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Humanitarian Aid, Food Security[1]

This text looks at the main issues in humanitarian aid and food security, which are key questions within the European Union. The improvement of both is an essential aspect of reliable and effective aid to vulnerable populations. But the task is not easy. The concepts and the actors of humanitarian aid are changing, implying a redefinition of the nature of humanitarian aid itself. New problems have emerged, connected to security, underlining the clash between the principles and the reality in the field. Yet, a wider involvement of local populations, together with a greater attention at training professionals in humanitarian aid, may be clues for improvements. Food security is the second topic considered. It is part of humanitarian aid, but it also deserves a specific analysis. Indeed, it is not only a constant element in humanitarian policies, but it also has the deepest impact on most of the social, political and economic aspects of crisis. Food security is looked at as an issue of public health concern. The text also focuses on its challenges and, in particular, on the way it can be more efficiently organised.

Keywords: humanitarian aid, responsibility to protect, food security, public health, human security, migration

Acronyms

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EDRIS	European Emergency Disaster Response System
ICA	Integrated Context Analysis
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internationally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PSC	Private Security Company
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
WFP	World Food Programme

Introduction

Humanitarian aid is currently evolving, as a result of the challenges of globalisation and of the growingly intricate nature of humanitarian crisis. As a result, multiple new actors are now involved in humanitarian aid, including State agencies, humanitarian NGOs and other private organisations. This change of paradigm is visible even at the heart

of the humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but also at the level of the international organisations specialised in humanitarian aid within the United Nations system or at regional level, within the European Union. In particular, old and new principles applied in humanitarian aid are being reassessed in the light of the security problems faced by populations and also by humanitarian workers in the various fields of intervention. Among them, food security is one of the most complex problems. This is due to the several possible causes of food insecurity. The food dimension of security also involves a great number of agencies, with a complex management. Food security is strategic, being not only an essential element for the survival of populations, but also a geopolitical factor for governments.

The questions asked in this contribution will look into: a) the conceptual framework in humanitarian aid and security; b) the key issues of food security within this challenging context; c) and in both cases, how the European Union is responding to the challenges.

Humanitarian aid and security

Humanitarian aid: Main concepts and principles

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid is, according to a simple definition, the provision of assistance to people in danger or more generally at risk in the context of a humanitarian crisis. It is therefore essential to first define what a humanitarian crisis is.

What typifies a humanitarian crisis is the fact that the situation on the ground is characterised by an exceptional and generalised threat to human life, health or livelihood. These crises emerge in the context of a lack of protection due to pre-existing factors (poverty; inequality; lack of access to basic services). This lack of protection has consequences for the inadequacy of responses to natural phenomena (natural disasters or epidemics) or to violence accompanying an armed conflict. A humanitarian crisis is thus identifiable both by its causes (direct or indirect) and by its devastating effects, which the causes mentioned multiply. Thus, the question of security is undoubtedly at the root of the problem of humanitarian crises, and of their endogenous and exogenous causes. It is also present in the day-to-day work of humanitarian workers, the nature and tasks of which are constantly evolving, as concrete security issues arise in the field.

Although it would be wrong to limit the perspective of humanitarian aid to the issue of security, the many circumstances in which humanitarian aid is needed are also, at the same time, situations in which the security (of a geographical area, a state, or a region) has been put at risk. This is true both for conventional threats to security (such as in the context of armed conflict), and for a wider range of threats, such as those to be considered under the concept of "human security" (Hough et al. 2020).

Human security

Human security is a concept developed in the framework of the United Nations (starting with the *Human Development Report* of 1994) the core idea of which is to place the individual at the heart of security concerns, a true shift in security paradigms. The focus also changes from military threats to non-military threats, and from state to non-state actors, and bridges security concerns with human rights and development. Therefore, the structural causes of threats to human life are identified, from poverty to environmental crises, to social and political problems leading to mass migration and refuge. Besides, the often intermingled character of natural and manmade disasters, as, for instance in resource scarcity wars, or with 'environmental refugees' also emerge as security concerns and causes of humanitarian crises (Mac Ginty – Peterson 2019).

