

The Four Famines: Root Causes and a Multilateral Action Plan

Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy

July 18th, 2017
14:30, SD-419

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy, thank you for convening this hearing on “The Four Famines: Root Causes and a Multilateral Action Plan”. Today, I will provide a briefing on the state of the four looming famines in South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen; WFP’s efforts to respond to and prevent famine; and major challenges and opportunities for effectively responding to these emergencies. This brief responds to the questions posed in Chairman Young’s letter to me on June 15, 2017. This brief is being provided on a voluntary basis and should not be understood to be a waiver, express or implied, of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and its officials under the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

The looming famine emergencies have two things in common: they are primarily driven by conflict and they are entirely preventable. With modern forecasting, improved agricultural practices and effective humanitarian organizations, bad weather alone is not capable of pushing large groups of people into famine any more. Conflict between armed groups or between armed groups and the State, in these cases, is the catalyst to cause famine to occur. Displacement, a major consequence of conflict, means that lives are disrupted, fields not kept and harvests missed. Each lost harvest drives poverty deeper. Families become dependent on other communities, themselves already poor. They buy food on credit, become dependent on humanitarian assistance just to meet their basic needs or they migrate to urban areas where they do menial labor or beg on street corners. These impacts are exacerbated by funding shortages and impeded access for humanitarian agencies like WFP and have placed millions at risk of death from starvation and disease. Still, when properly resourced, food assistance is already working to save lives. Funding provided by the United States—the global leader in food assistance—has helped to prevent

famine and forced migration from occurring, has pulled several counties in South Sudan out of famine and is helping to contribute to improved regional and global stability. While it is important for the United States to continue to lead the response to global famine relief funding, other nations must also rise to meet this unprecedented challenge.

MY FIRST 100 DAYS

My first months as Executive Director of WFP have been committed to two major activities: seeing first-hand the emergencies that WFP is responding to, and working to ensure that all donor nations are stepping up to do their part to save lives and prevent these emergencies from escalating beyond their borders—making sure the burden is shared.

In my first three months as Executive Director, I've undertaken seven field visits including to our operations in famine affected South Sudan and Somalia and the refugee camps in Uganda. As I have seen firsthand, the world is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. Next week I'll be traveling to Yemen with the leaders of UNICEF and WHO.

About 20 million of our brothers and sisters in South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen are at risk of famine, and an additional 10 million are facing crisis conditions. It is the most vulnerable in these countries—especially children—that are at highest risk of death from starvation and related diseases. Nearly six million children in these countries are malnourished, with at least 1.4 million in severe condition – roughly the equivalent of every child under the age of five in Florida and South Carolina. As many as 600,000 of these children could die in the next four months without intervention. When famine strikes, it is the result of our collective failure as a global community to respond.

WFP OVERVIEW

The World Food Program is the world's leading humanitarian agency fighting hunger. In 2017, WFP plans to reach 17 million people in these famine prone countries. In the month of June alone, WFP reached 11.2 million people, assisting 5.4 million people in Yemen, 2.3 million in South Sudan, 2.4 million in Somalia and 1.1 million in northeast Nigeria. When funding is provided and access is guaranteed, our efforts have demonstrated that we can provide assistance that pulls communities from famine conditions, and, importantly, that we can prevent famine from occurring in the first instance.

SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, WFP has assisted 3.4 million people across the country since the beginning of the year. Famine that was formally declared in February 2016 has been alleviated in the two affected counties. While the official declaration has ceded, suffering continues on a massive scale. In fact, today, the number of people in need of emergency food assistance has increased from 4.8 million to over 6 million, including over 1.7 million people facing emergency or famine-like conditions. The potential for starvation is ever more present for up to 45,000 people in Unity and Jonglei states, even though the size of the affected population is no longer sufficient (i.e., greater than 20 percent of the county's population) to meet formal famine criteria. The ongoing conflict has created two million refugees. We are grateful to countries such as Uganda, which I've recently visited, for generously hosting over a million refugees from afflicted countries.

