Protection Risks & Food Insecurity: Strengthening Community-led Solutions to Complex Crises: ECOSOC Official Side-Event

21st of June, 2023 | 8:30 – 10: 00

Event Title: Protection Risks & Food Insecurity: Strengthening Community-led Solutions to Complex Crises: ECOSOC Official Side-Event

Date and time: Wednesday 21st June, 8.30- 10.00 am (Geneva time)

Co-Sponsors: Permanent Mission of Sweden in Geneva and Global Protection Cluster (GPC)

Organizers: Global Protection Cluster (GPC), World Food Programme (WFP), CARE, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), InterAction, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxfam

Objectives:

For millions around the world, conflict perpetuates a deadly and persistent cycle of protection risks and food insecurity. Not only is the connection between hunger, protection, and conflict strong, evidence shows it is growing more widely. The World Food Programme reports that 70% of people experiencing hunger live in areas affected by conflict and a Global Protection Cluster (GPC) analysis finds that in food insecurity contexts (IPC3 or above), there are now more people in need of protection than last year. Despite this clear connection, humanitarian approaches to addressing these mutually reinforcing needs are often siloed and more systematic approaches to analyze and act on food insecurity and protection risks through a multisectoral lens are sorely needed.

The identification of protection risks and their connections to food insecurity is fundamental to effectively reducing and addressing such needs in crisis contexts. Utilizing participatory approaches that **integrate the perspectives and priorities of communities and local actors is a critical starting point** with profound and proven impacts on how humanitarians understand protection risks and food insecurity and support the rights of people affected by crises.

In addition to dissecting the linkages between food insecurity and protection, participatory approaches help reveal a diversity of experiences and the need for tailored solutions. The risks and challenges that people face can be highly diversified depending on geography, conflict dynamics, and identity factors. For example, among people affected by conflict-induced hunger and protection risks, those who are marginalized due to gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or other characteristics often bear the brunt of the impacts, yet they have the fewest positive coping strategies to rely on for assistance. In this event, diverse speakers drew attention to the importance of community-led approaches highlighting challenges, practical solutions and best practices from specific contexts.

Panel Members:

Moderator

Mr. Samuel Cheung, Global Protection Cluster (GPC) Coordinator

Opening Remarks

- Mrs. Sara Brodd, Senior Policy Specialist Protection, The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Mr. Rein Paulsen, Director of the Office of Emergencies and Resilience, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Panel Discussion

- Mr. Kevin Muriithi, Senior Protection Coordinator, International Rescue Committee Afghanistan (IRC)
- Mrs. Aisha Mounkaila, Founder & Chair, NGO LARASSU, Niger
- Mrs. Saba Gebremedhin, Executive Directress, Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations
- M. Thierry Yongo, Head of Mission of the national NGO "Person in Need Relief Mission" (PNRM)

Main points raised by each panelist:

Sara Brodd, Senior Policy Specialist Protection, The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

- The fact that actors from the protection and food security sectors come together to discuss collective actions to address and mitigate protection risks linked to food insecurity, is to me a sign that we did move forward in putting people's protection at the centre of humanitarian action.
- Protection risks linked with conflict and violence are driving and aggravating humanitarian needs, including food insecurity. While lack of food will lead to increased exposure to the risk of facing violence, abuse and deprivation. The most vulnerable groups, including women and children, are often the hardest hit.
- Addressing and mitigating those protection risks is one of the priorities in Sweden's humanitarian strategy, through SIDA. We are convinced that identifying and understanding protection risks remains fundamental to effectively protecting the affected population in the first place. We are also convinced that identifying risks helps us provide a quality immediate humanitarian response while at the same time reducing further escalation of acute needs. It is essential to strengthen collective efforts to understand and identify protection risks, including through inclusiveness and collaboration with affected communities and local actors.
- A shared understanding and analysis of risks and threats also enables various actors to design multi-sector programmes to increase the capacity of communities to overcome threats and ultimately to change behaviour of those that are responsible for the threat. It is an opportunity to increasingly work in complementarity with development and peace actors and to collectively deliver on protection outcomes.
- We should support this dialogue to influence programming and ensure that our partners measure and report on risk mitigation as an actual result and desired outcome, across sectors. At the same time donors and member states need to understand protection outcomes, accept certain risk taking and support humanitarian leadership including through advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy.
- Listen to the full remarks here