Principles of humanitarian aid

The concept of humanitarian aid is normally defined with reference to the criteria accepted by the UN, a set of four principles derived from the longstanding principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement (UNGA 2016; OCHA 2012) – all of them commented by Pictet (1979) in a reference book. As a series of actions intended to save human lives and to alleviate suffering, while protecting human dignity, humanitarian aid is ruled by the key principle of humanity. A second principle, neutrality, means that the agents of humanitarian aid do not take sides in a conflict or controversy. Impartiality, that is, the delivery of aid according to needs and not to the situation (e.g. race, gender, religion or other social or political aspects) of those in need is the third principle. Independence, the fourth principle, implies that aid is kept separate from geopolitical power considerations (e.g. military, or economic). Although the formula is apparently straightforward, its ethical and practical implications are paramount (Mac Ginty – Peterson 2019).

The international legal order and the extant structure of global governance have defined patterns within which that action shall be carried out, notably international humanitarian law, but also refugee law and the human rights provisions. The question thus arises as concerns neutrality, if not as regards also independence, since those patterns do not exist in a geopolitical void and are in sum influenced (and funded) by the major world powers. At the same time, new principles are emerging which are increasingly accepted by humanitarian NGOs (and also the United Nations), such as the principle of accountability, implying a new form of governance, also within humanitarian aid itself, and accompanied by a duty of transparency in relation to the various stakeholders as to the objectives and results to be achieved or attained (Tan – von Schreeb 2015).

Humanitarian aid and its actors (Responsibility to Protect)

In the early days of humanitarian aid, in the 19th century, it was mainly the task of charitable organisations, and more specifically of the international Red Cross movement (headed by the Geneva-based ICRC).

Today, humanitarian aid implies a vast array of actors involved in the process, a rather diverse set of non-governmental actors (NGO), often associated with it, and theoretically well placed for delivering in accordance with the abovementioned four principles. However, humanitarian aid is also a task of governmental entities: the states, who retain the first level of the 'responsibility to protect' (Australian Red Cross 2011); then international governmental organisations many of which were created for surmounting the shortcomings of a traditional state-centric world order.

There is now a wide range of actors involved in the humanitarian aid process, as it has expanded to include a large and diverse set of non-governmental and governmental actors. Indeed, increasingly, however, humanitarian aid is also a task for government entities: this is a natural development, as states retain the first level of the 'responsibility to protect' (Australian Red Cross 2011), but whether they do so impartially remains to be seen. Humanitarian aid is also provided or at least coordinated by international intergovernmental organisations.

Responsibility to Protect

The Responsibility to Protect (or R2P) is a concept adopted at the UN World Summit of 2005. The concept itself was the result of a long debate on the right of (military) intervention versus the sovereignty of states, when it came to protecting human lives. It defines military intervention for human protection purposes as a last resort (after the states have failed to do so), under proper international authority (the UN Security Council) and for very specific types of threats (i.e. genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity). The concept also encompasses preventive and diplomatic action, but the difficulty in matching R2P approaches with that of humanitarian workers is evident (Hough et al. 2020).

Therefore, in field terms, this often means that a multiplicity of actors will be present, from the tiniest local non-governmental association to military forces involved in peace and stabilisation missions (which partially share the objectives of the humanitarians), to private security forces organised by the for-profit sector, to the media. No doubt that this scenario has led to the urgency of 'Delivering as one' (UNGA 2006), in practical terms a strong concern with coordination, organisation, logistical planning and needs assessment. Increasingly also, professionalisation has entered the field, side-by-side with the many volunteers also involved.

Some problems recurrently emerge from the practice of humanitarian aid, among which are the security of the missions and of the humanitarian workers; the involvement of private armed groups in the process; the many difficulties stemming from having to deal

with authoritarian regimes; or the ethical dilemmas of bridging principles with practice, to name but a few (MAC GINTY – PETERSON 2019). The question of the physical and mental security of humanitarian aid professionals is particularly acute, in addition to that of the populations receiving humanitarian aid, given new phenomena such as terrorism.

