

## **NIGERIA, SOUTH SUDAN, SOMALIA, AND YEMEN ARE FACING FAMINE OR A CREDIBLE RISK OF FAMINE**

### **KEY MESSAGES**

The four famines illustrate the deadly combination of on-going conflict, denial of freedom of movement, poor governance, drought and rising food prices

There is direct correlation between food scarcity and protection risks, particularly in situations of displacement

The enormity of the crisis is exposing individuals to heightened protection risks that are life threatening

Protection Clusters and sectors across all four operations are facing severe funding shortages and their capacity to respond to growing needs is overstretched

To curb the severity and spread of the food crisis concerted and coordinated efforts from all actors are needed

Facilitating access and scaling up humanitarian and protection assistance to the affected populations are urgently required

**More than 20 million people** across four countries risk facing starvation and water shortages within six months.<sup>1</sup> Wars in Yemen, north eastern Nigeria and South Sudan have devastated livelihoods and collapsed economies, with famine already declared a reality in parts of South Sudan due to continuing conflict since 2013. In Somalia, a drought and a long-standing conflict is devastating the agriculture sector, ruining the country's rural and urban economy, and bringing the country to the brink of famine.

Conflict and violence in all four countries have impeded physical and economic access to food, particularly as a result of the disruption of livelihoods and markets, as well as distorted access to land and employment. These conditions have further fuelled internal displacement with a spill over effect to neighbouring countries. The number of South Sudanese seeking refuge in Ethiopia has risen significantly with a daily outflow of 660 people in March 2017, compared to 103 people in January 2017.


In 2017 demand for humanitarian aid has reached record high levels as several humanitarian crises continue to unfold. With the upsurge of crises in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and complex operations in Ukraine, Burundi, DRC, CAR, Niger, and Mali, the humanitarian system is struggling to meet rising humanitarian needs. UNOCHA estimates that more than \$5.6 billion is needed this year by humanitarian operations in Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen. As of March 22, the humanitarian response plans only received 13.9% of its required funding.<sup>2</sup>

While assistance and protection continue to be the key goals of humanitarian action, the current alarming funding gap in meeting the needs of people in Somalia, South Sudan, north-eastern Nigeria, and Yemen raises fear that the situation will deteriorate fast if the international community does not act quickly.

Protection Clusters and sectors across all four operations are facing access constraints and severe funding shortages and their capacity to respond to growing needs is overstretched. The gravity of the situation requires life saving interventions by all actors. Timely financial support to ensure essential relief efforts and ward-off looming famine; as well as collective, concerted and coordinated global efforts to save the crisis-affected people from facing the risk of hunger and starvation, are needed.

### **NORTHERN NIGERIA**

 **7 million<sup>9</sup>**  
people are struggling with food insecurity


 **450,000<sup>10</sup>**  
children suffer from severe acute malnutrition

 **1.8 million<sup>11</sup>**  
people are internally displaced

### **SOUTH SUDAN**

 **100,000<sup>5</sup>**  
people are already declared to be facing famine

 **1 million<sup>6</sup>**  
people are on the brink of famine and urgently need food and livelihoods assistance

 **270,000<sup>7</sup>**  
children suffer from severe acute malnutrition

 **1.9+ million<sup>8</sup>**  
people are internally displaced


### **SOMALIA**

 **6.2 million<sup>3</sup>**  
people urgently need food and livelihood assistance

 **536,000<sup>4</sup>**  
newly displaced persons have moved from their homes since November 2016

### **YEMEN**

 **17 million<sup>12</sup>**  
people (60% of population) are food insecure

 **462,000<sup>13</sup>**  
children suffer from severe acute malnutrition

 **2 million<sup>14</sup>**  
people displaced across 21 governorates

## PROTECTION IS LIFE SAVING

The four famines illustrate the deadly combination of on-going conflict, denial of freedom of movement, poor governance, drought and rising food prices

**IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES**, people were already facing serious threats to their physical safety and other life-threatening protection risks as a result of decades of conflict. The risk of hunger and famine have also caused protection risks or exacerbated existing ones, illustrating a direct correlation between food scarcity and conflict. Against a backdrop of dire humanitarian needs and a precarious security environment, the protection situation of women, men, and children in all four countries has worsened. Long-standing structural factors such as poor governance, denial of freedom of movement and expression including the right to receive information, as well as denial of access to humanitarian aid owing to insecurity, direct attacks on aid workers or restrictions on their activities are **also immediate contributing factors**.

