



37th annual meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) “Women, conflicts and food and nutrition issues”

Thematic day

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

1. Conflict and Food and Nutrition Issues in the Sahel and West Africa

In the past decade, populations in the Sahel and West Africa have experienced some of the worst violence which is aggravating food and nutrition crises in the region. Conflicts have evolved to be more violent, deadly, and widespread. [Analysis](#) by the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat shows that non-state armed groups are reforming and adapting in the region while the numbers of victims, who are mainly civilians, is climbing. The scale of violence is spreading, and military operations have been inadequate for addressing the need for long-term solutions. Due to sustained violence in several areas, livelihoods and local economies have been disrupted as local populations have been displaced or have fled. According to the [RPCA](#), 27.1 million people, mainly living in major conflict areas such as Liptako Gourma, Lake Chad Basin and Northern Nigeria were in need urgent food and nutrition assistance during the past lean season (June-August 2021).

The convergence and mutual reinforcement of crises in the areas of security, food and nutrition is a concerning dynamic in the Sahel and West Africa. Furthermore, this complex and multidimensional situation is occurring within a context of structural and persistent development deficits, and a weakened social contract. These factors are reflected in a social unrest, the violent extremist insurgencies, and the impacts of climate and environmental degradation.

Compounding the intersecting crises is the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent slowdown of the global economy due to national lockdowns and restrictions. In the Sahel and West Africa, both informal and formal workers – particularly daily earners – have been hit by lockdown measures and mobility restrictions as household have seen incomes evaporate and hunger grown as result of market closures and reduced purchasing power.



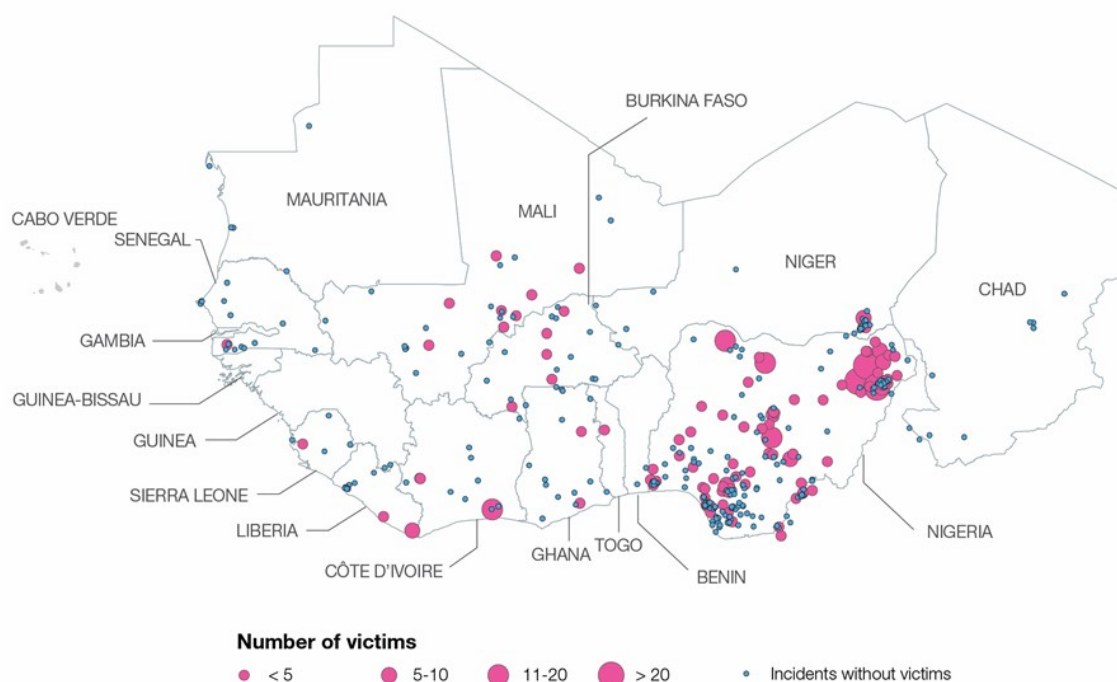
A Multidimensional and Gendered Context of Conflicts

Among the many realities in the Sahel and West Africa that have come to light through research is how the region's women and girls are most vulnerable to its intersecting fragilities and bear the greater burden of these multidimensional crises. Women and girls pay a hefty price in conflict zones. A Sahel and West Africa Club publication on [Women and Conflict in West Africa](#), shows that they are deliberately targeted by Islamist organisations and militias and suffer at the hands of security forces during counter-insurgency operations. 87% of violent acts against women in the region over the past 20 years took place in Nigeria alone. In the north and central area of the country, women have been routinely attacked, kidnapped, and sexually abused.