Mr. Rein Paulsen, Director of the Office of Emergencies and Resilience, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

- Protection risks and displacement have been drivers of humanitarian needs across emergencies in the past decade. We know that there is a strong correlation between this record level of food insecurity, and conflict, disaster and displacement. Conflict and insecurity are the biggest driver of food insecurity in 19 countries

or territories, where more 117 million people were living in IPC 3 or above. Recently economic shocks are becoming an important driver of food insecurity. In some countries, such as Syria and South Sudan, economic factors, linked to conflict and global food system shocks, are even becoming the main driver.

- Food security is closely tied to a person's or household's capacity to generate income. This income often comes from agricultural livelihoods. When these are damaged, the impact on households' food security can be immense, with a series of knock-on effects that increase protection risks. This means that when they lose their livelihood and they are not able to access sufficient food, they resort to "negative coping strategies", which can result in choices that can often increase risk to safety and dignity.
- We see evidence of the strong correlation between food insecurity and protection risks, and we have a collective responsibility to further deepen our evidence base, that when a household food security is compromised protection risks increase significantly.
- We need to be driven forward by the shared understanding of what we are talking about today. We see for instance two areas to better embed the centrality of protection in our responses in complex food crises settings: a) we, the food security actors, must understand vulnerability to protection risks and therefore as a starting point when working with communities we are adopting a 'do no harm' approach. This is incumbent to all actors, not only to protection agencies or FAO. As food security actors we need to coordinate and work more closely with protection actors, and leverage on their expertise and analysis, to deepen our share understanding of protection risks; b) Look at how FAO specifically works to address increased protection risks: where populations traditionally rely on agriculture, there are opportunities for us to reduce risk with comprehensive agricultural livelihood assistance.
- In such contexts, investing in a household's ability to generate a stable income and contribute to their own food security removes the necessity of people to engage in negative coping mechanisms that expose people, particularly women and girls, to serious risks of harm and exploitation.
- Listen to the full remarks here.

Mr. Kevin Muriithi, Senior Protection Coordinator, International Rescue Committee Afghanistan (IRC)

- In Afghanistan, understanding and identifying protection risks is now even more fundamental than before to better design strategies that can effectively address the erosion of safety and dignity and corresponding rise in humanitarian needs following the coercive environment and restrictions imposed by De Facto Authorities. Gendered restrictions contributed to and exacerbated protection risks for women and other population groups facing systematic discrimination – including a newly identified trend of increased risks related to denial of resources, opportunities, and services. This risk is very much linked to consequences of heightened food insecurity and resulting negative coping strategies that individuals and communities employ to survive. Reciprocally, acute food insecurity requires immediate attention to discourage negative coping mechanisms leading to increased protection risks. An intersectional lens and disaggregated analysis is critical to understanding who is affected by protection risks and how people may be differently impacted.
- The restricted humanitarian space and ban on female humanitarians brings forth challenges of not only being able to reach population groups facing systemic discrimination but also it influences whose voices and perspectives are included in the analysis needed to inform our response. Realizing the localization of assistance, communities should be empowered to conduct protection risk analysis, suggest program adaptations, and monitor protection risks in partnership with local organizations. In Afghanistan, risk analysis has been very important to understand the humanitarian needs of populations, target programming accordingly, identify entry points for embedding protection programming where access has been restricted, and support crisis-affected communities more effectively. Well-coordinated, integrated or multi-sector planning and monitoring of needs will lead toward a stronger protection response. Sector specific protection integration tools and referrals should be strengthened. . Co-location of services to leverage sectoral entry points, utilization of inclusion focal points, and multi-agency and Cluster coordination in assessments and analysis have been key ingredients supporting a more adaptive and outcomes-oriented response.
- Listen to the remarks here.

- Listen to the second round of remarks here.

