

## ACHIEVING SDG 16: MAJOR STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY

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### Abstract

SDG -16 is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development” and focuses on the crucial issues which induce conflict such as access to justice, ending corruption, fundamental freedom and participatory governance. Food insecurity can lead to violent conflicts and wars. Wars trigger a radical displacement of victims severing them from food supplies, essential commodities and livelihood. Access to food as an international human right must be realized and complied with. The achievement of SDGs by 2030 would remain a distant dream if SDG-16 remains elusive.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, wars, hunger, food insecurity, sustainable development goals

### Wars and Sustainability

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an intergovernmental set of 17 objectives with 169 targets measured through 230 indices led by the United Nations consisting of the world’s shared mission to end poverty, remove inequality and protect the planet by 2030

Since war reverses development, sustainability must address international peace and well-being. SDG -16 is to “*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.*” The 2011 World Development Report enabled us to get a better understanding of peace, conflict and sustainability. Most importantly, nations must be willing to take necessary steps for peace, security and conflict resolution.

SDG 16 is possibly the most important of all, as none of the others can be achieved without addressing it. It forms the core for the realization of other goals. However attainment of SDG 16 is complex and difficult [1]. SDG 16 is not merely ending wars and violence. It focuses on the crucial issues which induce conflict such as access to justice, ending corruption, fundamental freedom and participatory governance.

## **Hurdles to SDG 16**

Globally the percentage of hunger and malnutrition affected people began rising from 2015. Experts opined that wars and climate change were the main causes. About 60% of those suffering from chronic malnutrition resided in conflict ridden areas. Wars are inherently destructive, but extensive damage to resources of all kinds can be more catastrophic [2, 3, 4]. Food supplies are the obvious targets of conflict with complete destruction of agriculture, harvest, livestock and civilian infrastructure. Food insecurity leads to complete disruption and collapse of economic activities thus threatening the survival of entire populations. Wars trigger a radical displacement of victims severing them from food supplies, essential commodities and livelihood. Such refugees are at severe risk of malnutrition and disease.

Tragically food insecurity can lead to violent conflicts and wars. The French Revolution of 1789 was largely triggered by poor harvest and subsequent economic setbacks leading to drastic increase in the price of bread. A period of sky-high food price in North Africa and Middle East in 2011 witnessed the Arab Spring uprisings. The history of wars has several instances of using hunger as a weapon. The ‘Hunger Plan’ of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War by Nazi Germany could have starved more than 20 million people. Thousands were starved to death during the German siege of St. Petersburg between 1941 -1944.

South Sudan, the world’s youngest nation could also be the poorest. Due to a civil war in 2013, millions were forced to flee their homes and food sources. A hunger crisis developed in 2017 due to poor harvest. An economic crisis steeply increased the price of food. As per the reports of UN agencies, a large percentage of the population suffered acute food insecurity since early 2019. The mammoth number of Syrian refugees is a key reason of the hunger crisis in the country coupled with severely affected agricultural output. Hunger and starvation are commonly used war strategies against opponents, despite being counted as crimes.

The UN World Food Program report of 2018 described the crisis in Yemen as “the worst human-made disaster in the modern history of the world” once again underlining the explicit connection between conflict and hunger. The crisis worsened with shutting down of the Red Sea port, the chief point of entry for food supplies and imports for the entire population.

### **War and Food Crisis: Current Scenario**

The war in Ukraine has not only caused extensive damage and loss of lives but has resulted in a major food crisis. Uncertainty and insecurity persist as war continues unabated from 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2022. FAO is greatly concerned about the growing food insecurity since.

Even before war began in Ukraine, there was rising food insecurity. The global economy was staggering under severe repercussions of human inflicted conflicts, climate change, the pandemic of Covid-19 and the resulting inflation. The aftermath was devastating for the poor world-wide. Russia and Ukraine account for 29% global wheat and 62% sunflower oil exports. Ukraine, being a major 'breadbasket' of the world, the outbreak of war created unprecedented setbacks. In 36 countries, prices of food have risen by 15% or even higher making lives even more difficult for the poor who spend 50% and higher of their total income on food. About 60% of Third World countries are already in debt distress. As the war continues food insecurity levels are expected to further rise sharply. Acute hunger is predicted with an additional 47 million people, a sharp rise from 276 to 323 i.e. 17% with sub-Saharan Africa being the worst hit.