Another question is what is to be delivered: In a nutshell, immediate crisis assistance – protection, food assistance, shelter, health, sanitation and hygiene. However, crises may last longer than expected, which leads to a necessity for a longer term or structural answers, for providing food, accommodation, health and education services (as is often the case for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, or IDPs) to provide not only food but also non-food items, adequate housing, health services and access to education. Furthermore, the focus has shifted from the immediate problem to reconstruction, and to crisis prevention, which means disaster preparedness and capacity building, often with a view to local empowerment (OCHA 2020).

Funding remains a core issue for making humanitarian aid viable. The role of international organisations and of international governmental and non-governmental donors is fundamental, but resources are always scarce, which further reinforces the necessity for their rational use (IASC 2020; OECD 2012).

In the EU, humanitarian aid is also present, as a set of principles, a policy area and institutional structure (see Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union; and Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). Within the European Commission, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) is the structure that directly deals with it, along with its civil protection agenda (ECHO 2020). Despite the fact that structures of common civil protection (internal to the EU) remain autonomous from the international aid ones, the structure is largely pliable to attending both to internal crises management (e.g. migration and refugees) and to delivering in the international context, and thus establishes a bridge with the EU's external action, notably in the promotion of human rights, stabilisation and rule of law action, and more broadly with cooperation for development.

In the EU, humanitarian aid policies are living an "Age of Change" (IRRELA 2018), adapting to the new realities. The European Union humanitarian aid, most often channelled through NGOs which are working in partnership with the European Commission, is one of the most respectful of good practices, ethics and also one of the widest in spectrum. Indeed, it does not only provide aid to developing countries regions (Figure 1), but it also helps any country in a situation of emergency disaster (e.g. floods), as it regularly happens in the case of some Asian countries like China or to South Pacific countries, sharing logistic aid or technical tools for example (ECHO 2002; 2020).
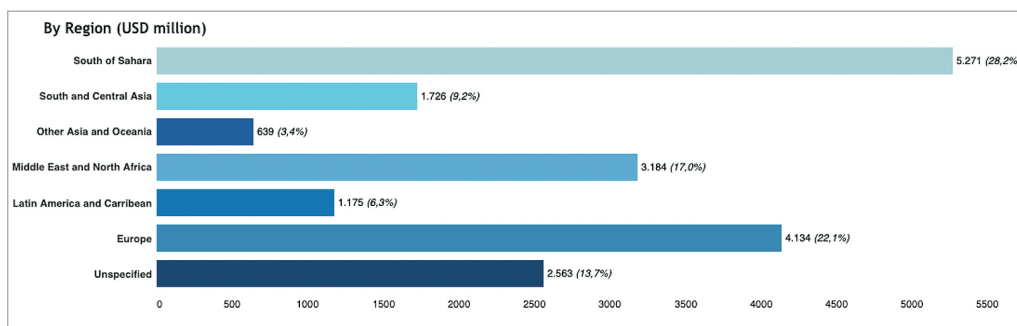
Figure 1: Regions recipients of the European Union institutional support
Source: OECD 2020

Currently, all the forms of financing humanitarian aid in the EU are clearly stated, in particular the indication of the source of funds – which are the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the EU Trust Funds (such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, created in 2015). Another source of funds is all the EU Member States themselves. In line with the new principle of transparency, all the recipients, countries and territories of humanitarian aid, and more generally all Official Development Assistance (ODA), are detailed in the EU Aid Explorer tool created by the European Commission (the EU institution in charge of conceiving and supervising the execution of humanitarian aid) (European Commission s. a.). The same happens with the European Union funds related to emergency disaster responses, the European Emergency Disaster Response Information System (EDRIS) also depending on the European Commission. The EDRIS mechanism includes a search tool online allowing any person to trace both donors of emergency aid and its beneficiaries, as well as specific sectors of aid that are targeted, such as, for example, food, nutrition, or more generally health (ECHO s. a.).

