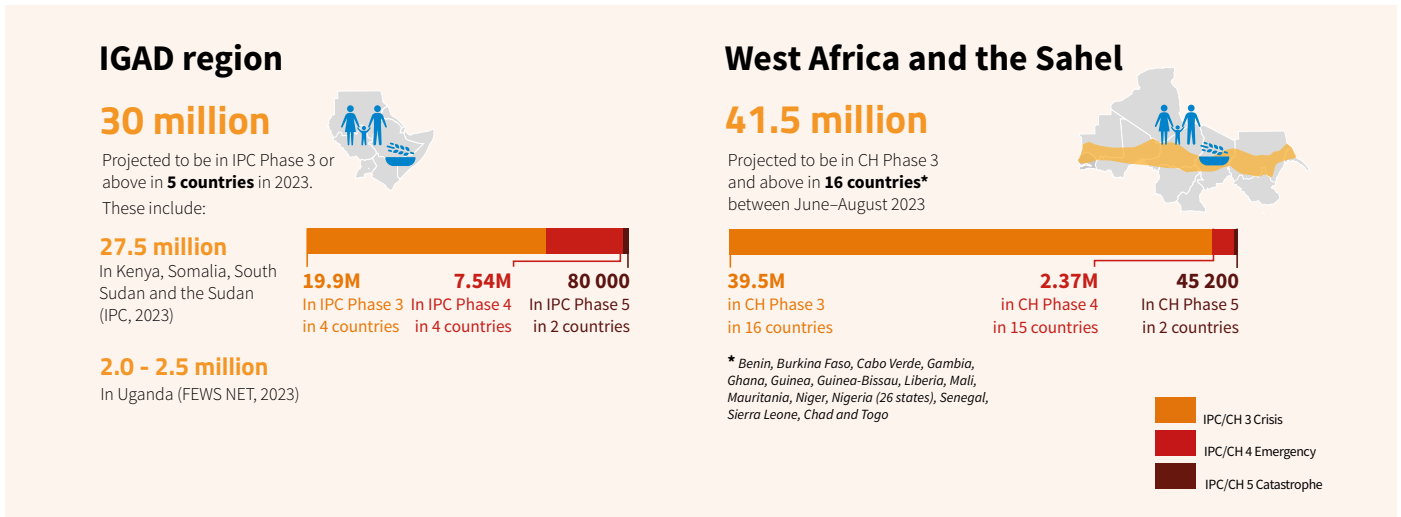
### Famine monitoring

The numbers of people facing emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC/CH Phase 4) and of countries with populations facing catastrophic conditions (IPC/CH Phase 5) have been increasing almost steadily since 2016. According to [the latest famine and protracted IPC/CH Emergency analysis](#) produced by the Global Network Against Food Crises, the most severe levels of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition are found in parts of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. Too often, these levels have been sustained for a prolonged period.

Over 10.3 million people in these areas are in Emergency (IPC/CH Phase 4), and 129,000 people are in Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) as of June 2023. Immediate action is critical in order to save lives and protect livelihoods, and prevent further deterioration into catastrophic conditions.

## Focus on the Sahel and the Horn of Africa

Over 55 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda were acutely food insecure (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) last year, according to the latest [IGAD Regional Focus report](#). Food crises are forecasted to escalate across the region in 2023, particularly in Kenya and Somalia. The worsening situation is attributed to the compounding effects of multiple shocks, including climate extremes and disasters, conflict and insecurity, and economic shocks. The impact of the conflict in Sudan is likely to further deteriorate the regional food crisis situation.



The food crisis in West Africa and the Sahel is also alarming. The [CILSS Regional Focus report](#) highlights that over 28 million people in 13 countries faced acute food and nutrition insecurity between March and May 2023. These represent the highest levels of acute hunger since the first Cadre Harmonisé analysis in 2013. Projections for 2023 paint a grim picture. Up to 41.47 million people in 16 countries are expected to be acutely food insecure and need humanitarian assistance during the June–August 2023 lean season. Of these, approximately 45,200 people in Burkina Faso and Mali are expected to face catastrophic levels of food insecurity. (IPC/CH Phase 5).

Regional Focus reports are a by-product of the annual GRFC produced by the Food Security Information Network in support of the Global Network Against Food Crises.

## Famine Prevention needs an all-hands-on-deck approach: ECOSOC HAS



Rein Paulsen, Director, Reena Gehlani, Famine Prevention Coordinator, FAO Office of Emergencies and Resilience, Valerie N. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director for Programme and Policy Development, WFP and Ramesh Rajasingham, Head and Representative of OCHA in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division at the 2023 ECOSOC HAS Side Event on Protection Risks and Food Insecurity. © FAO/Chavez

The global food crisis was at the centre of the conversations at the 2023 Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC HAS), held from 21 to 23 June 2023 in Geneva.

The discussions brought together Member States, the UN, a broad range of humanitarian and development partners, local community representatives, as well as representatives from the private sector and the academia. They provided an opportunity to discuss meaningful, locally-driven and people-centred solutions to preventing famine.