Mrs. Aisha Mounkaila, Founder & Chair, NGO LARASSU, Niger

- Women (the majority of IDPs and refugees) fight night and day to give hope to their families. As a result, they play a crucial role in food security and the protection of basic services. They are often the first victims of hunger and are responsible for feeding their families. Women also face higher rates of food insecurity, particularly in areas plagued by terrorism and crime such as the central Sahel and the Lake Chad basin today.
- As a group of organisations that defend the rights of women and young people in particular, we believe that community stabilisation is essential because it lays the foundations for long-term development. Our approach focuses on women as the main target and entry point, with an emphasis on community-based planning and recovery and rapid-impact interventions to restore livelihoods and access to basic services for all. We work to reduce exposure to protection risks, such as displacement and gender-based violence, which have become virtually synonymous with conflicts and climate crises.
- With this in mind, in January 2023, InterAction, WFP and CARE, in collaboration with national NGOs, conducted a study on the interconnections between conflict, food insecurity and protection risks in Niger (Diffa, Maradi and Tillabéry regions). The aim is to ensure their socio-economic empowerment in a country or town that is not their own, and to give them the power and potential for leadership in their households and communities, for a community that is fair in terms of gender and sustainable peace.
- Listen to the full remarks here.

Mrs. Saba Gebremedhin, Executive Directress, Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations

- I represent a network of women's associations that work in several conflict and drought prone areas in Ethiopia. Why protection must be at the center of the humanitarian action has been explained, I will focus on what this mean to us and for communities. In Ethiopia we have been in a deep crisis for the last 3 years, specifically due to conflict and droughts. In this situation, all the progress we made in terms of law and policy and in relation to harmful practice has been lost and we went back 20 years. While the responsibility to protect is the very foundation of humanitarian response, it is the very first thing we lose when a crisis starts.
- In Benjaghoul, a conflict between ethnic groups has generated displacement and we had cases of women raped in established IDP centers. Even in our own humanitarian response, women needed to be protected. The conflict in Tigray have brought a lot of damage to the country, families and communities. As a result, we see more women who, before, could get by in dignity with small incomes and livelihoods, becoming victim of sexual violence, or resorting to commercial sex. We are not saying that when there is conflict, we need to say that there is sexual violence, but in Ethiopia we have never had women standing in the streets in the capitals, and now we can see commercial sex in the streets as women search for livelihood. Protection must be immediately thought of when there is a drought or conflict.
- Women organizations have been there at every stage working with community networks, providing food and social support, and now we see opportunities and challenges. During the conflict and now we can bring women organizations within the mainstream humanitarian mechanisms, yet we face challenges. Local actors and women organizations that have been there for long time with communities to support their agency, are left without funding. We are considered not qualified or expert enough to provide assistance. We consider it fundamental to give agency back to women organizations on the ground so they can really contribute to the humanitarian response to protection risks and food insecurity.
- Listen to the full remarks here.

M. Thierry Yongo, Head of Mission of the national NGO "Person in Need Relief Mission" (PNRM)

- The food insecurity situation in the Central African Republic remains worrying. The results of the 20th cycle IPC show that 39% of the CAR population is food insecure and almost 4 in 10 households have a poor quality of food consumption). As the Food Security Cluster, it is important to include in all needs assessments, the

identification and response to protection risks, and how population groups are differentially affected. Sharing information, pooling lessons learned, and sharing experience are important challenges that we must take up together. When we have succeeded in doing so, we have achieved encouraging results between food security, protection and government authorities.

- Several factors contribute to increasing the protection risks for the civilian population, particularly women and children, in the Central African Republic. We think that there is a need for a system enabling the community to express itself freely on any humanitarian response action and to contribute actively to identifying protection risks and the best actions. This system should be integrated into specific accountability mechanisms as part of the humanitarian response.
- We already have some positive examples. The Food Security Cluster, in collaboration with the Child Protection Sub-Cluster and the NGO PLAN International, has trained cluster members and developed a child protection guide for the food security sector. This guide provides orientations for the involvement of local actors and communities in the identification, analysis and resolution of protection risks. This good example should be expanded towards a more systematic capacity strengthening.
- See PowerPoint presentation here.