Humanitarian aid in context: Case studies on security issues

Humanitarian aid in a crisis area is always a complex activity. Nevertheless, it has some basic rules. Perhaps the most important is that agencies arrive at the scene to mitigate human suffering and the number of casualties, not to increase it. Therefore, the first step for humanitarian actors in an actively hostile area or in a humanitarian catastrophe is that they have to ensure their own security. Without this, they cannot provide effective support for the victims of the crisis. Furthermore, as wounded people or hostages, they become an additional burden for humanitarian actors.

Agencies should also keep in mind that the local judgement of their activity is based mainly not on their good intention and actions. Unfortunately, in many cases, (mis) perceptions, assumptions and preconceptions shape the attitude towards foreign actors. In most modern conflict zones which consist of the complex web of interests and groups, the arrival of a new actor can easily destroy the fragile balance of power. Although

agencies follow a humanitarian agenda, in many parts of the world, local powerbrokers consider the activity of NGOs and government a threat to their influence. The arrival of free food or the construction of a well weaken client-patronage systems and offer an alternative source of resources for communities. It is acutely true for a conflict area, where political struggle intensifies into an armed confrontation, which reduces trust and opens a wide arena for brutal and cruel solutions.

Therefore, the arrival of humanitarian agencies and aid cannot happen without some extents of support of the conflict parties. In many cases, it revokes dilemmas, because even if it is a terrorist organisation like al-Shabaab, some level of bargaining is necessary. In case of South Central Somalia, where more than 3 million people lived under the rule of the Jihadists during the famine in 2011, secret negotiations with al-Shabaab for access to the area were the only solution to save the life of hundreds of thousands of people. Of course, it raised sharp criticism because it strengthened the legitimacy of al-Shabaab and provided them assets which could be used to maintain their insurgency. Nevertheless, the other option was to let Somalis to starve to death, which was unacceptable for many actors.

Negotiation with local players is never easy. As we mentioned, the maintenance or even the creation of the impression of impartiality and trust is a long process and often leads to confrontation with the local government. It is understandable: as we mentioned, talks with an insurgency group easily jeopardise the credibility of central government. There are no silver bullets in these situations, and it is always a fragile balancing between the different actors.

The best protection for humanitarian staff can always be guaranteed by local top dogs, whether they are government or other actors. Nevertheless, it also hurts the impression of neutrality. Therefore, it is not accidental that many agencies use private security companies (PSC) for their protection. Although it is a costly solution, perhaps it provides the best chance that local actors will be convinced that the mission acts impartially.

In spite of all previous efforts, there is no zero risk in conflict areas. Therefore, the psychological and practical training of the staff before the deployment is essential, including first aid, a hostage-taking situation, negotiation techniques and others. Participants have to understand that there is a constant gap between the goodwill of the people of the agencies who arrive to the scene and the brutal reality of the crisis, which is inhuman and cruel – and often makes the conflicting parties also brutal. Therefore, a security oriented, realistic approach is a must.

Example: Humanitarian aid and the United Nations World Food Programme in Somalia

According to the United Nations, humanitarian aid aims "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character" (United Nations 2021).

The United Nations has a network of organisations working to address humanitarian issues. In this brief analysis, United Nations World Food Programme in Somalia is examined. The aim of United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is to "provide humanitarian and development assistance to the most food insecure and vulnerable households and communities around the world. In many cases, the beneficiaries of WFP assistance live in fragile contexts or areas prone to frequent disasters and recurring shocks" (World Food Programme Somalia 2020: iii).

In order to meet the challenges of achieving the nutritional needs of the citizens of Somalia in 2018, the Integrated Context Analysis (ICA) was developed (World Food Programme Somalia 2020). Food security in Somalia and the main trends are being examined. According to the available data in Somalia and Figure 2, "during the years 2013 and 2018, on seasonal basis, the overall average of food insecure people during *gu* [April–June] was 1,432,000 and 1,623,000 during *deyr* [September–November]. The additional number at risk (acutely food insecure) in the event of a shock was 919,000 during *gu* and 1,197,000 during *deyr*" (World Food Programme Somalia 2020: 15).