Several red threads emerged, including the need to address the key drivers of the global food crisis through political solutions to end conflict and mitigate its impact, as well as climate change mitigation and

adaptation. The importance of scaling anticipatory action to save lives, and the criticality of local actors - particularly women-led organizations - in driving sustainable impact was highlighted throughout. Overall, the notion of not being to “humanitarian our way out of the current humanitarian situation” was prevalent, with a strong focus on the need for an all-hands-on-deck approach to preventing famine in 2023 through holistic solutions and resilient agri-food systems. Speaking at the High-Level Panel, the UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator, Reena Ghelani, [highlighted five areas for action](#).

- First, **redouble global efforts to prevent, reduce and end conflict and violence**. Conflict remains the main driver of hunger for 117 million people in 19 countries, almost half of those affected and it absorbs almost 80 per cent of food sector aid.
- Second, **invest seriously in climate adaptation and mitigation in the most vulnerable countries**. Climate change is the main driver of hunger for 57 million people, and while its impact will continue to be most acutely felt in the poorest and most crisis-affected countries, only a fraction of development or climate finance goes to such contexts.
- Third, **address the social, governance and economic factors that fuel those crises**. Economic factors are the main driver of hunger for 84 million people, almost triple the number compared to 2021. Around 60 percent of low income countries are in or at high risk of debt distress, leaving limited resources to address the crises in their own countries.
- Fourth, **place women and girls at the centre of our efforts to combat these crises**.

Closing the gender gap in agriculture inputs alone could lift approximately 100-150 million people out of hunger and reduce poverty rates by between 12 and 25 percent.

- And fifth, **the humanitarian and development community must be faster, better and less riskaverse**. Only a third of development aid goes to countries with food crises. When it does, only 11 percent is channelled to the food or agriculture sectors, and not enough of it is invested in rural areas where 80 percent of the most food insecure people live. Humanitarian response, meanwhile, is funded at less than 21 percent and is not sufficiently focused on anticipatory action, resilience and sustainability.

As the UN Secretary-General recently noted, a world without extreme poverty or hunger could be within reach. We have the information, expertise and technology to achieve that. What we need now is the collective commitment and hard work and the tough choices to make it happen.



A woman in the garden of Guesse, in the commune of Simiri, Niger on 16 May 2023.  
© OCHA Michele Cattani

# We can't fight famine without gender equality

Gender equality is threatened by the current hunger emergency. There are now about 150 million more hungry women and girls than men, and the gender gap is increasing quickly. A series of recent reports, including OCHA's [Gendered Drivers, Risks and Impacts of Food Insecurity](#), [Beyond Hunger](#) and FAO's [Status of Women in Agrifood Systems](#), lay bare the disproportionate impacts of the global hunger crisis on women and girls, including in the areas of education, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health. Women working in agrifood systems often face marginalization, as well as worse working conditions and pay than men. Women also have less secure tenure over land and less access to credit and training.

But women are also at the forefront of food security interventions, and climate adaptation efforts. The UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator witnessed this during a recent visit to Niger. In Kollo, women's groups successfully developed income-generating activities, using drought resistant crops, complementing the dwindling income of more traditional activities, like herding, that are impacted by climate change. And in the locality of Simiri, organic vegetable gardens, managed by women and maintained through solar-powered drip irrigation and natural fertilisers, helped communities adapt to climate change.

Despite their active role and crucial contributions in food systems and climate action, women often lack access to decision-making and leadership positions. To help address that, a two-day workshop on [Women and Girls Leading Against Hunger](#) was organized by the Office of the UN Famine Prevention Response Coordinator, the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Nairobi, Plan International, World Vision, the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and OCHA. Representatives from over 20 grassroots organizations from eight countries – all of them women, gathered in Nairobi to identify solutions to increase women and girls' participation in the fight against food insecurity, share best practices and lessons learnt.

Women leaders called for women and girls to be central to efforts to address the global hunger crisis, including through gender parity in decision-making structures and full and equal access to land, credit, and productive assets. "Leadership is not given, it is negotiated and fought for. We need to fight for women's leadership in fighting hunger," said Celina Kathura from the Wiyukiririe Women Group in Kenya. In direct response to calls from civil society for more support for their efforts, the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund announced the launch of its new global funding appeal to mobilise US\$55 million in financing for local women-led and women's rights civil society organizations working to respond to food insecurity in fragile settings.

The event served as the starting point of a movement aiming to lift and elevate voices of women's organizations active in food security, and to ensure their leadership role is acknowledged and promoted through mutual support, funding, and a better access to land, credit and productive assets. Women and girls hold the key to fighting famine. We need to start listening to them and act.

## For more information:

<https://www.fao.org/home/en/>  
<https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/>  
<https://www.unocha.org/>  
<https://www.wfp.org/fight-famine>

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Fighting Famine is a special update highlighting critical aspects of global food crises, including response efforts and urgent priorities. It is produced with the support of the Global Network Against Food Crises, which is an alliance of humanitarian and development organizations tackling the root causes of food crises.