The cost of providing humanitarian assistance as well as the number of people in extreme need will continue to rise in South Sudan—and in other famine risk countries—as the country enters into the 'hunger' or 'lean' season, the period where food stocks run out and where rainfall can limit overland access by WFP and other organizations. In South Sudan, for example, we estimate that approximately 60% of roads are currently impassible, a figure which will rise to 90% at the height of the rainy season. The lean season has arrived earlier this year—and will persist for a longer period—across several of the famine risk countries given consecutive years of drought and conflict that have reduced available food stocks.

YEMEN

WFP is currently scaling up its emergency operations in Yemen, where two-thirds of the country's population is in need of emergency food assistance. Approximately 17 million people in Yemen do not have access to sufficient food to live healthy lives. Of those 17 million, WFP has identified 6.8 million people who are severely food insecure and require emergency food assistance. Yet given funding shortfalls, full emergency rations reached only 3.9 million people in June. In addition to providing general food rations, in July WFP aims to provide specialized nutritious foods to over two million children between six months and five years old who face increased risk of death from malnutrition. Meanwhile, the cholera outbreak in Yemen has expanded to 21 of 22 governorates in the country, claiming the lives of over 1,700 people and affecting over a quarter of a million people whose bodies have been weakened by a lack of food and proper nutrition. WFP, long recognized for its logistics expertise, is partnering with the

Ministry of Public Health and Population and the WHO to provide medical supplies, including a chartered flight in May that delivered 80 metric tons of supplies.

NIGERIA

In northeast Nigeria, given funding shortages, WFP is targeting only the most vulnerable women and children and has been forced to halve food rations in recent months—at a time when the lean season is setting in and hunger is on the rise. At present, at least three Local Government Areas remain inaccessible because of ongoing conflict, each on the brink of famine. At least 1.9 million people have been displaced in the country. WFP has been able to quickly scale up its operations in Nigeria, from serving 160,000 people in October 2016 to over a million people each month since December 2016.

SOMALIA

In Somalia, WFP has similarly scaled up its response, reaching five times more people in May (2.4 million) than it did just five months prior in January. This includes reaching almost 775,000 women and children with preventative and curative nutrition assistance. This escalated response has so far prevented famine onset in the country, however 3.2 million people are currently facing critical and emergency conditions. While we are approaching the close of the rainy season, it is estimated that 25% of all food insecure people remain located in inaccessible areas, either because of impassible roads or inadequate security.

WFP'S STRENGTHS

What is true across all four countries is that in the places where WFP provides food assistance malnutrition rates are falling. Donor funding is being put to good use and it is making an impact, delivered by dedicated staff working in some of the most dangerous settings in the world. In extreme cases, WFP staff has made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in service to their brothers and sisters and all of humanity. We owe them a great debt of gratitude and a steadfast commitment to ensuring that their mission is completed.

As I said to the world in my first meeting of the WFP Executive Board in June, I could not imagine walking into this job with four looming famines, and unprecedented human displacement if the World Food Program were not already a highly effective and efficient provider of humanitarian assistance, operating at speed and at scale. These attributes have made WFP a highly sought after partner. The World Bank, for example has requested WFP to work alongside

them, the World Health Organization and UNICEF to jointly design and deliver packages of assistance in conflict and fragile settings that would play a major role in decreasing mortality and malnutrition rates. Meanwhile, in Yemen, WHO has requested WFP to staff and run their Emergency Operations Center that will oversee the management of the cholera outbreak.

FUNDING NEEDS

Despite this good work, overall funding support to WFP remains insufficient to carry out all of its programmed activities. Globally, humanitarian needs are growing faster than available funding. The number of people who are acutely food insecure in the world has risen from 80 million in 2016 to 108 million in 2017, a 35 percent increase in a single year. In addition to these famine emergencies, WFP is currently responding to two additional Level 3 emergencies—our highest classification— in Iraq and Syria and six Level 2 emergencies in Ukraine, Mali, Libya, Horn of Africa Drought, Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is difficult to overstate how unprecedented the food assistance needs are in the world today. Funding remains the principal barrier to reaching millions more in desperate need in famine risk countries and beyond.

