



Knowledge, evidence
and learning for
development

Evidence on the ways social inequalities and discrimination affect vulnerability and resilience in contexts of acute food insecurity and famine risk

Becky Carter, IDS and Tom Palmer, FCDO

5 August 2021

K4D helpdesk query

Query

1. In what ways are social inequalities and discrimination drivers of famine or severe food insecurity risk?

- inequalities among people and groups that stem from discrimination based on social identity characteristics such as gender, age, disability, sexuality, ethnicity and religious belief.
- looking at evidence on vulnerability and resilience

2. What measures can address these drivers?

Impacts at two levels:

- national and sub-national
- households and individuals

Methodology and Evidence base

Methodology

Rapid non-rigorous literature, online searches for relevant (English language) literature and some expert input, focus on evidence from Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen

Evidence base

Academic research on famines; research and grey literature on vulnerability to food insecurity; humanitarian vulnerability assessments and guidance

Impact of social inequalities and discrimination on national and sub-national risks of severe food insecurity and famine

3 key findings of rapid review

- Food insecurity is both an effect and cause of conflict while in recent years the worst food crises have occurred in areas of active conflict.
- Gender inequalities, in particular women's vulnerability to violence, influence national propensity for violent conflict. (United Nations & World Bank, 2018)
- High levels of economic and political inequalities for ethnic, regional and religious groups can make violent conflict more likely. (Bahgat et al., 2017)

Data available and evidence gaps

- ▶ *Experts highlight evidence gaps and complex interlinkages of causal factors (Birchall, 2019; Bahgat et al., 2017)*
-

The ways social inequalities and discrimination affect individuals' and households' vulnerability/resilience to severe food insecurity and famine

3 key findings of the rapid review:

There is some evidence on:

1. who is vulnerable due to social inequalities and discrimination
2. the causal pathways of how social inequalities and discrimination shape people's vulnerability and resilience

BUT

3. there are evidence gaps, with lack of disaggregated data

Conceptual frameworks

Food security means all people have at all times access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food (IFPRI, n.d.)

Food insecurity understood as a continuum, with starvation (and famine or famine like conditions as defined by the IPC) the most extreme experience (Hendriks, 2015)

Research provides insights into **famine** as a process, a system, and a unique state characterised by social breakdown (Devereux, 2000, 2006, 2009 and Howe, 2018)

Who is affected

Severe food insecurity and malnutrition:

- Evidence heightened vulnerability of **women, female headed households, older people, people with disabilities, children, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, people with diverse sexualities** – displacement exacerbating
- Also vulnerable: **rural, remote** and **urban informal workers**

Famine mortality rates:

- Importance **careful contextual analysis**
- **High rates children, young infants, elderly** BUT also adults, adolescents
- **Women consistently experience lower death rates** BUT in some famines girls higher mortality rates than boys
- **Minority ethnic groups have faced higher rates**

Evidence example 1

FAO (2020): Food Insecurity Experience Scale 2014-18: women more likely than men to find access to food difficult “even when they have the same income and education levels and live in similar areas as men”

Evidence example 2

FAO et al. (2019): “Children in most disadvantaged ethnic groups in low- and lower-middle-income countries have on average 2.8 times the rate of stunting and six times the rate of wasting compared with their more advantaged peers Additionally, ethnic disparities appear to be increasing in many countries.”

Casual pathways

Social (intersecting) inequalities shape:

1. Vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition

- increased susceptibility to shocks (livelihood)
- lower capacity to withstand and adapt (assets incl. social networks)
- “strong negative synergies between chronic and transitory food insecurity, and between moderate and severe food insecurity” (Devereux, 2006)

2. Heightened risks in crises (negative coping strategies, protection threats)

3. Barriers to accessing humanitarian response (environmental, institutional, attitudinal)

Evidence examples

UN & World Bank (2018): Systemic societal discrimination determines differential access to political, economic and social resources and opportunities

Howe (2018): how interaction between vulnerability and disruptive factors that can result in a famine have differential impact on hhs/communities depending on “economic, social, political, demographic, environmental, and biological characteristics”.

Further resource: Related K4D helpdesk query on [*Impact of social inequalities and discrimination on vulnerability to crises*](#)

Data available and evidence gaps

Scarce disaggregated data in situations acute food insecurity on individuals' social characteristics, impact on their vulnerability/resilience.

- More on risks of food insecurity for women, female- and disability- headed hhs
- Some for livelihood, locality, residential status (settled/transitory/ displaced), ethnicity
- Less on effects age, disability; even less sexuality, religious identity, and intra-household dynamics.

Evidence example

FAO et al. (2019): Intra-household food dynamics: limited evidence and “no systematic bias at the global level has been observed towards one specific age or sex group within a household concerning intra-household food distribution” BUT a “wide consensus” because of weaker bargaining position (discriminatory norms), within hhs women and girls “frequently eat least, last and least well”

House (2020): Global study - “a clear connection between discrimination against LBT+ communities and lack of access to decent work” and identify “an urgent need for further research on LBT+ poverty and its links with hunger, food insecurity and nutrition, as well as lack of shelter”.

