

2017 Hunger Report

# Fragile Environments, Resilient Communities





Freedom House

## Executive Summary

The world has made dramatic progress against hunger and extreme poverty in recent decades. In 1990, approximately one in four people in the world lived with hunger on a daily basis. By 2015, the hunger rate was cut nearly in half and stood at about one in nine. Over the same period, extreme poverty was cut by even more, from one in three people in the world to one in ten.

At no other time in human history has progress against hunger and poverty occurred so rapidly. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provided a framework to mobilize global action against hunger and poverty and other development objectives. The MDGs were not the only reason for this dramatic progress but they made a difference. Buoyed by this progress, in September 2015, heads of state and government from around the world adopted a new and much more ambitious set of global goals known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 interrelated goals include goals to *end hunger and poverty* by 2030. See Figure ES.1.

## Ending Hunger in Fragile Times and Fragile Places

Recent trends give optimists good reason to believe that ending hunger and poverty is within reach. At the same time, the world faces daunting challenges. Tragedies on an unimaginable scale are occurring in different parts of the world. The wars in Syria and South Sudan and the near famine conditions in places where war and climate change collide are enough to challenge anyone's optimism about ending hunger and poverty.

Syria and South Sudan are among a group of nations the international development community often refer to as fragile states. While there is no universal definition of fragility, these are nations where high rates of hunger and poverty are compounded by civil conflict, poor governance, and vulnerability to climate change. Fragile places present the greatest challenge in ending hunger and poverty.

Conflict is one of the greatest threats to ending hunger. More people die from hunger and disease in conflict zones than from violence. Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion*, describes the effects on nations as “development in reverse.” Within two years of the start of the Syrian civil war, the country had lost 35 years of development gains, including 3,000 schools damaged or destroyed, another 2,000 converted to shelters for displaced people, nearly a third of all public health centers destroyed, half the population living in poverty, and half the workforce unemployed.

**Post-conflict societies are more likely to relapse into conflict if hunger remains a major problem.**

The potential for climate change to destabilize countries in some of the most volatile regions of the world is why the U.S. military considers it to be a threat to national security. The international community cannot afford to ignore the challenges in fragile states. Conflicts spill over national borders and threaten regional security, with ramifications for the security of nations around the world, as we've seen repeatedly since the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Fragile states are a breeding ground for terrorism. Violence in Syria and Central America drive refugees and undocumented immigrants into Europe and the United States.

Countries that are governed well have a 30-45 percent lower risk of conflict. While a nation's leaders are the face of governance, state institutions are what make it possible for governments to function and serve the public. Access to health care, education, and other services, especially among groups who have historically been excluded, are important steps towards achieving durable peace. The record shows that post-conflict societies are more likely to relapse into conflict if hunger remains a major problem.

Any country can have fragile regions or communities. Some U.S. communities have poverty rates of 50 percent or more. As a community becomes poorer, there are more and more barriers

Every minute,  
**24 PEOPLE**  
leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror.



Hunger rates in developing countries in conflict are almost **3x higher** than in other developing countries.





Figure ES.1 The Sustainable Development Goals



Source: Adapted from United Nations, 2015

to people lifting themselves out of poverty. The difficulties reinforce and amplify each other. A survey of the literature on concentrated poverty shows that the most negative correlates of poverty (e.g., high levels of food insecurity, failing schools, large numbers of youth dropping out, chronic joblessness, and violent crime) generally do not appear before neighborhood poverty rates reach 20 percent, and then become endemic as poverty rates rise to 40 percent or more.

## A Call to Action: Investing in Resilience at Home and Abroad

Ending hunger is a moral imperative. It is especially so in fragile situations where the odds are stacked against vulnerable people and the barriers that they face are the highest. If we continue on the current path, it is estimated that by 2030, two-thirds of the people who experience hunger will live in fragile states.

The guiding principles of the SDGs are to “leave no one behind” and to “reach the furthest behind first.” The average poverty rate in the countries the World Bank classifies as fragile is





Ellie Van Houtte / USAID

USAID pre-positioned emergency relief supplies in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to ensure rapid deployment to affected communities in advance of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.