Currently, we have received less than half of the funds we need, as WFP's planned activities in the four famine risk countries are funded at 42%. Over the next six months, WFP needs more than US\$750 million to address needs in these countries. Funds must be made available now to avoid needless suffering for children, women and men, and also higher costs. At present, WFP's Yemen operation is funded at 37%, South Sudan at 33%, Somalia at 49%, and Nigeria at 65%. Delays in responding to these famines, whatever the reason, cause the unnecessary loss of life. Without proper funding, WFP and other partners must make difficult decisions about where food is distributed— decisions about who lives and who dies. A declaration of famine means that people are already dying from hunger and related causes. By the time famine was declared in Somalia in 2011, more than half of the eventual 258,000 victims had already died.

When we do not provide funding for the famine response, or prevent famines from occurring, the losses are intergenerational. Children who lack proper nutrition early in their life experience permanent losses in physical growth—height, weight and brain development—leading to a diminished capacity to learn and a greater susceptibility to infection. Studies have shown that children who receive proper nutrition in their first 1,000 days are ten times more likely to survive life-threatening illnesses, attend almost five more grades of schooling than their

malnourished peers, earn 20% more in wages as adults, and can increase a country's GDP by over 10% annually. In Yemen, one out of every two children under the age of five is stunted and suffers from chronic malnutrition. Without sustained intervention, there will be social, economic and security consequences that will long outlive these looming famines.

UNITED STATES LEADERSHIP

The United States has led the global response to the four famines, providing more funds than any other single donor nation. This is consistent with the United States' long history and tradition of leadership in the fight to end hunger. This is evident in Congress' action to pass the FY17 Consolidated Appropriations Act signed in May, where supplemental funding was made available to respond to the unprecedented needs associated with the four famines. We appreciate efforts from the United States to see that this funding is quickly made available to partner organizations like WFP. We commend the President and the American people for making \$639 million dollars in humanitarian assistance immediately available to respond to the famine emergencies, \$331 million of which will be directed to WFP to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of children. This support, which President Trump announced on July 8th at the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany, comes at the time when people are most vulnerable, when food has run out from the last harvest, when there is nothing left for these families to feed their children.

Contributions from the United States have long included an important mix of both American commodities and cash-based assistance. This allows WFP to reach more people using the right tool, in the right place, at the right time. The mix includes food grown by American farmers, local and regional procurement, vouchers and debit cards. This is wholly consistent with WFP's efforts to utilize only the most appropriate food assistance modalities, all guided by rigorous analysis that takes into account local conditions.

It is essential for the United States to continue to lead in this effort—as you have done and as I know you will continue to do—because when the U.S. acts, the world takes notice. This committee, this Congress and the President are standing on the shoulders of giants in American political history. You are following in the footsteps of a generation of leaders who had the foresight, courage and wisdom to invest in Europe in the aftermath of WWII. They helped to found institutions like WFP, and through these efforts have consistently demonstrated that these investments serve to reinforce American interests, not to undermine them.

PARTNERSHIPS

It is not just U.S. funding and farmers that are helping to support the mission of WFP. Across the four countries at risk of famine, WFP is partnering with 14 separate U.S.-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to implement emergency and non-emergency food assistance programs. Partnerships with these NGOs allow WFP to reach more people, in more places, with life-saving food assistance, and is reflective of the global reach and impact of U.S. civil society organizations. These include Adventist Development and Relief Agency, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Food for the Hungry International, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, Malaria Consortium, Mercy Corps, Mercy USA for Aid and Development, Relief International, Samaritan's Purse, World Relief, and World Vision.

American companies have also answered the call. WFP is proud to announce a new partnership with MasterCard that will facilitate the provision of an additional 100 million school meals over the next five years. While we at WFP are a global leader in logistics, we continue to learn and improve through partnership with UPS. And where WFP is using its purchasing power to support smallholder farmers in the countries where we work, Cargill is working to make sure those farmers have long lasting markets for their crops. These are just several examples of critical partnerships with the U.S. private sector.

