

Human Rights Council

Addressing the need for food and water in post-conflict zones



Forum:	Human Rights Council
Issue:	Addressing the need for food and water in post-conflict zones.
Student Officer:	Shams Kamel
Position:	Main Chair

Introduction

Access to food and clean water is a fundamental human right, yet it remains an illusory prerequisite for millions in much of the world, especially in post-conflict settings. Armed conflicts inflict truly dire consequences far beyond the theater of operations. Once the end of hostilities is imminent or has come about, communities find themselves in an extremely precarious situation with critical infrastructure destroyed, economies brought into disarray, and social systems in complete disarray. In such situations, the very first and urgent needs for the population are food security and safe drinking water. These constitute the go-between physicians of recovery, and the absence of these services severely obstructs the healing processes and breeding grounds for further impoverishment of vulnerable groups, most notably children, the elderly, and displaced persons.

Unsanctioned internal displacements, displaced infrastructure, capable institutions, and the right to basic public services are staged as post-conflict scenarios. While in such settings, agricultural production is generally disrupted for land degradation, unexploded ordnance, the absence of farming tools or seeds, and displaced rural populations. Food supply chains-including transport networks, markets, and distribution centers-are often dysfunctional instances preventing the delivery of assistance to the affected population. Non working water facilities, pollution of rivers and wells, and the lack of proper sanitation systems will further diminish access to safe water. These disruptions directly raise and have raised famine risk and outbreaks of waterborne diseases while protracting suffering and deepening humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, the politicization of humanitarian assistance in post-conflict areas often

negatively affects timely and equitable access to vital supplies. Contending parties to a prior conflict (or host nation) may still have control of access routes, limit the access of international humanitarian organizations, or politicize aid to benefit their own agenda and to the detriment of others. In these environments, divisions between communities and their authorities complicate recovery by fueling mistrust. The actual distribution of food and water carries heavy logistical challenges but can also represent a test of political will and international commitment. This dynamic is not only a way to undermine peace's sustainability, but it also stalls, if not reverses, reconstruction and reconciliation.

International accomplishments, while generally altruistic and well-intentioned, fail to provide sustainable resolutions. While proponents of short-term relief packages are better than none, these often fail to address the salient landscape of the systemic vulnerabilities that created food and water insecurity. Humanitarian dynamics, which include actors, host governments, and local communities, are typically uncoordinated, resulting in overlaps or gaps in aid provision. Aid programs become even less effective without any cultural awareness or community involvement in planning or implementation. Recovery plans must prioritize resilience-building, including rehabilitation of agricultural capacity, repair of water infrastructure, and empowerment of local governing bodies.

Ultimately, addressing the need for food and water in post-conflict settings demands an integrated approach that takes into account the urgency of short-term relief initiatives and the complexity of long-term development mechanisms. This also includes fortifying international legal structures to build pathways for access to fundamental resources and to hold accountable those who weaponize starvation and desperation or water denial. Finally, each context will require locally-led, inclusive, and practical recovery models that will restore trust and social connectedness. Absent a sustained and collective effort from the international community, the ideal of human rights in post-conflict settings will remain lamentably out of reach for millions.

Definition of Key Terms

Post-Conflict zone

Areas that have recently experienced armed conflict or war, and are in the recovery and reconstruction phase. These areas have usually suffered major damage to infrastructure, government has been severely disrupted, there are usually internally displaced populations and a precarious security situation. Even though the fighting has stopped, the humanitarian needs remain great, and many of those needs relate to basic access to services such as food and water.

Food Security

A situation in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Following conflict, food security is often endangered due to disrupted agricultural production, broken supply chains, and population displacement.

Water Security

The reliable availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods and production, with an acceptable level of water-related risks. Following conflict, access to safe drinking water is often severely affected that is due to destroyed infrastructure, pollution, or absence of sanitation systems.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

People or groups of people who have been displaced from their homes due to conflict, violence, or disasters and who remain within the borders of their country. IDPs are often cut off from certain basic services and therefore are deprived of basic livelihood, and are very vulnerable to food & water insecurity.