51 percent. The World Bank's 2011 World Development Report, *Conflict, Security, and Development*, noted that no fragile state was on track to achieve any of the MDGs. By 2015, several of these nations had met at least one of the targets, but overall, the record leaves little room for doubt: fragile countries are furthest behind.

Addressing the root causes of fragility now will prevent future conflicts, save lives, build resilience and put the world on a path toward ending hunger. In other words, investments today will reduce the need for humanitarian response and military intervention in the future.

At the beginning of 2016, there were 33 active conflicts around the globe, and the number of people forcibly displaced by conflict had reached 65 million, the highest number since World War II. Diplo-

macy and defense are obviously crucial to ending conflict and securing peace, but much more must be done to prevent crises and to ensure that a short-term crisis today does not turn into a long-term crisis through the intergenerational effects of malnutrition and the disruption of health care and education, especially among vulnerable children. A child in a developing country that is affected by conflict is twice as likely to be hungry and nearly three times as likely to be out

of school as a child in a developing country at peace.

The United States government is currently involved in fragile states. The U.S. military is present or assisting in many of these countries, and the United States is the largest contributor to the international humanitarian system. Between 2004 and 2015, humanitarian funding from all donors increased six-fold, from \$3.4 billion to \$21.8 billion, and fragile and conflict-affected countries have been the largest recipients of this assistance. But in spite of this dramatic increase in resources, donors meet less than two-thirds of the annual humanitarian needs. In 2014, and then again in 2015, the World Food Program had to temporarily suspend food aid to millions of refugees because of funding shortfalls.

We need new tools and a new approach that focuses on building resilience through local institutions, so that communities and countries can avoid, cope with, and bounce back from crises. To address the long-term challenges posed by fragility, the United States should take a more comprehensive and balanced approach, with greater investments in diplomacy and humanitarian and development assistance. U.S. global development programs that build resilience in

## A Focus on Fragility at Bread for the World

*Jordan Teague, Bread for the World Institute*

Many of the issues and legislation that Bread for the World works on are important to people living in fragile states. From food aid reform to poverty-focused development assistance, Bread for the World faithfully advocates for policies and programs that assist the most vulnerable people and their countries.

The Global Food Security Act (GFSA), passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in July of 2016, includes a provision to authorize emergency food assistance and other disaster response to populations affected by manmade and natural disasters. GFSA will ensure that millions of people in fragile and conflict-affected countries receive the humanitarian assistance that they need. Bread for the World also pushes for greater flexibility in U.S. food aid programs so that in a crisis aid can reach those in need faster and respond to emergency conditions in the most appropriate, cost-effective way.

The U.S. global food-security plan mandated by the GFSA proposes to expand USAID assistance for agriculture and nutrition in fragile states. GFSA also will make sure that all U.S. global food security programs build the capacity of local communities to better withstand shocks due to conflict or climate change. GFSA was a focus of both the 2015 and 2016 Bread for the World Lobby Days, and Bread members made thousands of phone calls and sent thousands of emails to their members of Congress urging support for this bill, and many engaged key members of Congress in more personal ways by visiting them in their district offices and on Capitol Hill.

The Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in July 2016. FATAA focuses on tracking foreign assistance spending and programs across all U.S. government agencies and will help make U.S. humanitarian and development assistance more accountable and effective in fragile states. Bread for the World and its members have been advocates of foreign assistance reform since the organization was founded, and foreign assistance reform has been the focus of three Offering of Letters campaigns since 2008.

Bread for the World and its members have helped achieve increases in funding for poverty-focused development assistance (PFDA) in each of the last five years. PFDA supports programs that help build resilience such as agricultural development, nutrition, education, and global health in low-income countries, as well as those programs that respond to humanitarian crises such as violent conflict, natural disasters, or famine. In addition to ongoing, yearly advocacy on the federal budget and appropriations for PFDA, Bread members focused on increasing funding for PFDA in four Offering of Letters campaigns over the last decade. This means that hundreds of thousands of personal letters and phone calls have reached members of Congress from Bread for the World in support of increasing funding for PFDA in recent years.

Bread for the World has also addressed budget issues at the macro level, working with others to maintain a circle of protection around programs focused on people in poverty in the United States and worldwide. Resisting deep, across-the-board cuts in poverty-focused programs has made it possible to pursue increases in international humanitarian and development assistance.