Measures to consider and respond to the impact of social inequalities and discrimination on vulnerability

Evidence relating to:

- Gender and social inclusion sensitive analysis
 - Emergency response
 - Resilience building
-

Improving gender and social inclusion sensitive analysis

Recommendations in literature

- More **disaggregated data**, in particular **individual-level** disaggregation to understand intra-household vulnerability
- Move from “static” categories to **political economy analysis** – to understand famine dynamics, causes of vulnerability and resilience (social connections) (Barbelet & Wake, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2016)
- **Holistic, integrated analysis looking across vulnerability categories**, rather than separate long lists of vulnerable groups (Barbelet et al., 2018)

Initiatives

- **IPC analysis and early warning**: plan to add more in-depth thematic analysis on vulnerable groups (possible focus: gender-sensitive, refugees and displaced) and/or trend/resilience analysis to tools and procedures (IPC, 2019)
 - **HelpAge Rapid Assessment Method for Older People** on malnutrition rate (Barbelet et al., 2018)
 - **World Food Programme's Gender Equality for Food Security (GE4FS)** measure tested in 17 countries links data on gender and food security with empowerment measures to show how vulnerability is gendered (WFP Gender Office, 2020)
 - **Testing and uptake of Washington Group Questions** to identify persons with disabilities in needs assessments – Syrian nationwide survey (HNAP, 2019)
-

Improving inclusive emergency humanitarian response

- **Recommendations for improving humanitarian response to famines:** timely response; reduce migration by scaling up community interventions; effective community-based targeting. (Devereux et al., 2017)
- Guidelines recommend a **twin-track approach** combining specific interventions for groups at heightened risk with strategies/resources for removing barriers to community-wide interventions – (e.g. *IASC Disability Inclusion Guidelines 2019*)
- **Localisation:**
 - Women’s **leadership** in prevention & crisis response leads to better food security outcomes for women and children (Lafrenière et al., 2019, UN Women, 2015)
 - Valuable role in crises of **WLOs/OPDs/OPOs** and other CSOs representing marginalised people
 - Recommendations on improving **accountability for and protection from sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse** at all levels of the humanitarian system (Feather et al., 2021)

Evidence gaps

- ▶ *Role of local organisations under funded and evidence gaps* (Robinson et al., 2020; Sherwood and Pearce, 2016)

Resilience building

Shock-responsive social protection programmes:

- Linked to early warning mechanisms (Devereux, 2021)
- Growing use of cash transfers in emergencies but how inclusive?
- Research on **COVID-19 SP response for people with disabilities:** (UNPRPD & ILO, 2021)
 - low coverage pre-crisis
 - challenges expanding to new beneficiaries (disability assessment) especially in crisis
 - recommendation universal disability allowances or at least national disability registries

Empowerment interventions:

- Consensus **empowering women** key to improving food security for women and their households BUT limited evidence in fragile settings.
- Recommendation: **gender-transformative approaches** addressing causes of inequality (social norms, unpaid care work, GBV) (CARE-USA, 2020)
- **Inclusive peace processes** increases long-term stability (Carl, 2019)

Evidence gaps

- ▶ *Inclusivity of crisis-response social assistance*
- ▶ *Support to women's empowerment within food systems (Moore et al., 2021) and in fragile settings and on causal pathways/mechanisms (Njuki et al, 2021)*
- ▶ *Resilience and preparedness programming targeting people with disabilities and older people (Robinson et al., 2021)*

For the full report this slide deck is based on, please see:

Carter, B., & Kelly, L. (2021). [Social inequalities and famine and food insecurity risk](#). K4D Helpdesk Report. Institute of Development Studies.

DOI: 10.19088/K4D.2021.097

Bibliography

Bahgat, K., Dupuy, K., Gates, S., Nygård, H. M., Rustad, S. A., Strand, H., Urdal, H., Østby, G., Barrett, G., & Hillesund, S. (2017). Inequality and armed conflict: Evidence and data. Peace Research Institute Oslo.

<https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=954&type=publicationfile>

Barbelet, V., & Wake, C. (2020). Inclusion and exclusion in humanitarian action. Humanitarian Policy Group. London: Overseas Development Institute. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Inclusion_and_exclusion_in_humanitarian_action_the_state_of_play.pdf

Barbelet, V., Samuels, F., & Plank, G. (2018). The role and vulnerabilities of older people in drought in East Africa. Overseas Development Institute. <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12293.pdf>

Birchall, J. (2019). Gender as a causal factor in conflict. K4D Helpdesk Report 549. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14393>

CARE-USA. (2020). Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition. A Scoping Paper – September 2020. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1920/Gender/GEWE_Scoping_PaperFINAL040ct.pdf

Carl, A. (ed.) (2019). Inclusion in peace processes. Accord 28, Conciliation Resources, 2019. https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fspublic/Navigating_inclusion_in_peace_processes_Accord_Issue_28.pdf

Devereux, S. (2006). Distinguishing between chronic and transitory food insecurity in emergency needs assessments. World Food Programme, Emergency Needs Assessment Branch 31 (ODAN). <http://www.livestock-emergency.net/userfiles/file/assessment-review/InstiueDevelopment-Studies-2006.pdf>

Bibliography

Devereux, S. (2021). Social protection responses to COVID-19 in Africa. *Global Social Policy*. June 2021.