Humanitarian Aid

Aid given with a humanitarian purpose, usually in response to an emergency situation, such as natural disasters or armed conflicts. It includes the provision of things like food, water, and shelter, or medical assistance. In the post-conflict situation, humanitarian aid fills a very important role for stabilization and preventing further deterioration in living conditions in that community.

Reconstruction and Recovery

The rebuilding of infrastructure, institutions, and livelihoods after a conflict. Recovery takes place through the process of rebuilding physical things (e.g., roads, water), and re-establishing governments and public/civil services. Access to food & water is the root of that recovery process.

Waterborne Diseases

Illnesses from microorganisms that are transmitted through contaminated water, including cholera, dysentery, and typhoid. This can be a common result of the destruction of water treatment and sewage systems in post-conflict zones.

Weaponization of Resources

The intentional denial, destruction, or manipulation of critical services like food and water used as an instrument of war or political coercion. This is a breach of international humanitarian law and constitutes a serious danger to human rights during and after conflict.

General Overview

Humanitarian challenges in the aftermath of conflict

When a community endures conflict, it experiences severe humanitarian woes that go beyond the obvious destruction around the community. Access to clean water and sufficient food is often obstructed and challenged in the midst of significant infrastructure collapse, environmental degradation, and institutional failure. Food systems are vulnerable to conflict because they are heavily dependent on a state of peace, the regularity of activity, and mobility. War reduces or wholly eliminates peace, regularity, mobility. Family farms can remain abandoned, markets can be destroyed, and roads can be blocked. Water systems are similarly impacted when treatment plants, pipelines, and sanitation facilities are targeted or neglected. Often, natural water sources are contaminated with industrial waste, human displacement, and damaged sewage systems, and so increased waterborne disease breaks out in previously healthy communities. But this combination compounds civilian suffering and hampers any efforts towards stabilization.

Political and logistical barriers to recovery

One of the most complicated obstacles to recovery in post-conflict situations is the political manipulation of aid. These warring parties may use access to food and water as a weapon of leverage and control, or use it to punish opposing groups. The manipulation could be by blocking humanitarian corridors or denying access to NGOs altogether under the argument of sovereignty. These actions are illegal and violate international humanitarian law in addition to creating continued suffering of the population and prolonging the rebuilding process. Logistical issues exacerbate the situation: governments may lack the capacity to respond to large population relief requirements, NGOs and civil society often face bureaucracy or security restrictions delaying aid from reaching those in need. Simply put, if there is not a neutral and nascent level of cooperation, the recovery, peace-building, and development process are unlikely to result in equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable populations.

The role of international cooperation and development

A consistent and long-term response from the international community is necessary to address existing food and water insecurity in post-conflict contexts. While the short-term provision of emergency relief is vital for purposes of immediate survival, investment in rebuilding infrastructure, re-

establishing local governance, and sustainable development must be undertaken for long-term solutions to be identified and implemented. In the immediate post-conflict environment, basic foundational components must be rebuilt like irrigation systems, agricultural training, and drinking-water treatment plants. However, it is equally critical that humanitarian assistance incorporates a participatory approach with the local community by engaging them in the rebuilding process and identifying context-specific, culturally appropriate solutions. UN agencies such as the WFP, and UNICEF have critical primary roles in the above activities, with local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society with oversight to ensure efficiency and accountability in all aspects of delivery of humanitarian assistance. Development following peace-building in post-conflict circumstances must interrupt the cycle of dependency.