**FIELD PROTECTION CLUSTERS** have been working in all four countries for a considerable period of time, documenting, reporting and responding to grave human rights violations, and publicising the situation of populations in danger, as well as undertaking a series of other actions designed not only to relieve the symptoms of abuse but also to put an end to it where possible.

**TODAY**, as the impact of the famine and food insecurity intensifies, the affected population in all four countries, including women and children, are becoming more vulnerable and increasingly exposed to physical threats, family separation, further marginalisation, gender based violence including sexual abuse and exploitation, and attacks as they search for food, water and access to medical care.

Across all four countries, field Protection Clusters have documented that people are increasingly turning to negative coping mechanisms, including early marriage, child labour, transactional sex and forced onward movement, including across borders, due to extreme food insecurity as well as limited or lack of access to humanitarian assistance. The enormity of the crisis is clearly exposing individuals to marginalisation, life threatening protection risks, and leading to rising displacement. For example, in Somalia and South Sudan, food insecurity is increasing flows of displaced people within the country as well as to neighbouring countries.

**THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF PROTECTION CLUSTERS** in all four countries during this critical period are focused on raising awareness of protection risks and equal access to humanitarian assistance; enhancing the physical and psychological security of the affected population; addressing immediate physical needs and reducing negative coping mechanisms; minimising the threat of violence, coercion and deprivation as well as building local capacity to obtain safety and dignity for all those involved.

### PROTECTION AT THE FOREFRONT OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Evidence and lessons learnt from the past show that assistance activities constitute a direct complement to protection and vice versa. International law requires for humanitarian action to include both the protection of the affected population and their assistance and relief in order to work effectively towards the overall objective of protecting life, health and ensuring respect and dignity for the crisis-affected people.

It is thus essential to ensure that key protection concerns are kept at the forefront of all humanitarian interventions and that response to the looming and existing famine include actions that prevent negative coping mechanisms and reduces risks experienced by vulnerable groups.

### FUNDING AND ACCESS TO DO MORE

Despite the repeated highlighting of protection concerns, funding for activities to address some of the priority problems has been difficult to come by. In Nigeria, for example, the protection sector received only 12% of its funding requirement in 2016 and South Sudan received 26%. In Yemen, the protection cluster received 15% of its funding requirement in 2017 and Somalia received 7.4 %.

Funding gaps in meeting the needs of people in Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen raises fears that the situation may deteriorate fast if the international community does not act quickly. In all four countries, protection risks and concerns experienced by the affected population evidence strong links with health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene problems prompting the necessity for a coordinated and collective effort that holistically addresses immediate needs of those at risk.

Humanitarian access, timely and predictable funding are essential to deliver life-saving protection interventions and programming. If action is taken now to address imminent and crucial humanitarian needs, looming famine can be prevented.

17 million people (60% of the population) are food insecure;  
Yemen is facing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world

Since the start of the conflict in 2015, Yemen has experienced massive internal displacement. The war is having a devastating impact on the population. Almost the entire country is affected, with alarming rates of food insecurity and malnutrition.

**The Task Force on Population Movement (TFPM)**, a technical working group of the Protection Cluster, that engages in dedicated displacement and return tracking with a view to inform the humanitarian response in Yemen, reported that there are almost 2 million IDPs and 1 million IDP returnees in Yemen as of 1 February.

The on-going conflict remains the main cause of displacement in the country, causing severe food insecurity among the displaced, returnee and host populations.

Yemen was declared by the Famine Early Warning System as **“the largest food security emergency in the world.”**<sup>15</sup> A report by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation highlights that **7.3 million Yemenis** are currently facing food emergency status with another **10.2 million in crisis. This figure represents a 21 per cent increase in hunger since June 2016, compounded by the on-going conflict in the country that started in 2015.**

The situation in Yemen is compounded by myriad protection issues, including **how food access can be used as a weapon of war if parties to the conflict politicise aid and arbitrarily deny sustained humanitarian access.** In particular there is concern about the port city of Hudaydah through which 80% of all imports entered the country prior to the onset of war, and which has recently been a target of the conflict. With Yemen heavily dependent on imports, including 90% of its food, ongoing attacks on and around the port by parties to the conflict have the potential to inhibit the import of commercial and humanitarian goods, including vital food stuffs. This is to be seen against the backdrop of the already limited operational capacity of the port, as a result of destruction of vital port infrastructure. In the absence of any alternative channels for importation, the potential fall out on the food supply to the country could be catastrophic.