To address these urgent needs certain programmatic themes have been formulated under the prism of Integrated Context Analysis (ICA). More specifically: "ICA classifies livelihood zones in five categories based on their levels of recurring vulnerability to food insecurity and exposure to natural climate-related hazards. ICA categories and areas provide evidence to inform discussions and selection of broad programmatic strategies using thematic building blocks of safety nets, DRR, early warning and disaster preparedness" (World Food Programme Somalia 2020: 50).

In conclusion, in case of Somalia, humanitarian aid is strongly correlated with the food supply of the population and it is an issue that requires further research, development and effective treatment by the United Nations.
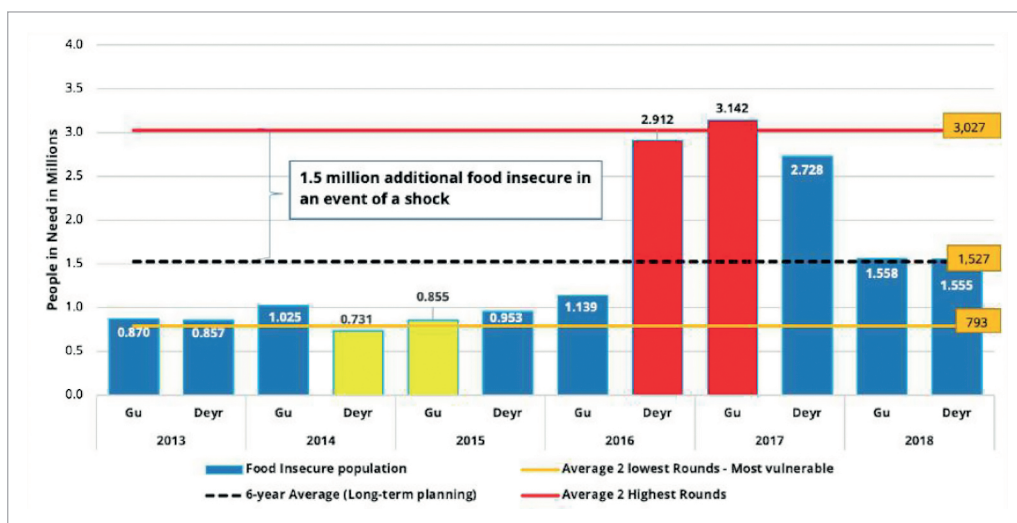

Figure 2: Number of severely food insecure people by season
Source: World Food Programme Somalia 2020: 14

Humanitarian aid and food security

According to the United Nations, food security exists when all people, at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (The Rome Declaration on World Food Security 1996). While food security is essential to support normal growth and human health, many underlying factors compromise food availability, access, stability and the utilisation for healthy and nutritionally adequate diets. Food insecurity often occurs among the most vulnerable populations affected by extreme poverty, lack of resources or low education level. Food security is threatened by different factors such as insufficient purchasing power, unavailability of foods, inappropriate distribution and inadequate use of food at the household level. This results in billions of individuals adopting poor diets both in the developed and developing regions. Diets of poor quality are a principal contributor to the multiple burdens of malnutrition: stunting, wasting, nutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity (FAO et al. 2020). Thus, ensuring access to a safe, healthy and good quality diet is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals targets of eradicating all forms of malnutrition, "ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture" (FAO 2020). While it rightfully sets as the 2nd Sustainable Development Goal ('zero hunger'), food security has clear connections with many other of the global goals for sustainable development (WFP 2019b). Importantly, at the heart of sustainable development, the complexity of dealing with food security issues is linked to the malfunctioning of the food systems thus requiring more systemic approaches, in order to understand the interconnectivity of relevant aspects related to food production, distribution and consumption but also social, economic and environmental trends that may affect arising issues (Caron et al. 2018). Addressing food security as a challenging structural issue requires innovative forms of understanding its complexity. In the next decades, climate change and environmental degradation (policy area 9) including soil degradation and water availability and water quality (policy area 7) can put at risk more vulnerable regions. In the EU, the Mediterranean region will be particularly affected by such a trend. Humanitarian aid is crucial to alleviating hunger and undernutrition in most conflict regions but strong partnerships and international commitments to achieve sustainable food systems are needed to support more integrated actions to address the populations most vulnerable to food insecurity and to mitigate related challenges such as migration.