### **Causes of Current Crisis**

Living in a world which is intricately connected we cannot overlook or ignore food crisis in any part of the planet. It is then absolutely essential for the international community to address the root causes behind such crises and challenges and restructure the agriculture and energy policies which determine the global economy.

Global food markets are exceedingly concentrated in both reserve and supply. 7 countries make up 86% of wheat export and 3 countries possess 68% of the planet's wheat reserves. A similar picture exists for rice, corn, soybean and other grains. About 30% of the world's wheat and barley were supplied by Russia and Ukraine before war broke out while 36 countries consisting of some very vulnerable nations depended on those supplies for more than 50% of their imports of wheat. The war of Ukraine has shown that food insecurity issues are related to their access and affordability rather than on availability.

Economic factors such as slow economic growth, rising levels of poverty, unequal resource allocation [5, 6] lack of basic infrastructure etc. may be reasons for emergence of wars. According to [7] and [5, 8, 10] environmental factors like resource depletion, soil erosion, deforestation and water related issues could lead to conflict or wars. Degrading environmental conditions lead to decreased economic and agricultural output, displacement of population and disruption and undesirable changes in patterns of social behavior [6, 10].

Food and economic insecurity with depleting natural resources can be major causes of disagreement [1, 3]. When dominant groups capture land and food resources and deny access to the relatively weak, violence erupts. Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan witnessed the result of food crises leading to rebellion and subsequent collapse of the government. Denial of the right to food has also witnessed uprisings in Central America and Mexico as well as Asia.

It is felt by the World Food Programme that failure of Russia to open the ports in South Ukraine to grains and agriculture related exports would actually be a war declaration on global food

security, as it would ultimately lead to famine, destabilization and mass displacement around the planet. Conflict, climate change and the global pandemic Covid 19 [11, 12] then form ‘the perfect storm’ driving hunger. Food security being crucial to peace and stability, the biggest concern in 2023 would be food availability.

### **War against Hunger**

Four suggested actions have been outlined by the UN which countries might work on to mitigate conflict and hunger.

- i. The prime target is to end the war and promote peace in Ukraine and everywhere.
- ii. Protecting humanitarian access and vital commodities and provisions for civilians is crucial.
- iii. For successful mitigation of the interlinked threats of food insecurity, energy and finance would necessitate reintegrating Ukraine’s agricultural production and Russia’s food and fertilizer production into the global market regardless of the war.
- iv. Donors must wholly fund humanitarian calls with authorized support so that none die of hunger in this bountiful planet. *Addressing hunger is another way to global peace and integrity.*

### **Recommendations**

*Access to food as an international human right* must be realized and complied with. States and international organizations must ensure the right of humans to sufficient food. The state must take emergency measures to ascertain food for its entire population in case of limited accessibility. Access to food is specifically important in armed conflict. Wholehearted cooperation among humanitarian organizations, development agencies and peace-keepers of different nations is a pre-requisite. Food availability, supply and assistance are crucial aspects in short term conflict resolution and long term peace building. Food is the prime issue in Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. To coordinate all these aspects successfully one must have good understanding of local perspectives and reactions. The local factor must never be ignored while planning and implementation. Finally, one must learn from history. The early warning and action in past instances of conflict must be strategically applied to current contexts for protecting lives [13] and complete implementation of SDG-16.

### **Conclusion**

The sale and spread of weapons of mass destruction are a source of constant threat. Uncontrolled trade of conventional weapons and the indiscriminate use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons with ballistic missiles poses grave concern about the security of humanity. All nations

and global leaders must be committed to world peace and conflict resolution through international cooperation. The achievement of SDGs by 2030 would remain a distant dream if SDG-16 remains elusive.

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