While there is some evidence of women participating in conflicts as perpetrators (particularly in suicide attacks), they are overwhelmingly victims. Women in conflict are victims of rape and forced prostitution, pregnancy, abortion, sterilisation and forced marriage. Women and girls also make up a large proportion of internally displaced populations (IDPs) and refugees. In Burkina Faso, [51% of IDPs are girls under the age of 14](#) and an [OXFAM study](#) reported that 84% of the total population of IDPs are women and children. What's more, women's increased exposure to sexual and sex-based violence during conflict increases their reproductive health challenges which are made worse because they lack access to health services especially in conflict areas. Conflict also expands the gap between girls and boys, young men and women in enrolment, retention and progression at school including tertiary education. These forms of violence, aggression, suffering and disadvantage compromise women and girl's physical and psychological integrity, disrupt their livelihoods and undermine their quality of life in the Sahel. In the context of the COVID pandemic, the risk and [impact of domestic violence for women and girls has increased](#), setting back modest gains made in women's rights and participation in society.

WOMEN AND CONFLICT

Victims of political violence affecting women, 2009-19



The Gendered Dynamics of Food and Nutrition Security

Women and men experience food and nutrition security issues differently. Fewer women and girls have access to affordable and nutritious food despite two thirds of women being employed in the food system and the major role they play in West African food economy as well as cross-border trade. Opportunities and progress for women even in sectors they are active remain limited by gender norms and other social institutions which have entrenched gender inequality and held women and girls back from realising their potential. Women and girls continue to have less access to education, land, credit and markets, and face constraints on their time due to the demands of unpaid care and domestic work. These pressures and barriers consequently disadvantage women in terms of employment opportunities and participation in the labour market beyond farming and the food economy. Female-headed households are also more vulnerable to stress and less resilient when faced with shocks due to 'cultural restrictions and the feminisation of poverty' (Keita, 2021).

The combination of these gender inequities and gendered experiences poses an existential challenge for peace, adaptation, growth and prosperity in the Sahel.

Given the dynamic and gendered nature of these crises, there can be no single solution and conventional approaches have been unsuccessful. The region needs interconnected solutions that are grounded in local, regional and gendered realities. Such solutions should consider local, transnational, and gendered dynamics in places such as Lake-Chad and Liptako-Gourma, which are affected by hunger, malnutrition, and violence by armed groups, as well as livelihood and employment concerns for young people and women in cities, towns and villages across the region. For instance, de-escalating inter-communal tensions and prioritising the protection of populations are measures that will increase the safety of women. Investments in stronger public institutions, inclusive governance mechanisms and the provision of basic services such as security, health, water, and sanitation will also contribute to stabilising conflict prone areas. As age compounds gender discrimination and inequalities, solutions must also be informed and grounded in better sex and age disaggregated data which will help us understand the role of gender in conflict and Food and nutrition crises. This will in turn lead to better early warning systems and conflict resolution processes as well as targeted solutions which address the [specific food and nutrition needs of women and girls at different stages of their lives](#).

In view of the gendered context and the critical intersections and mutually reinforcing nature of conflict with food and nutrition crises in the Sahel and West Africa, the members of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) have chosen the theme "*Women, conflicts and food and nutrition issues*" as a discussion topic for the RPCA's 37th annual meeting, with the aim of addressing the following critical questions:

1. How can policymakers, governments and regional bodies and international partners efficiently address the food and nutrition security needs of women in the context of conflict?
2. What best practices, key lessons and success factors can be drawn from local stakeholders and programming which effectively combine conflict resolution, the empowerment of women and girls and the provision of food and nutrition security?

To reflect and respond to these critical questions and identify solutions, the "*Women, conflict and food and nutrition issues*" thematic day will host a technical and political panel discussion which are being convened for the following purpose:

- Share experiences and perspectives on the challenges (extent of the phenomenon, best practices for the response, etc.)
- Identify key appropriate policy responses.