The framework of food security and humanitarian aid

Achieving food and nutrition security depends on four dimensions: food availability, food access (economic and physical), food utilisation and the stability of these conditions over time (FAO 2006). Therefore, food security may be threatened by several factors such as unavailability of foods, inappropriate distribution, insufficient purchasing power, or inadequate use of food at the household level (FAO 2006). The poor access to nutritious

food and water, in addition to the lack of sanitation facilities and basic health and social services, are basal factors that lead to suboptimal nutritional status. Furthermore, food insecurity may lead to different forms of malnutrition and consequently to the development of chronic diseases (FAO 2020).
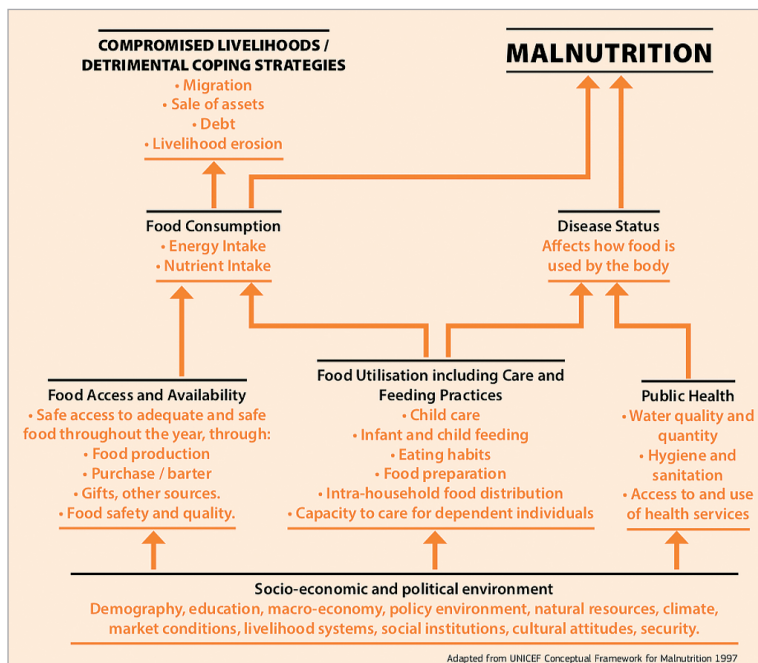

Figure 3: Framework on the causes of malnutrition
Source: European Commission 2013: 4

Humanitarian crises with food security dimensions are increasing in frequency and complexity (OCHA 2020). The situation is exacerbated by the concentration of economically and physiologically vulnerable people living in unsafe locations, in addition to the natural or human-made crises such as disasters, outbreaks, conflicts and forced displacement. Therefore, a growing number of vulnerable people are affected, which may lead to chronic food insecurity and impaired development, requiring intervention from different sectors (OCHA 2020).

Humanitarian food assistance aims at fighting inadequate food consumption and hunger to save lives and livelihoods to prevent acute malnutrition and other life-threatening effects and consequences (The Johns Hopkins – IFRC 2008). Thus, implementing adequate food aid early in combination with public health measures will prevent food insecurity and maintain the nutritional status of the affected populations (The Johns Hopkins – IFRC 2008). Food security interventions encompass several approaches including food provisioning (food aid), cash and voucher transfers, protection or restoration of productive assets and capacities. The right intervention depends on which aspect of food security has been compromised and why. Although food aid is appropriate

in several circumstances, in the cases where food is available and markets work reasonably well, food aid may not be the best intervention. Other interventions such as cash or vouchers may be more effective, more economically efficient and less damaging to local food systems (e.g. food production and marketing systems), and establish conditions to promote the rehabilitation and restoration of self-reliance. Food aid is often essential in emergency situations. The food aid distribution system must follow principles: be transparent – the target population should have information about the rations, the timing and distribution of which should take place in a public place; fair – rations should be based on need and household size; accountable to beneficiaries – distribution should take into account the social, ethnic and political divisions within the target population; gender-sensitive – women must be allowed to collect food, be represented on food committees and never placed at risk. Therefore, to improve food security, needy populations must be properly targeted, shipments of appropriate foods must arrive in a timely manner and complementary resources must also be provided (The Johns Hopkins – IFRC 2008).