For more than forty years, Bread for the World's advocacy has helped to strengthen the U.S. government's leadership in reducing hunger and malnutrition in some of the most fragile places in the world.

*Jordan Teague is the international policy analyst for food security and nutrition in Bread for the World Institute.*

**Bread for the World advocates for policies and programs to reduce hunger and malnutrition in some of the most fragile places in the world.**



Joseph Molieri / Bread for the World

Two-thirds of people in the world who are hungry live in rural areas and earn a living as farmers or landless agricultural workers.

but they come and go without being brought to scale. We need a long-term commitment to resolve the many interconnected problems in high-poverty communities. There is no one-size-fits-all or a single all-encompassing policy solution. To aggressively reduce the rate of concentrated poverty, policymakers will need to use all tools at their disposal.

Bread for the World welcomes the ambitious agenda of the SDGs. We believe ending hunger and poverty by 2030 is within reach in all countries. We recognize that fragile environments present major challenges. We also know that with political will focused on the challenges we can succeed.

countries that are vulnerable to fragility are underfunded, especially relative to defense spending, and limited in scope. The legislation that governs U.S. foreign assistance was written in a different era for different challenges. Programming lacks flexibility, making it difficult to work across sectors and to address diverse needs on the ground. It is in our interest to take a pragmatic, forward-thinking and sustainable approach to fragility. This includes our engagement with international institutions. The SDGs and the Paris climate agreement in December 2015, which produced a global framework to fight climate change, are the most impressive displays of collective action to date. The annual conference on climate change provides a forum for all countries in the world to come together to address perhaps the biggest long-term development challenge facing humanity. U.S.

leadership at the global level can help bring people together and can leverage resources from other partners.

To end hunger in the United States by 2030, public policies and resources must be more focused on reducing concentrated poverty. In 2014, 55 percent of all people in poverty lived in a community where at least 20 percent of the population was poor—up from 43.5 percent in 2000. Some small-scale demonstration projects have shown promise,



## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

### INTERNATIONAL

Develop a whole-of-government plan to coordinate and expand U.S. government engagement in fragile states.

Work with the international community to increase official development assistance to conflict-affected and fragile countries, including through multilateral mechanisms such as the World Bank's International Development Association.

Work with the international community to ensure timely and reliable funding to respond to crises through bilateral programs and international organizations.

Fulfill U.S. commitments to the Paris climate agreement adopted in December 2015, including financing the Green Climate Fund.

### DOMESTIC

Set a medium-term goal to end concentrated poverty in the United States, defined as no more than 20 percent of the population within a community, by 2025.

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS HUNGER REPORT

### INTRODUCTION: THE FRAGILITY CHALLENGE

- Allow for much greater flexibility in how USAID partners with governments and civil society in fragile countries.
- Increase funding to address the growing gap between humanitarian needs and resources.
- Strengthen coordination of humanitarian and development activities to build resilience to shocks and stresses.
- Invest in social protection and rural development with a focus on small-scale farmers, especially women farmers.
- Help countries build more effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions for all.

### CHAPTER 1: CONFLICT FRAGILE

- Ensure that all people who are forcibly displaced are protected and their basic needs met.
- Provide more and better support to countries and communities hosting people who are forcibly displaced.

- Strengthen the capacity of national institutions in fragile states to deliver public services.
- Invest in sectors such as agriculture and infrastructure shown to have the greatest potential to reduce poverty and generate large numbers of jobs.
- Recognize and protect the legitimate land tenure rights of vulnerable groups.

### CHAPTER 2: CLIMATE FRAGILE

- Invest in climate-smart social protection strategies so the people most vulnerable to climate change are not forced to adopt negative coping strategies.
- Strengthen the capacity of national and local partners to prepare for and respond to natural disasters.
- Make gender equality a core principle of all U.S. climate change assistance.
- Identify guiding principles and institutional frameworks to prepare for the relocation of large groups of people displaced by climate change.

### CHAPTER 3: U.S. FRAGILE

- Provide housing assistance to all families with incomes of less than 30 percent of area median income.
- Extend the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to childless workers.
- Reform the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to ensure sufficient funding, increase states' accountability, and better connect families to child care and job training services.
- Create a public jobs program focused on connecting workers who have barriers to employment with in-demand job skills.
- Reform the criminal justice system by decriminalizing poverty, ending for-profit policing, and reducing barriers to work for formerly incarcerated individuals.