Key messages of the side event:

- **Strong inter-linkages exist between protection risks and food insecurity**, including conflict-induced hunger. Conflict continues to be the main driver of food crises, with WFP reporting in 2023 that 70% of people experiencing hunger live in areas affected by conflict. A Global Protection Cluster (GPC) analysis finds that in food insecurity contexts (IPC3 or above), there are now more people in need of protection than last year.
- Attacks on civilian and civilian infrastructures, theft, extortion, eviction or destruction of personal property, including livestock and livelihoods, is a risk across all cluster operations. **This is a pernicious cycle** where protection risks linked with conflict and violence are driving and aggravating food insecurity, and food insecurity in turn deepening protection risks, all with important gendered dimensions.
- **Exclusion, denial of resources and opportunities interplays with food security capacities**. As households try to cope with conflict-related protection risks, many are forced to increasingly rely on 'negative coping mechanisms', including child labour, early and forced marriage, family separation, banditry or extortion, trafficking and the use of dangerous smuggling routes to ensure some food is on the table. Negative coping mechanisms that are themselves protection risks are impacting directly main drivers of food insecurity and pushing families into situations of endless coercion, deliberate deprivation and abuse.
- **The identification of protection risks remains fundamental** to effectively reducing and addressing such risks and acute humanitarian needs in crisis contexts. How we as national and international humanitarian actors identify and analyse protection risks from the perspective of affected people and how we understand and respond to these together with communities has major implications for the needs, rights and agency of people affected by crises.
- As stated by the IASC in its Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, **we have a collective responsibility to contribute to reducing these risks**. If we understand that risks are made up of three parts: the threat, the vulnerability to that threat and the capacity to overcome the threat, we can better target specific areas of risk to change behaviour and practice not only of those that are vulnerable, but also to change the practices/responses of humanitarian actors, and ultimately change behaviour of those responsible for the threat.
- **Perspectives and priorities of communities and local actors are essential to identify and collectively address protection risks**, to build context-specific action plans that build on communities' existing capacities and theories of change, even more in complex crises where access to communities may be hindered or impeded.
- Recognizing the interlinkages between protection risks and food security, **there is a need for collective efforts to ensure more conceptual clarity on protection risks and protection outcomes that takes into account the perspective and priorities of affected populations** and **informs integrated programming**.

Understanding the interlinkages between protection risks and humanitarian needs can give us stronger instruments to prioritize programming and collective actions to address the drivers of humanitarian needs, including food insecurity and hunger.

- The **identification of factors common to food insecurity and protection risks** can reinforce our collective predictive capacities and the ability to design collective and joined up approaches to prevent and reduce the most acute situations of food insecurity and malnutrition.
- Strong protection risk analysis provides the opportunity to design collective programs that include responsive actions, alongside remedial and environment building actions at the crossroads of the development, peace, and human rights agenda to address collective protection outcomes.

Main points raised during the discussion with participants:

Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Humanitarian needs have reached historical records with more than 1 million people in famine or risk of famine, which is 10 times more than 5 years ago. Conflict is the still the primary driver. 5 years ago, the Security Council Resolution 2417 on conflict and hunger was negotiated, which recognized the link between conflict and hunger. This resolution is still even more important today since it reiterates the ban on the use starvation of civilians under IHL. We need to collectively uphold this resolution. The members of the Security Council must pay attention to the reports of the Secretary General. We could do even more to strengthen its implementation: we can ensure that grave violations of IHL are investigated, and perpetrators held to account. It is time to act, and we need to do it together. As Netherlands we look forward to strengthening the collaboration to end this link between conflict and hunger.

European Union

I have a particular question, especially from the colleagues online or Member State. There is a gender impact of course of food insecurity and conflict. You spoke of violence of women and girls and food insecurity that impact women and girls, and we know that quite often is women that are the food producers in their communities. What can be an actionable outcome of this discussion in term of women empowerment? Economic empowerment is crucial to ensure that women themselves can improve the protection for families and themselves. My question is: what can we do differently in the Food Security and the Protection Cluster to go beyond our standard conventional approach and really trying to integrate what we hear coming from representatives of local and women organizations? Figures are not new, the Netherlands remarked about the resolution 2417, and we know that food insecurity is an accelerating factor of other elements. What are your actionable takeaways, and can we do things differently?