The “*Women, conflict and food and nutrition issues*” technical and political panels will contribute to the phenomenon process assessment, policy response, mutual learning and dialogue leading to more effective and sustainable solutions to addressing the gendered impacts of conflict and women FNS.

The discussions will identify the modalities of the interventions, synergies and financing mechanisms needed for efficiently addressing the food and nutritional needs of women in the context of multidimensional conflicts and widespread violence. The panels will also discuss best practices in terms of intervention approaches to addressing women's food and nutrition issues in the context of conflict and for strengthening their role in conflict prevention and management.

2. Thematic day Structure

The thematic day is structured in two blocks or sequences: i) an introductory session followed by; ii) two panel discussions, one technical and one political.

2.1. Introductory session

The introductory session provides a general overview of the issues and challenges related to the topic, with three presentations. The first one deals with the growing convergence of conflict zones and major food insecurity areas. The second is a case study on the impact of the security crisis in the Sahel and West Africa on the future of pastoral communities and pastoralism in general. Finally, the third concerns a study on the situation of women at the heart of the security crisis in Burkina Faso.

2.2. Technical and political panel discussions

All panellists will be invited to share from their perspectives, experience, and expertise on the intersection of conflict and food and nutrition crises and how this affects women. They will be asked to discuss key challenges, explore, and identify best practices to address women’s food and nutrition issues in context of conflict and finally, propose policy options.

Technical Panel

Participants of this panel include researchers, policy advisors, conflict and FNS experts and civil society actors. The discussion will focus on outlining the critical context of the food and nutrition situation for women in the Sahel and West Africa and its intersections with conflicts and violence, key lessons, and best practices from local stakeholders as well as necessary factors for the efficient and successful scaling up of policy and programming solutions.

Key Questions

1. What are the on-the-ground realities for women facing food and nutrition insecurity and, other forms of violence in context of conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa?
 - a) What is the nature and severities of the effects of various conflicts and food and nutrition crises for women in the Sahel and West Africa?

2. What are some of the key lessons learned or best practices, interventions, and actions at the local level which effectively combine women food and nutrition issues and their role in conflict prevention and management?
 - a) What are the success factors and necessary conditions for scaling up?
 - b) What are the implications of these lessons and best practices for public policies dedicated to addressing these multifactorial women's food and nutrition issues efficiently in the context of conflicts?

Political Panel

Participants of this panel will include and decision makers from governments, regional and international organisations, and development agencies. The discussion will outline the national, regional, and international challenges and means of efficiently responding to the food and nutrition security needs of women in the context of conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa. The discussion will also identify concrete policy options and synergies for responding to the issue efficiently.

Key Questions

1. What are the key challenges and opportunities for policymakers (governments and regional bodies) to address the intersecting effects of conflict and food and nutrition insecurity on women? What 2-3 concrete policy actions can be implemented?
2. How should the international community support national governments as well as coordinate their own humanitarian response to the gendered nature of conflicts and food and nutrition crises in the Sahel and West Africa? What could be the 2-3 critical measures to be implemented?
3. What regional policy options (2-3 critical ones) and synergies are necessary to address the risks faced by women of violence, loss of livelihoods, food and nutrition insecurity in the context of conflict exacerbation in the Sahel and West Africa?
4. What should a regional-level gender responsive approach to the impacts of conflict and food and nutrition insecurity on women look like? What 2-3 concrete policy options could be expected from regional organisations such as ECOWAS for addressing the issues?
5. Conflicts, in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic these last two years are worsening food and nutrition situation in the region. The global economic downturn is also impacting development agenda and public spending. How have development financing mechanisms adapted and what actions will guarantee the engagement with and empowerment of women in addressing conflict prevention, food and nutrition security and pandemic economic recovery?

Additional questions that will inform the discussion:

1. What is the psychological and wellbeing burden on women of ongoing conflicts and security shocks as well as food and nutrition shocks?
2. What can and should be done to bring greater attention to the gendered impact of conflict and FNS on women among the region's decision-making bodies, national governments and international partners?
3. What are the key components of a multi-sectoral response to sexual violence in the context of conflict and forced displacements of populations?

For more information

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