Event Title: Fighting food insecurity and famine: A call for coordinated action and multi-sectoral solutions against global hunger

Date and time: Wednesday, 22 June - 8:30 AM-10:00 AM EDT

Sponsors: Burkina Faso, Canada, Dominican Republic, Ireland, United States

Objective:

This event highlighted the approaches and best practices that effectively address the multidimensional causes of food insecurity and seek to prevent any further deteriorations, examining areas for increased investment, ongoing gaps, and the linkages between global initiatives and civil society approaches. The event also aimed at identifying key policy actions to support an effective response. A dynamic panel discussion took place featuring voices and perspectives from contexts such as Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region, and Yemen reflecting on country-level actions and initiatives fighting against growing food insecurity and the risk of famine.

Panel Members: (names, titles, and organizations)

- Mr. Rein Paulsen, Director of Emergencies and Resilience, FAO
- Ms. Lucia Ennis, Regional Director for Asia, Concern Worldwide
- Ms. Sameha Abuejhain, Deputy Head of Food Security and Livelihoods Program, Yemen Family Care Association
- Ms. Dimple Save, Head of Nutrition Department, South Sudan, Action Against Hunger
- Mr. Patrick Daniel, National Director Mali, World Vision International

Main points raised by each panelist:

- **Mr. Rein Paulsen, FAO Director of Emergencies:**
  
  - Highlighted that FAO had warned about an upward trajectory of acute hunger since 2016. He highlighted that the global levels of acute food insecurity in 2021 were almost twice the ones of 2016.
  - Noted that three-quarters of a million people are living in catastrophic conditions – risking imminent starvation and death – more than five times the number of 2020. An estimated 49 million people are today in Emergency levels of acute hunger, or IPC Phase 4.
  - Stressed that at least two-thirds of those experiencing acute hunger are in rural areas, making their living from agriculture, however this is not reflected in the collective response, as just 8 percent of humanitarian funding to the food security sector is going to emergency agricultural interventions.
  - Made a strong call for the humanitarian system to focus on cost-effective solutions that meet the greatest needs in the most impactful way, and noted that only concerted agriculture, food assistance, health, nutrition and WASH action, when properly coordinated and sequenced, will have the greatest success in saving people’s lives and reducing skyrocketing levels of acute hunger.

- **Ms. Lucia Ennis, Regional Director for Asia, Concern Worldwide:**
  
  - Noted the unprecedented hunger crisis in Afghanistan: highlighted the economy in freefall and stated that essential financial institutions are not functioning
Almost half of the country’s population are facing crisis levels of food security, 3 million children at risk of malnutrition, thousands queuing for aid/begging in the street. 20 thousand or more are facing famine-like conditions which may worsen.

On recent visit to Afghanistan, Ennis noted two things which stood out about the situation:
   1. Large groups of women begging for bread outside bakeries. The de facto authorities are limiting women’s ability to work and they have little recourse to feed their families when they don’t have male relatives
   2. Stacks of letters of people asking for aid and employment as NGOs are one of the only reliable employers

Concern has pivoted to focus on livelihoods and food security given the current economic situation. They are doing this through providing livelihoods inputs, promote women’s economic empowerment, and through multi-sectoral work that provides cash for work, etc.

She presented two areas for solutions: humanitarian and political
   1. Ongoing support to the humanitarian response will be key to addressing crisis levels of food security. HRP is only 31% funded. Donors also must give organizations flexibility due to the challenging operational environment.
   2. Humanitarian aid cannot replace the political and financial institutions necessary to improve life in Afghanistan in the long run. Called for the international community to ease economic restrictions and support institutions. De facto authorities must allow everyone to access opportunities.
   3. Need the political will to pursue solutions to this crisis.

Ms. Sameha Abuejhain, Deputy Head of Food Security and Livelihoods Program, Yemen Family Care Association:

Noted the extremely challenging economic situation in Yemen, which was recently exacerbated by the crisis in Ukraine.

Stressed the huge increase in the number of food insecure people in a short period of time.

Offered the following potential solutions to avert famine and food insecurity:
   1. Intensify diplomatic efforts to end the war and open air and seaports;
   2. Support essential state institutions such as Central Bank;
   3. Provide adequate and sufficient emergency assistance to address crisis levels of food security;
   4. Invest in infrastructure projects and build resilience through a triple nexus approach;
   5. Strengthen monitoring and early warning systems;
   6. Promote wider participation of local NGOs and support capacity building to meet Grand Bargain localization goals;
   7. Mobilize more financial and technical resources to support those in need.

Ms. Dimple Save, Head of Nutrition Department, South Sudan, Action Against Hunger:

Noted that the growing food insecurity in South Sudan is mainly driven by conflict, climate change disasters such as flooding and economic instability and now the impact of the Ukraine war on food and agricultural inputs prices.

8.3 million people are expected to face severe food insecurity, a 7 percent increase from last year and 2 million children and women at risk of malnutrition.

Highlighted that humanitarian actors have limited access to some regions.
Noted that women are often the sole breadwinners.