Global implications and the urgency for action

Globally, food and water insecurity in post-conflict areas has tremendous consequences. The number of populations displaced because of conflict is only going to increase as we see an increase in conflicts due to geopolitical tensions, climate change issues, and competition over resources. Displaced communities often spill over borders creating regional humanitarian crises. This can place pressure to host them on country that might already be resource scarce. Of course, post-conflict neglect can create instability resulting in a new cycle of violence and radicalization which again can trigger political tension. Providing access to food and water security is not just a humanitarian imperative, it is a global strategic priority for peace and global security. Solving this issue require further affirmative commitment and use of rights, added to renewed global cooperation and investment to build resilience where it's needed most.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)

The largest humanitarian agency in the world focused on hunger relief. In post-conflict areas, it provides emergency food support, nutrition interventions, and restores interrupted food systems. Within this latter process, WFP supports rebuilding agricultural activities to support food production and reduce the need for external support.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Protects the rights of children and families impacted by conflict. When safe access to water is interrupted, they work to restore it. They are active in addressing hygiene conditions and treating malnutrition. They provide emergency food support and water in refugee camps and displacement areas.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC provides food, clean water, and health services to places of Conflict and Post-Conflict. It assists the restoration of damaged water systems in addition to providing assistance, but it maintains neutrality and is able to obtain access to areas where vulnerability is expressed, although there may be restrictions on others.

Syrian Arab Republic

After years of civil war, millions of displaced people in Syria have no access to food or clean water. Recovery is made uncertain by the destroyed infrastructures, economic crises, and political tensions that led to greater reliance on international aid.

South Sudan

Unending civil strife and floods have severely undermined food production and access to pure water in South Sudan. Many communities rely on outside resources, and meaningful efforts for peace and recovery are difficult to achieve.

Yemen

Yemen's civil war has precipitated large-scale famine and water access problems. Essential infrastructure is largely destroyed and humanitarian access is very limited; millions of people face starvation and waterborne diseases. Humanitarian support from the international community remains highly politicized and is urgently needed.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The FAO is committed to promoting sustainable agriculture with policy frameworks and enables the rebuilding of rural livelihoods in post-conflict situations. The FAO supports livelihood rehabilitation by providing seeds and tools, along with training farmers, in order to restore food security and strengthen longer-term resilience.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)

MSF provides emergency medical care, helps treat malnutrition in children and mothers and provides clean water in areas where health services, coordination, supplies and funding are deficient. MSF is able to respond independent of or when relevant responses are delayed in post-conflict environments.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
July 15, 2011	South Sudan proclaims independence, but within months descends into civil war, which leads to widespread food insecurity and water access issues.
March 15, 2011	The Syrian Civil War begins. As the next decade unfolds, unprecedented levels of displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and a reshaping of economies, develop one of the worst humanitarian and water crises in the world.
April 17, 2015	The conflict in Yemen escalates, resulting in a blockade of food and fuel to the country. Yemen quickly becomes the world's worst humanitarian crisis.
August 2, 2017	The UN initiates an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in conflict stricken areas to assess the risk of famine in these areas, starting in 2017 with Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, and South Sudan
December 6, 2018	The Global Compact on Refugees is adopted by the UN General Assembly, pledging enhanced cooperation by the international community in relation to displacement and vulnerable people in need of food/water.
March 23, 2020	As COVID-19 spread globally, UN Secretary-General António Guterres asked world leaders to commit to a global ceasefire, which would allow humanitarian aid—food and water—to reach affected people living in conflict..

October 14, 2022

WFP reports "catastrophic hunger" in 5 conflict-afflicted countries: Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan, and calls for immediate and urgent international support.