BURDEN SHARING

While the U.S. continues to lead in global funding for the famine response, other donor nations must also do more. When I am not in the field visiting the people that we serve, you can be sure that I am in donor capitals asking that all nations are contributing to ending these emergencies and resolving their underlying conflicts. And other donors have begun to answer that call. This is especially true in the case of Germany, where funding to WFP last year increased to nearly \$900 million, up from approximately \$60 million ten years ago. Germany and the European Union greatly increased their contributions in response to the escalation of humanitarian emergencies in Syria and the four countries at risk of famine.

I have made it a goal of my time as Executive Director of WFP to broaden support for the organization. The United Kingdom has been stepping up more (providing \$156 million to the famine countries); the European Union has been stepping up more (\$72 million); Canada has been stepping up more (\$37 million). But other states can and do more—and I have made this clear to them in one-on-one bilateral meetings and when we sat across the table from one another

at my first WFP Executive Board meeting. I also have not been shy about mentioning the need for these other donor states to do more in news media interviews.

UN COLLABORATION

Given the complexity of the emergencies in these four looming famines, broadening our base of donor funding is just one critical step that we must take. Our work must also be supported by partnerships with other humanitarian organizations. Providing food alone is insufficient in these complex emergencies. Vaccinations to counter the spread of disease, water to prevent dehydration, and shelter for displaced people are also essential. This is where partnerships and coordination matter, with organizations like UNICEF and UNHCR—as well as a host of other humanitarian agencies—drawing on WFP’s extensive logistics capacity to deliver critical non-food items to those in need. At any given moment WFP’s 5,000 trucks, 70 aircraft, and 20 ships are delivering food and supplies across the globe, a larger logistics capacity than any other humanitarian organization. Working with partners like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) allows WFP to break the cycle of hunger and poverty by providing seeds and training to vulnerable populations that allow local food production to take hold, effectively reducing the need and cost of humanitarian assistance in the future. These partnerships that acknowledge the longer-term development needs of affected populations provide an exit strategy for humanitarian organizations.

U.S. INVESTMENTS

Other programs like school feeding—made possible with funding from U.S. programs like the George McGovern—Bob Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program—represent sustainable safety net systems that can be taken up by recipient governments to prevent communities from falling into extreme poverty and reducing the need for costly interventions later on. Similarly, investments in early warning systems like USAID’s Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET), WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Service, and the global Integrated Phase Classification, allow humanitarian partners to project and respond in real time to potential emergencies. FEWSNET and VAM for example, issued warnings regarding potential famine conditions in the four countries as early as January 2017, allowing the international humanitarian community sufficient time to organize and raise awareness and funds to respond. Without this capacity to forecast food insecurity, the cost of humanitarian intervention is much greater, both in dollars and lives lost. The most cost effective way to

respond to famine is prevent it from happening in the first place. Make no mistake, our ultimate goal is to work ourselves out of business—to build a world where WFP is no longer needed.

CRISES CAUSED BY CONFLICT

We cannot solve these emergencies with money and effective partnerships alone. The four looming famines are rooted in ongoing conflict. In fact, currently 10 of WFP's 13 largest food assistance operations are driven primarily by conflict, and today fighting and violence drives over 80% of all humanitarian needs. Until we are able to end the underlying disputes through diplomacy and other actions, conditions will never fully improve.

Conflict and hunger are mutually reinforcing. Recent research conducted by WFP indicates that for each percentage increase in food insecurity, migration increases by approximately 2%, increasing the likelihood that food insecurity and the underlying conflicts will spill over borders. What is required to prevent further regional and global instability is unimpeded humanitarian access, best provided through a peaceful resolution of conflict, but at the very least, through a commitment by all warring parties to International Humanitarian Law to protect civilians and allow free-passage of humanitarian goods and services to reach those in need. We need to bring pressure to bear upon these nations in conflict and the parties involved.