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F14680181211021260>

Devereux, S., Sida, L., & Nelis, T. (2017). *Famine: Lessons Learned*. Humanitarian Learning Centre.

<https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/13173/Lessons%20Learned%20FINAL%20online.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO. (2019). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019. Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns*. Rome, FAO. [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000106760/download/?_ga=2.239053186.306077665.1623267527-10114967.1618837733)

[0000106760/download/?_ga=2.239053186.306077665.1623267527-10114967.1618837733](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000106760/download/?_ga=2.239053186.306077665.1623267527-10114967.1618837733)

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO. (2020). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9692en>

Feather, J., Martin, R., & Neville, S. (2021). *Global Evidence Review of SEAH in the Aid Sector*. London, UK: RSH Resource & Support Hub. https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/RSH_Global_Evidence_Review_Final_Design_V5.pdf

Hendriks, S.L. (2015). The food security continuum: a novel tool for understanding food insecurity as a range of experiences. *Food Sec.* 7, 609–619 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-015-0457-6>

HNAP. (2019). *Disability: prevalence and impact. A Nationwide Household Survey Using Washington Group Methodology*. Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme. https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Disability_Prevalence-andImpact_FINAL-2.pdf

Bibliography

House, C. (2020). Out of the Margins: LBT+ exclusion through the lens of the SDGs. Report on key research findings from the global Out of the Margins network. Stonewall. <https://outofthemargins.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Out-of-the-Margins-report2020.pdf>

Howe, P. (2018). Famine systems: A new model for understanding the development of famines, *World Development* 105 (2018) pp. 144–155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.12.028>

IPC Global Partners. (2019). Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Technical Manual Version 3.0. Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions. Rome. http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). (n.d.) *Food Security*. Retrieved June 24, 2021, from <https://www.ifpri.org/topic/food-security>

Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, S., & Thylin, T. (2019). Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response, *Gender & Development*, 27:2, 187-201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1634332>

Maxwell, D., Majid, N., Adan, G., Abdirahman, K., & Kim, J. J. (2016). Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011. *Food Policy*, 65, 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.11.001>

Moore, N., Lane, C., Storhaug, I., Franich, A., Rolker, H., Furgeson, J., Sparling, T., & Snilstveit, B. (2021). The effects of food systems interventions on food security and nutrition outcomes in low- and middle-income countries, 3ie Evidence Gap Map Report 16. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). <https://doi.org/10.23846/EGM016>

Njuki, J., Eissler, S., Malapit, H., Meinzen-Dick, R., Bryan, E., & Quisumbing, A. (2021). A review of evidence on gender equality, women's empowerment, and food systems. Food Systems Summit Brief Prepared by Research Partners of the Scientific Group for the Food Systems Summit, May 11th 2021. https://sc-fss2021.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/06/FSS_Brief_gender_equality.pdf

Bibliography

Robinson, A., Marella, M., & Logan, L., (2020). Gap analysis on the inclusion of people with disability and older people in humanitarian response. ELRHA. https://www.elrha.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/Elrha-HIF_Gap-Analysis_Inclusion-of-people-with-disability-andolder-people_Literature-Review2020-A.pdf

Sherwood, E., & Pearce, E. (2016). "Working to Improve Our Own Futures": Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Women's Refugee Commission. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/StrengtheningNetworks-of-Women-with-Disabilities.pdf>

UN Women. (2015). The Effect of Gender Equality Programming on Humanitarian Outcomes. UN WOMEN. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/unw%20effects%20of%20gender%20equality%20on%20humanitarian%20outcomessinglepgsweb.pdf?la=en&vs=5705>

United Nations, & World Bank. (2018). Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>

UNPRPD, & ILO. (2021). Social Protection Measures For Persons With Disabilities And Their Families In Response To The Covid-19 Crisis: An Updated Overview Of Trends. UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Centre for Inclusive Policy for the International Labour Organization. https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/RessourcePDF.action;jsessionid=Q7M4iGUnzTJw-J0tjGoHF28_LI0iiCZyCIDjKQE6f047yf0lukO!1750948109?id=57373

WFP Gender Office. (2020). The Power of Gender Equality for Food Security: Closing another gender data gap with a new quantitative measure. Rome: World Food Programme. <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000112500/download/>



Knowledge, evidence
and learning for
development

Contact

Email: info@k4d.info

Twitter: [@K4D_info](https://twitter.com/K4D_info)

Website: www.ids.ac.uk/k4d

Copyright

This presentation was prepared for the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes.

Except where otherwise stated, it is licensed for non-commercial purposes under the terms of the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#). K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of FCDO, K4D or any other contributing organisation.

© Crown copyright 2021