June 13, 2023

UNICEF reports 190 million children in conflicts cannot access clean water, safe sanitation, and access to adequate nutrition, and this report calls for immediate intervention with a multi-agency response to the situation.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 16 Dec. 1966 (Treaty No. 14531)
- *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Jun. 1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*, 17 Mar. 1992 (Treaty No. 33207)
- *International Conference on Water and the Environment*, Jan. 1992, Dublin, Ireland
- *World Food Summit*, Nov. 1996, Rome, Italy
- *Secretary-General on environment and human settlements*, 10 Aug. 1999 (A/RES/53/242) *World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Aug. 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa *The Human Right to Water and Sanitation*, 28 Jul. 2010 (A/RES/64/292)
- *Strengthening Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention in the Aftermath of Natural Disasters*, 9 Feb. 2011 (A/RES/65/264)
- *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Food*, 24 Mar. 2017 (A/HRC/34/L.3)
- *United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*, Jul. 2021, New York, United States
- *The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment*, 28 Jul. 2022 (A/RES/76/300)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations (UN) has made some important strides toward addressing access challenges to food and water in countries recovering from armed conflicts. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, And Cultural Rights (1966) formally recognized “the rights to adequate food and water” and UN A/RES/64/292 (2010) reinforced the status of food and water as basic human rights, laying the groundwork for an emerging global humanitarian agenda.

United Nations agencies such as (WFP - World Food Programme), UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) have undertaken substantial work in post-conflict countries specifically challenged to build and deliver water, food and other emergency aid in nations such as Yemen, South Sudan and Syria, while also working to build resilience in food and water systems capacity for their eventual recovery.

A number of resolutions and forums since, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), UN A/HRC/34/L.3 (2017) on the right to food as well as the formal UN Global Call to Action on Food and Nutrition Security in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (2022) all reaffirm that the UN is committed to supporting co-operatives with the greater recovery processes and resilience strategies in their ongoing challenges.

Apart from the UN, countries, such as Turkey, Qatar, Norway and the Netherlands engage in both multi-party cooperation on some targeted recovery projects, such as refugee support or agriculture redevelopment in regions like Syria and South Sudan. Such development work is of course impacted by the continuing insecurity and limited access challenges.

Possible Solutions

Dealing with the immediate challenges of food and water in a post-conflict environment will require addressing short-term emergency needs, while also considering the long-term sustainable development needs of a community. One important solution is to enhance coordination and collaboration between UN agencies, NGOs, and local government agencies to get assistance to the most vulnerable populations in a timely and effective manner. In addition, improved logistics and communications networks will reduce delays in getting food and water to those in emergency situations.

Reconstruction investment will also be paramount. Restoring water treatment facilities, waste systems, and agricultural infrastructure is crucial so people can independently produce food or access clean water for themselves. Supporting small holder food production through providing seeds, equipment, and training could immediately restore local food production, thereby allowing people to rely less on external food aid.

An additional and crucial solution is providing strengthened financial and political support from the international community to sustain local recovery and revitalization programs over the long-haul. Post-conflict reconstruction programming to strengthen the political will of donor countries, and as a result stabilize a fragile environment of hunger, insecurity, and violence.

Finally, restoring or reconstructing peacebuilding governance structures in post-conflict contexts will be vital to realizing both food and water security. Without security and stable governance, the goal for food or water security will be precarious. Investing in the establishment of dialogue processes, frameworks for negotiation, and the implementation of structures for inclusive governance should be promoted to shape an environment conducive to humanitarian and development programming.