United States

We believe that affected communities know their own needs and their own challenges best and are the best placed to solve them. This is why we prioritize a sit on the table for them to meaningfully engage in decisions that affect them. We know that the most marginalized are often less likely empowered to use their voice or being seen. When involved, our programmes become safer, more accessible and inherently protective. This is even more important in period in food insecurity. We call on other donors and humanitarian community at large to ensure that robust protection programming is integrated alongside food security and livelihood interventions. It is an effective way to identify the most vulnerable, provide holistic support to those in needs and together mutually improve outcomes. We also need to see operationalization of protection mainstreaming across all humanitarian operations, sectors and operations as a fundamental approach. To this, we ask our partners to clearly identify who is at risk, what those risks are, the implications that actions or no action may have and do everything in our power to mitigate those risks. This must be done hand in hand with affected people and communities to understand what protection risks they face and, most importantly, what solutions they would prioritize. We welcome everyone and our partners and other

donors prioritize resources, staff and activities to facilitate these participatory approaches, and make this an automatic standing operating procedure is a shared goal we can advance all together.

Oxfam

We welcome the fact that this discussion gave voices to women rights and human rights organizations, since we see that often they do not have the agency to raise the profile of protection. It would be good to have some reflections from the panel on how we can make more space in decision making for these organizations, and how this can support change on protection outcomes.

ICRC

I welcome the remarks of the SIDA and EU colleagues that call on looking at the role of peace and development actors and identify what they can do. I want to bring in the notion of preparedness. When we respond to a crisis it is already too late and we can only do as much as some damage control without the ability to design adequate responses. We need to work hard on preparedness and put systems in place that can ensure compliance with IHL before the conflict erupts. Authorities and communities can play an active role in protection and specifically in these preparedness efforts.

Sara Brodd, SIDA

I look forward to working with other donors to systematically include protection risks in our in our strategy and programming to inform policy, funding allocations and actions. I believe that we, as donor are important in supporting this process. We have a responsibility to include as an ask to our partners the necessity of involving communities and local actors. We need however to support partners to learn how to work on reduction of protection risks and how to measure and report on these results.

Samuel Cheung, GPC

- Collaborative effort – partnership – between food security and protection sectors in bringing together respective models and tools for joint analysis of food insecurity and protection risks and joint action. This includes a specific focus on predictive and joint analysis models and instruments.
- Incorporating existing protection risks tools, guidance and methods into other sectors of humanitarian action and humanitarian needs identification and response to develop integrated programming that can contribute to the reduction of those needs.
- Further enable/support the leadership of communities and local actors in protection risk analysis and joined-up protection and food insecurity action. Protection actors must continue to engage in more participatory approaches to protection risk analysis.
- Member States should systematically incorporate protection risks into their strategy and programming to inform policy, funding allocations and actions aimed at working closely with communities and our local partners to more effectively address root causes and drivers of crises, with an aim to reduce humanitarian needs. We should also call for more investments in community-based approaches to protection (including analysis, monitoring and programming).
- Listen to the full remarks here.

Outcomes of the side event:

1. **Consensus:** Both the panel and the audience interventions have shown a collective voice and general agreement on the necessity to discuss collective analysis and actions to address and mitigate protection risks linked to food insecurity, as well as ensuring a stronger agency of local and women organizations into decision making to address protection risks and food insecurity.
2. **Collaborate:** The Global Protection and Food Security Cluster agree to establish a joint work stream with other actors including NGOs to identify opportunities and modalities to analyse the interconnections

between protection risks and food insecurity, based on their respective models, tools and guidance and develop potential programmatic approaches. This may include the establishment of a dedicate working group on analysis, modalities for stronger localization and community engagement, a joint operational framework, joint advocacy initiatives and piloting in selected operations.

3. **Prioritize:** Participating member states both in the panel and in the audience consider the systematic inclusion of protection risks in prioritization and programming critical.
4. **Focus on outcomes:** Moving forward they recognize the need to guide, support and facilitate their partners in incorporating modalities to increase the agency of local actors and communities in the identification and integral response to protection risks and food insecurity.
5. **From risks to needs:** The Global Protection Cluster commits to look at the intersection between current guidance and tools on protection risks and humanitarian needs identification, to facilitate a dialogue within its network to advance knowledge and understanding.