EU food assistance practices are adapted to each specific situation and to the needs of different groups (e.g. children under the age of 5), by providing the most vulnerable people with essential and nutritious food items during critical times (European Commission 2013). However, complementary interventions, including those that ensure safe food storage and preparation, or access to potable water, hygiene and health services are also planned, alongside direct food assistance, to prevent or treat the malnutrition of the vulnerable people in crisis (European Commission 2013).

Limitations to the effectiveness of interventions include the capacity to assess the food insecurity situation of the populations, level of funding, sectorial balance of resource allocation, and the ability of agencies to work across different timeframes (short- and long-term). Multiple actors and limited ability of governments (and limited willingness of agencies) to coordinate are also a constraint to effectiveness. Food assistance interventions must be humanitarian and impartial in character, and worthily conducted without discrimination, respecting the human rights and international humanitarian law and principles. The challenge includes adequate operational resources, available provisions of different food groups, reaching the affected populations and the identification of people's needs.

Food security and public health issues

Inequalities in the access to energy and food resources, inadequate living conditions, poverty and education remain complex and unsolved issues that lead to poor diets as a major risk factor for the increased burden of disease globally (Fanzo 2015; Afshin et al. 2019).

In developed regions, including the EU, excessive consumption of high energy dense foods high in sugar, salt and saturated fatty acids has led to the rise of obesity epidemics, which is now regarded as a major public health issue. Globally, more than 2 billion adults are overweight as a result of the poor quality of diets (FAO et al. 2020). Actually, unhealthy diets are a leading cause of non-communicable diseases, mainly cardiovascular

diseases, cancers and diabetes, which represent a major economic burden for national health systems. In other regions, extreme poverty, conflicts and climate-related events affect the access of many populations to nutritious and diverse diets. As a result, hunger and malnutrition impair the healthy development of millions of children irreversibly, ultimately leading to poor physical and cognitive outcomes that persist later in life and contribute to an endless and vicious cycle of social vulnerability and inability to build healthier food systems. Currently, maternal and child undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies including iron, iodine, vitamin A and zinc remain responsible for more than 50% of all under-5 years' deaths globally.

In the EU, national food policies have been implemented in the last decades and the level of implementation often reflects the political priority towards healthy eating. Still, integrated actions have been increasingly gaining popularity to address unhealthy diets in the region. For instance, policy tools that shape both the food environment and improve consumer information to make healthier food choices easier have often focused on vulnerable populations including children. Such approaches both have been promoted by the European Commission and WHO/Europe (European Commission 2007). For instance, the marketing regulation of unhealthy foods targeted at children, the taxation of sugar sweetened beverages with an impact on food industry reformulation can protect younger populations from unhealthier food preferences and are gaining momentum (Jensen–Ronit 2015; Hagenaars et al. 2019). In addition, the EU fruit and vegetable scheme funded by the Common Agriculture Policy importantly impacts on the availability of healthy foods for school age children and increases awareness towards healthy eating from an early age. As a reference for the implementation of healthy diets, the national food based dietary guidelines are relevant national policy instruments that help consumers achieve healthier choices. At the EU level, food labelling regulation provides better and more transparent information available for consumers to make smart and healthy food choices easier. While such a package of policy instruments is increasingly popular in the EU region, the recent EU "Farm to Fork Strategy" aims to accelerate the food system transformation in the region by promoting the implementation of sustainable diets that could promote both public health, the environment and the resilience of the EU communities (European Commission 2020).