Bibliography

- arua. "Post-Conflict Societies - ARUA." *ARUA*, 5 Sept. 2019, arua.org/arua-centre-of-excellence-in-post-conflict-societies/.
- Bruch, Carl, et al. "Water Law and Governance in Post-Conflict Settings." *Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law*, vol. 29, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/reel.12319>. COHEN, MARC J., and PER PINSTRUP-ANDERSEN. "Food Security and Conflict." *Social Research*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1999, pp. 375–416, www.jstor.org/stable/40971318.
- Council on Foreign Relations. "Global Conflict Tracker L Council on Foreign Relations." *Global Conflict Tracker*, 2024, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker.
- Cunningham, Andrew J. "Post-Conflict Contexts and Humanitarian Organizations: The Changing Relationship with States." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 2, no. 1, Sept. 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-017-0022-3>.
- "Defining Conflict/Post Conflict | Women Win Guides." *Guides.womenwin.org*, guides.womenwin.org/gbv/conflict/context/defining-conflict-post-conflict.
- European Commission. "International Humanitarian Law." *Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.ec.europa.eu*, 2024, civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/international-humanitarian-law_en.
- Gleick, Peter H., and Matthew Heberger. "Water and Conflict." *Island Press/Center for Resource Economics EBooks*, Jan. 2014, pp. 159–71, https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-483-3_10.
- Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. "The Responsibility to Protect: A Background Briefing." *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, 14 Jan. 2021, www.globalr2p.org/publications/the-responsibility-to-protect-a-background-briefing/.
- "Human Rights in (Post-)Conflict - ENNHRI." *ENNHRI*, 16 July 2019, ennhri.org/our-work/topics/human-rights-in-post-conflict/.
- ICRC. *ADVISORY SERVICE What Is International Humanitarian Law?* July 2004, www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf.
- Institute, German. "Post-Conflict Societies: Chances for Peace and Types of International Support." *Idos-Research.de*, 2017, www.idos-research.de/en/briefing-paper/article/post-conflict-societies-chances-for-peace-and-types-of-international-support/. Accessed 2 July 2025.
- Jafarnia, Niku. "'Death Is More Merciful than This Life.'" *Human Rights Watch*, Dec. 2023, www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/11/death-more-merciful-life/houthi-and-yemeni-government-violations-right-water.
- Kemmerling, Birgit, et al. "The Logics of War and Food (In)Security." *Global Food Security*, vol. 33, no. 100634, June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2022.100634>.
- Lee, Sarah. "Economic Revival in Post-Conflict Zones." *Numberanalytics.com*, 2025,

- www.numberanalytics.com/blog/economic-revival-in-post-conflict-zones. Accessed 2 July 2025.
- Mourad, Khaldoun A. "Post-Conflict Development, Reviewing the Water Sector in Somalia." *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, vol. 25, no. 1326-1350, Jan. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-021-02096-3>.
- Panić, M. *POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES: AID EFFECTIVENESS and PERMANENT PEACE*. 25 Aug. 2008, www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess_bg_papers/bp_wess2008_panic.pdf. Swain, Ashok. "Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding." *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, vol. 61, no. 7, Apr. 2016, pp. 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02626667.2015.1081390>.
- Teodosijevic, Slobodanka B., editor. "Armed Conflicts and Food Security." *AgEcon Search*, 2003, ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/289088/?v=pdf.
- , editor. "Armed Conflicts and Food Security." *AgEcon Search*, 2003, ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/289088/?v=pdf.
- "The High Level Reflection Group Meeting at UNESCO in November 2019." *Unesco.org*, 2021, www.unesco.org/en/strategic-transformation. Accessed 2 July 2025.
- Tyner, James A., and Rachel Will. "Nature and Post-Conflict Violence: Water Management under the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1975–1979." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 40, no. 3, Jan. 2015, pp. 362–74, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12080>. Accessed 11 Nov. 2021.
- UNHCR. "Internally Displaced People." *UNHCR*, 2024, www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people.
- "Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding." *Google Books*, 2025, books.google.nl/books?hl=en&lr=&id=YKrpAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1989&dq=food+and+water+in+post+conflict+zones&ots=76XBZKs0tS&sig=jBsu0_BEvmvQ3CagshlR0haFk3g#v=onepage&q=food%20and%20water%20in%20post%20conflict%20zones&f=false. Accessed 2 July 2025.
- Wesselink -Pax, Egbert. *Investing in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas: Risk Analysis and Mitigation*. www.imvoconvenanten.nl/-/media/imvo/files/pensioenfondsen/beleggen-in-post-conflict-gebieden.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2025.
- Zaken, Ministerie van Algemene. "Post-Conflict Reconstruction - International Peace and Security - Government.nl." *Www.government.nl*, 30 Sept. 2014, www.government.nl/topics/international-peace-and-security/post-conflict-reconstruction.
- Zaken, Ministerie van Buitenlandse. "Human Rights - Government.nl." *Www.government.nl*, 26 Sept. 2011, www.government.nl/topics/human-rights.