In addition to years of chronic underdevelopment, the ongoing conflict has further engendered a severe economic downturn. This has negatively impacted Yemen's social and administrative infrastructure, exacerbated overall vulnerability and diminished already precarious self-sufficiency capacities.

Most Yemenis are facing increased food insecurity as food prices increase while livelihood opportunities remain scarce, and public salaries remain unpaid for months following the relocation of the Central Bank from Sana'a to Aden in late 2016. The protection cluster documented that restrictions placed on the right to freedom of movement owing to security risks has impacted the mobility of civilians and led to deprivation of the means of making a livelihood. This has in turn negatively impacted the ability of civilians to provide for their families. With financial resources rapidly depleting, the most vulnerable are often in need of cash assistance to meet their basic needs, including food assistance. Loss of civil documentation is also widely reported placing those without documentation of their status at risk of abuse, as well as restricting their freedom of movement and access to humanitarian assistance. Access to legal assistance - e.g. to secure civil documentation - is severely limited

Existing community and kinship-based social protection networks have also broken down. Consequently, the coping capacity of conflict-affected individuals is under severe pressure, particularly for persons with specific needs and vulnerabilities, including female or child headed households, older persons, persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and marginalised groups (Muhamasheen).

Children constitute 55% of the internally displaced in Yemen, and are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, as they are dependent on others. Access to nutritious food is critical to children's development (physical, mental and cognitive), but the conflict and food insecurity in Yemen has meant that children's growth has been compromised. The preliminary results of the [Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment](#), a joint survey conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in cooperation with the authorities in Yemen in February 2017, show that **over 2 million children** are acutely malnourished.

Similarly, caregivers such as pregnant and breastfeeding women are in desperate need of predictable food assistance. Food insecurity is also increasing gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, the disruption of livelihoods and stress of insufficient food assistance is exacerbating domestic violence.

Resort to negative coping strategies, as pressure mounts on families and individuals to secure food, is evident and include begging, increased harmful child labour, child recruitment, rationing of food or skipping meals, and early marriage. Access to information on the availability of humanitarian assistance - and how to access it - is also limited, placing vulnerable groups at increased risk of exploitation and abuse.

The Yemen Protection Cluster is providing a range of services to address and respond to critical protection concerns and risks as they arise. To mitigate against a precarious protection environment, psychosocial support, cash assistance, legal aid, referrals

to service providers, awareness-raising on humanitarian assistance, and on-going evidence-based advocacy form the core activities of the cluster. Building capacity of local organisation and national authorities as well as establishing and strengthening community-based protection networks to scale up and deliver high quality programmatic response is also a key priority for the cluster.

The Gender Based Violence (GBV) sub-cluster, in concert with protection cluster members, partners and other clusters, is developing action plans and awareness campaigns for GBV prevention and response services. The Child Protection sub-cluster is also working with protection cluster members and other clusters on the identification and referral of children for a range of services to address their acute needs.

Access constraints, however, make it difficult for the protection cluster and its partners to increase and strengthen their presence across the country. The sensitive nature of protection work, especially with respect to monitoring human rights and international humanitarian law violations, child rights abuses and implementation of Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response interventions, means that assessment and monitoring missions are often impeded. The imposition of bureaucratic impediments on partners' movements or the denial of visas for international staff, and the political affiliation of some local partners, are some of the key challenges that are impacting wider service delivery and outreach to the affected population.

Further, funding requirements to meet the needs of the affected population across all five area hubs where the protection cluster is present remains to be a gap, restricting response to the changing dynamics and increasing complexity of the situation. The protection cluster's funding requirement for the 2017 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) is \$70.3 million USD. However, as of April 2017, only \$10.5 million (15%) had been funded.

Timely and predictable funding is essential in order to deliver life-saving protection programming and activities, and to encourage as well as expand presence of partners in the field rather than implementing one-off interventions. Further, as the pace of return is on the rise, longer term funding is also needed to ensure access to durable and sustainable solutions.