# Religious Leaders' Statement

As leaders of churches and Christian organizations in the United States, we give thanks to God for the progress made against hunger and poverty in recent decades. It is a time unparalleled in human history. From 1990 to 2015, the global poverty rate was cut by more than half. In 1990, 1 in 4 people experienced hunger; today it's 1 in 9. We are humbled by the opportunity God has given us to contribute to this progress.

We are also encouraged by the action of the nations of the world in adopting the comprehensive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which is to get to zero hunger in the world by 2030. Yet we recognize the road to ending hunger and poverty will be far from easy. When signing the SDGs, world leaders pledged to "leave no one behind." It is this principle of the SDGs that makes the SDGs bolder and

more visionary than the preceding Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs will be achieved only if they reach everyone everywhere. With a 2030 deadline, there is little time to waste.

Political instability, climate change, violence, displacement, and weak governance often create conditions of fragility—perhaps the greatest challenges on the road to 2030. Research shows, for example, that a child living in a conflict-affected developing country is twice as likely to be hungry as a child living in other developing countries. Hunger and malnutrition, especially for young children, lead to lifelong underachievement and poor health. These are real determinants of a child's, and a nation's, ability to flourish.

The challenges we see are not new to people of faith. Vulnerable communities are part of the sacred stories highlighted

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## Executive Summary

in Scripture. Floods (Genesis 7:7), drought (1 Kings 17:7-9), famine and vulnerability of women (Ruth 1-5), political instability (1 Samuel 21:10), ethnic struggles (Acts 18:1-2), and religious persecution (Acts 8, 11, 12) have affected peoples throughout the ages. Stories such as Joseph being sold into slavery (Genesis 37:28) or Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt to escape violence and death (Matthew 2:13-14) are key to the arc of our biblical narrative. Our ministries with people in need as well as Scripture convince us of the great resilience and strength of people rising in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

With abiding faith and courage, we address this challenge called fragility as a barrier to ending hunger—for all people regardless of their faith tradition. We urge the U.S. govern-

ment and the international community to come together to invest more in fragile countries to promote peace, create stability and opportunity, and build resilience. Reaching the “furthest behind first” will take unprecedented investments over the next 13 years. Humanitarian and development assistance are critical to achieve rapid progress, and we need to focus on peace and institution building to sustain progress and ultimately lead the way out of fragility. Here at home, we urge our government to focus on communities with concentrated poverty—they are fragile environments within our midst. We must make fragile environments everywhere a national priority.

With more political will and resources devoted to partnering with fragile countries, alongside national stakeholders rising to the challenge, we can end hunger and extreme poverty.

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# Earlier Hunger Reports by Bread for the World Institute



**2016** *2016 Hunger Report: The Nourishing Effect: Ending Hunger, Improving Health, Reducing Inequality* shows that ending hunger and food insecurity in the United States would free millions of people to do better in school, be more productive at work, and live healthier lives. Good nutrition is preventive medicine, and is essential at every stage of life. The report offers recommendations for healthcare providers, anti-hunger advocates, and policymakers to help make a healthier, hunger-free United States a reality.



**2015** *2015 Hunger Report: When Women Flourish... We Can End Hunger* shows why women's empowerment is vital to ending global hunger and poverty. Women are the primary agents the world relies on to fight hunger. In developing countries, most women work in subsistence farming, the backbone of local food security. Discrimination against women is a major cause of persistent hunger. The report analyzes the ways in which this plays out in the household, the economy, and politics, and calls for a more comprehensive, holistic approach to women's empowerment.



**2014** *2014 Hunger Report: Ending Hunger in America* calls on the president to set a national goal to end hunger and poverty in the United States by 2030 and to work with Congress to get the job done. The report offers a four-part plan to end hunger in the United States: 1) a jobs agenda, 2) a stronger safety net, 3) human capital development, and 4) public-private partnerships to support innovative community-led initiatives against hunger.

Since 1990, Bread for the World Institute has produced an annual report on the state of world hunger. Visit



[www.hungerreport.org](http://www.hungerreport.org) and download a copy of an earlier report.  
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