Stressed the need to maintain and increase humanitarian assistance while also investing in longer-term approaches. Stated that food aid is necessary, but it is paramount to also support approaches that build resilience and livelihoods and invest in approaches that address the drivers of food insecurity and undernutrition. Multi-sectoral interventions must be prioritized as they can be more effective, efficient and at scales. She also gave some examples of programmes implemented by Action against Hunger in South Sudan:

- The rice project in Jonglei state, an area that has been regularly affected by floods for the past 3 years and where traditional crops like sorghum are no longer an option.
- Kitchen gardens implemented by the Mother Support groups, a group of 100 women producing enough for their own households but also selling the excess quantities and using profits to buy more seeds, paying school fees and more.

Highlighted that the HRP for South Sudan is less than 30 percent funded and called on donors, both humanitarian and development, to step up their support. The nexus approach is the way forward and programs that support food production and resilience need to be prioritized.

Noted that climate change is particularly affecting South Sudan and reiterated her call for more multi-sectoral responses.

**Mr. Patrick Daniere, National Director Mali, World Vision International**

Mali is currently facing one of the worst food security crises of the last decade:

- 3.6 M people are in need of assistance
- Some of the drivers of food insecurity include insecurity, erratic rain patterns impacting the lean season, insecurity driving large number of IDPs and losing their livelihoods, the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS and the Ukraine war increasing food and fuel prices.
- Highlighted that one third of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 27 percent from 2021, while the HRP is currently only 11 percent funded.
- Noted that World Vision International is currently working on increasing community resilience by strengthening the capacity and livelihoods of households in Mali through different activities, such as:
  - The implementation and scaling up Farmers Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), which is a low cost intervention that helps restore and retain soil and its nutrients, as well as diversify income sources for rural farmers, helping communities to manage and mitigate the risks related to climate change.
  - The establishment of savings and loan groups to help stabilize local economies and minimize shocks, along with the development of value chains to help increase and diversify income sources.
  - Taking a “whole of food security” approach to improve agricultural water supply alongside agriculture and livelihood interventions, including introduction of mechanized water systems and irrigation projects for community and household gardens.
  - Promoting early warning and anticipatory action by strengthening nutrition surveillance, such as through routine community level MUAC screening, and linking nutrition monitoring and interventions into food security programming.
  - Called for better adapted responses to the volatile nature of the crisis in Mali and more advocacy efforts focused on strengthening multi-sectoral responses to the food security crisis.

**Key messages of the side event:**

- A multi-sectoral approach is key in the fight against rising acute food insecurity and famine risk. A coordinated effort, working together at country, regional and global level with national
governments, and implementing partners in the areas of food security, agriculture, nutrition, health, and WASH is essential to avert famine.

- At least two-thirds of those experiencing acute food insecurity are in rural areas, making their living from agriculture. In many food crisis countries these figures are even higher. Agriculture is among the most cost-effective humanitarian frontline interventions and lays the pathway for resilience building. Yet, allocations to agriculture have decreased over the years, accounting for only 8 percent of funding in 2020.
- Interventions must build on local knowledge and solutions and be deliberate in including community voices in program design, implementation, monitoring and feedback mechanisms.
- Given the cyclical nature of acute food insecurity and famine in many contexts, reducing global food insecurity will require an urgent scale-up in life-saving assistance coupled with political will and action to address the drivers of acute hunger.
- As demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, local actors are at the heart of humanitarian responses. The involvement of national and local entities is paramount for ensuring a coherent approach to both humanitarian assistance and development efforts.

Main points raised during the discussion with participants:

- The United States recalled that hunger levels were already rising before the Ukraine conflict and reported that 89 member states have already committed to their call to action. The US also urged Member States to keep food and agriculture markets open and highlighted the need to strengthen resilience. They also informed that they are working on the ‘Feed the Future’ initiative that will contribute USD 5 billion to address food insecurity in 35 countries in 5 years.

- The Russian Federation responded to the US remarks and noted that the Russian Federation is not using food as a tool of war, they also stressed that they are not blocking seaports and provided solutions, such as humanitarian corridors and routes to export grains through Belarus. They also highlighted the secondary impacts of sanctions, which are preventing financial transactions and impacting agricultural and energy exports from Russia.

Outcomes of the side event:

- There was widespread consensus from all participants, including Member States, UN agencies, and national and international NGOs on the needs to deliver humanitarian action differently, by using multi-sectoral approaches that build resilient food systems, link long and short-term responses and address the underlying root causes of acute food insecurity.
- There was increased awareness that the most effective solutions are those that tackle food insecurity ‘end to end’ from early warning and prevention to interventions that promote recovery, sustainable agricultural production and social protection.
- Sound early warning mechanisms lead to anticipatory action, and it is imperative to ensure that these anticipatory actions are appropriately resourced, both financially and in terms of capacity. Investments must be made in long-term solutions, which include system strengthening.
- Given the cyclical nature of food insecurity, these solutions must build as flexible and agile as possible, to allow to respond efficiently and effectively to the volatility that so often characterizes contexts with populations affected by hunger.