## SOUTH SUDAN

FUNDING GAP 84%

**100,000 people are already facing famine,  
with another 1 million on the brink**

Across the country, nearly three and a half years of conflict have severely undermined crop production and rural livelihoods. Food insecurity became a significant threat to life with famine in parts of South Sudan now a reality. The UN declared last month that parts of former Unity State are now in famine that impacts an estimated 100,000 people in that state. Further an estimated 1 million South Sudanese are closely at acute or emergency risk of food insecurity.

At independence in 2011, South Sudan was already one of the poorest countries in the world. Decades of war with Sudan left very little infrastructure and meant the new country was chronically underdeveloped. When civil war broke out two years later, in 2013, all these issues were compounded to create the fragile food security situation today.

Similar to the situation in Yemen and Nigeria, the famine in South Sudan is referred to as a man-made with parties to the conflict described as parties to the famine. **One million children are estimated to be acutely malnourished across the country, including 270,000 children who face the imminent risk of death should they not be reached in time with assistance. The cholera outbreak that began in June 2016 is also now spreading to other locations.**

Limited access to justice, obstacles towards access to land, community level violence, normalisation of sexual and gender based violence, child abductions and child recruitments are protection threats documented by the South Sudan Protection Cluster (together with the respective Child Protection, GBV, and Mine-Action sub-clusters) well before the recent crisis. The protection cluster noted with alarm that the current situation is creating new protection risks and exacerbating existing ones. Restrictions on freedom of movement due to insecurity and deliberate measures taken by parties to the conflict, place serious risks and strains on food security and livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, the protection cluster is mobilising efforts to ensure multi-sectoral coordination to prevent and respond to critical protection issues and concerns across all clusters, as well as support the identification of vulnerabilities and actions to minimise risks and threats to the affected population. Protection analysis reports and updates regularly produced by the cluster are also enhancing understanding of the humanitarian situation from a protection lens and contributing to identifying appropriate response.

The severe food shortages caused by the conflict has exacerbated existing challenges faced by the cluster. As the situation deteriorates, more communities are being affected and accessing certain areas has become more difficult, impacting the ability of the cluster to implement protection activities without the required funding to, for example, maintain and recruit additional qualified staff, charter flights to access communities cut off from road access (due to the conflict and approaching rain season) and to maintain a presence in such geographical areas.

**6.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance;  
2.9 million Somalis at risk**

Located in the arid Horn of Africa region, Somalia has experienced famine in the past. In 2011, against the backdrop of an active conflict and weak government, the worst drought hit Somalia and came to be popularly known as 'The Horn of Africa Hunger Crisis', leading to the death of an estimated 260,000 people, half of whom were children.

Plagued by a complex and long-standing conflict and an entrenched economic crisis, the humanitarian situation in Somalia continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate and a sharp rise in displacement due to drought is currently taking place across the country.

**THE PROTECTION AND MONITORING RETURN NETWORK (PRMN)**, a technical working group of the Protection Cluster that tracks displacement and return, with a view to better inform humanitarian response efforts in the country, reported that **an estimated 536,000 newly displaced persons have moved from their homes since November 2016 in search of food and water, mainly from rural to urban areas. The dire situation is also pushing people across borders to neighbouring countries, including to Ethiopia.**

Protection analysis shows that internal displacement in the country continues to feature as a key driver of humanitarian and protection needs. Protection remains critical for the most vulnerable groups especially women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and minority communities. Needs are reported to be high in the regions of Bay, Bakool, Lower Shabelle, Middle Juba, South Galgaduud, Gedo, and Sanag.

Food insecurity and lack of access to humanitarian assistance is exposing vulnerable groups such as women, children and female-headed households to the risk of gender based violence. Some families are reportedly resorting to negative coping strategies such as early marriage, providing sexual favours in exchange for obtaining food rations for themselves and their families. Moreover, malnutrition and drought-related diseases are on the rise. Competition for limited resources such as water is already increasing local tensions and could trigger further inter-communal conflict.

The Somalia Protection Cluster together with the Child Protection, Gender Based Violence, Mine Action, House, Land and Property sub-clusters are identifying the vulnerabilities of people in different regions in order to enhance preparedness, determine the risks at hand, assess the multifaceted coping mechanisms, build up local capacity, and facilitate the delivery of a coordinated response. Prevention and response services include identification, documentation, tracing and reunification, legal aid services, medical support in coordination with the Health Cluster and the provision of psychosocial services.