AVOIDING DIVERSIONS

Still, while a major barrier, issues of humanitarian inaccessibility and food assistance 'diversions' have been at times exaggerated or misconstrued. In complex emergencies in insecure environments, WFP has demonstrated that it can provide quality food assistance with minimal losses. In 2016, for example, WFP handled 4.2 million metric tons of food across 72 countries. *Of this, only 0.47%—less than one half of one percent—was lost before arriving to people in need,* due to conflict and civil strife, improper or extended storage, inadequate transport, or the deterioration of food at its origin. In fact, WFP consistently experiences losses far below the internationally recognized industry threshold of two percent. It accomplishes this through a truly integrated supply chain that combines resource mobilization, food sourcing, and real time tracking of food down to the last metric ton.

In June 13th testimony to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, for example, Secretary of State Tillerson stated, "the focus on the Port of Hodeidah [in Yemen] is critical because it is the port of entry where we can begin to deliver

massive amounts of humanitarian assistance; it is controlled today by the Houthis. The aid that has been sent in through that port, we know, most of it has not made it to the people it was supposed to make it to...”. Secretary Tillerson is correct in stating that Hodeidah is an important port for the passage of humanitarian assistance—nearly 80% of WFP in-kind food assistance in Yemen travels through this port. While there are significant delays affecting vessels entering in to Yemeni ports, Hodeidah remains a critical entry point for food assistance in to the country. In fact, almost 19 million people live in the northern opposition-controlled areas of Yemen, and can be reached only through the Hoediedah or nearby ports. Four WFP vessels carrying over 100,000 MT of wheat are expected to arrive and discharge in June and July alone. Despite media reports, in 2017 there has been only one instance of WFP-contracted trucks being threatened or looted by armed groups.

HUNGER AND MIGRATION

What is true about humanitarian crises today is that they do not respect borders. Hungry people in the four famine emergencies and beyond have made the choice to journey to Europe, and to the United States, because their safety and wellbeing could not be guaranteed in the places where conflict rages on. This is not an easy choice to make. In fact, our research indicates that people displaced by violence in Syria, for example, will not move out of the country until they have moved at least three times inside the country because they do not want to leave their home. They want to stay in their own countries; but are compelled to move to ensure their basic needs are met. Migration also dramatically increases the cost of providing humanitarian assistance. For example, it costs about 50 cents per day to provide food to someone who is internally displaced within Syria. But if that same person becomes a refugee in Germany, it costs the German people 50 *Euros* per day.

BLUNTING EXTREMISM

Meanwhile, global military spending is nearly \$2 trillion a year. Emergency food and other essential humanitarian assistance are much more cost effective. Secretary of Defense Mattis has said, “America has two fundamental powers. One is the power of inspiration. The other is the power of intimidation. Those of us in uniform are in an intimidating role up against the enemy. But we now fight wars among innocent people, among populations that need to be on our side if we’re going to win. There is where America’s power of inspiration comes to bear.” As I’ve said on several occasions in recent months, bags of food stamped “from the American people”,

distributed by partners like WFP are among the most effective programs out there, dollar for dollar, for fighting extremism.

Evidence on the links between food insecurity, armed conflict and extremism is increasingly available today. WFP is involved in several efforts to make these links explicit, drawing on our extensive operations in the some of the world's most difficult settings. We have seen how hunger, marginalization, and frustration are capable of driving people— especially youth— into insurgencies and extremist organizations. The failure to meet the needs of these people serves to foster further frustration, increasing the pool of willing candidates to join these movements and leading to decreased food insecurity from violence and economic disruptions, completing the circle. People should not have to choose between feeding their family or resorting to violent extremism—we have the tools through food assistance to eliminate that awful choice. Food assistance through WFP and other U.S. partners can save lives and create the space and time necessary to arrive at political solutions to these conflicts.

Thank you, as representatives of the American people, for continuing to feed hungry people. Rest assured, I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that all nations are contributing financially to end these global crises. However, our efforts will never fully serve to end human suffering if a peaceful resolution to the conflicts driving these crises is not provided. We must take concerted action to build peace and stability in these nations through any means possible. One thing is undeniably true: with your help WFP is preventing famine, saving lives and diminishing the spread of extremism—and we will continue to do so.