In so far as rapid response to the urgent humanitarian crisis is concerned, the cluster is facing a number of challenges including the provision of limited support to the affected population due to financial constraints. Without additional funding, many vulnerable groups, including women and children, will be exposed to further protection risks and may not benefit from specialised services. The presence of mines and ERW continue to threaten the lives and livelihoods of civilians and further compromise the ability of humanitarian actors to safely carry out their duties. The situation is further exacerbated by shortage of funding that may result in the discontinuation of the UNMAS humanitarian mine action project in both South-Central Somalia and Puntland.

The on-going conflict in the country coupled with multiple years of drought and substandard harvests places **2.9 million Somalis at imminent risk**. Further, **over 6.2 million people** - half the population - are in need of humanitarian assistance. The current situation mirrors the 2011-2012 drought that ultimately created a famine throughout the country which resulted in the death of more than a quarter million people

The Somalia Protection Cluster's funding requirement for the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is USD 77 million. However, only \$ 5.7 million (7.4%) had been funded. **There is clearly an urgent need to mobilise resources to fill the funding gap and enable protection partners reach millions of the drought displaced persons at risk of hunger, disease or death.**

## 7 million people are struggling with food insecurity

Like South Sudan, Yemen and Somalia, northern Nigeria has been engaged in years of violent conflict between the government and the insurgent group, Boko Haram. The on-going insurgency in Northeast Nigeria is characterised by extreme violence and destruction as well as violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. As a result of the conflict, there are 1.8 million internally displaced persons in the country.

The most impacted states – Borno, Adamawa and Yobe - are located in the Lake Chad basin, an area that has experienced environmental changes over the last few decades. Once more, the conflict in the region has exacerbated these issues, leaving 7 million people in **the three most impacted states struggling with food insecurity**.

Insurgency and counter-insurgency measures has disrupted family and community networks, triggered family separations and resulted in many child rights abuses. Negative coping mechanisms including drug abuse, begging and survival sex are prevalent. With 81% of internally displaced persons in the North East States living with the host communities, considerable strain is placed on dwindling resources.

Vulnerability screening carried out by the protection sector across all six North East States illustrates direct links between food insecurity and protection risks, particularly of those in situations of displacement. The screening underlined a protection crisis in the north-east and pointed to severe food shortages as well as high rates of malnutrition in newly accessible sites. Multiple protection risks exacerbated by the food crisis situation include family separation, sexual abuse and exploitation, grave violations of child rights and forced recruitment as well as marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

To address the vast number of Nigerian people whose lives have been devastated as a result of the conflict and food insecurity, the protection sector (together with the respective Child Protection and GBV sub-sectors) is working to assess and respond to these critical and life threatening protection threats in collaboration with its members, partners and other actors.

Critical funding shortfalls, on the other hand, jeopardise and continue to obstruct the implementation of planned protection activities by the protection sector and its partners. Access constraints to certain areas due to conflict and violence is further exacerbating the situation and preventing the sector from carrying out crucial life saving work.

## ENDNOTES

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- 2 High Level Meeting On Famine And Fragility, "Activating a Humanitarian – Development Peace Approach." 27 March 2017, p 1
- 3 UNICEF, Nearly 1.4 million children at imminent risk of death as famine looms in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, 21 February 2017, available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_94893.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94893.html)
- 4 Somalia Protection Cluster, 08 April 2017
- 5 UNHCR Briefing Note, 11 April 2017, available at <http://goo.gl/HMFoCN>
- 6 *Ibid.*, 3
- 7 *Ibid.*, 1
- 8 UNHCR South Sudan situation update, 15 March, available at: <http://goo.gl/CqiCVM>
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- 10 *Ibid.*, 1
- 11 UNOCHA, Nigeria, available at: <http://www.unocha.org/nigeria/about-ocha-nigeria/about-crisis>
- 12 Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC), Yemen: Projected Acute Food Insecurity Situation - March-July 2017, available at: <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-map-detail/en/c/522844/>
- 13 *Ibid.*, 1
- 14 *Ibid.*, 9
- 15 Famine Early Warning System, Yemen: Declining imports into Al Hudaydah port drive concerns about future food supplies, March 2017, available at: <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/yemen/key-message-update/march-2017>