In developing regions, policy actions have mostly focused on dealing with food availability and energy/protein requirements to address hunger and malnutrition as a part of humanitarian food assistance aimed at alleviating the issue of emergency crisis in vulnerable regions exposed to natural disasters, extreme events and conflicts (FAO et al. 2020). While such reactive approaches are essential during an emergency crisis, addressing hunger and malnutrition in the long term needs to integrate a more holistic perspective and examine the root causes of food insecurity and explore the potential integrative solutions that could effectively contribute to healthier, resilient and empowered communities (HLPE 2017). Investing in capacity building, education and encouraging inclusive community-based participatory initiatives that align dietary choices with health goals may induce a crucial change.

Challenges of food security

Improving the assessment of food security and nutrition situation

The planning for a humanitarian food and nutrition response begins with a local field assessment to determine the magnitude situation (geographic extent, size of the affected population, malnutrition status). Local assessment includes the evaluation of food security, child feeding practices, household livelihoods, water supply, sanitation, health care and the food distribution system (IFRC 2006). Moreover, sources of information include community leaders, local government and representatives of civil society organisations (e.g. local NGOs and religious groups). Individuals from the affected population, including women because of their central role in providing food for the family and taking care of children, should be involved in the field assessment as well as the planning of the emergency response as much as possible (The Johns Hopkins – IFRC 2008). An effective intervention depends on the analytical capacity that encompasses assessments of need, cost-effectiveness and impact. A course of action to reduce or prevent a food and nutrition emergency requires: the ability to allocate resources impartially; the ability to link analysis or early warning to a timely and appropriate response; balanced responses to food security crises, the limited ability to link the short-term protection of food consumption with long-term improvements in production and access, and the engagement of humanitarian food security actors at the policy level. Therefore, a good communication between local and national government authorities, organisations such as Non-Governmental Organizations and UN agencies (technical resources, infrastructure) is essential for an effective intervention.

Maintenance of the food pipeline

The maintenance of the food pipeline up and running is one of the first priorities of the effective food humanitarian response. However, problems with the food pipeline are not uncommon (The Johns Hopkins – IFRC 2008; European Commission 2013):

a) Inadequate food pipeline at the outset of the food insecurity assessment may occur. Therefore, reliable estimates of the target population and the number of malnourished individuals are essential.

b) Food losses during packing, transportation and storage. Inventory and monitoring systems to manage, track and account for the movement of food commodities help prevent excessive food losses.

c) Decreased food pipeline over time. The most food-insecure geographic areas and vulnerable groups of the population (children, pregnant and lactation women) may be difficult to identify and reach when the population is large or dispersed. A strategy may involve the increase of the number of distribution points for food aid and the conduct of nutrition surveys of neglected areas.

d) The main costs of food aid programs are the purchase of food and its transportation, with air freight being the most expensive option. On the other hand, transportation depends on the urgency of delivering food aid. The procurement and transport of imported food may take several weeks. Therefore, food should be procured locally as much as possible to reduce the transportation and storage costs of imported food.

e) The organisations involved should provide similar general food rations to different communities in generally similar conditions and avoid competition among them.

Climate change

Climate change is likely to aggravate existing production and consumption constraints in food insecure countries. Shifts in ecosystems, increased climatic shocks and the emergence of new or renewed crops, livestock and human diseases all pose threats to food supply, marketing (cross-border trade) and rural income streams. Current food prices are a cause for concern, requiring attention to resource constraints for humanitarian assistance, appropriate policy and programmatic responses to new populations in need, and planning for a future in which many more people may have inadequate consumption (Maxwell et al. 2010). Furthermore, there are more than 500 million smallholder farms worldwide which feed more than 2 billion people. While small farmers produce about 80 percent of the food consumed in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, they are extremely vulnerable to climate change (IFAD 2011: 2).

Conflict and migration

Conflicts have led to the displacement of millions of people, causing and prolonging food insecurity among refugee populations (FAO–IFPRI 2017). Refugees have been identified as a vulnerable group. When on the move, they are more likely to experience disrupted or uncertain supplies of safe and nutritious food and water, especially under difficult circumstances (FAO–IFPRI 2017). In these conditions, people may be more vulnerable to using inedible or contaminated food ingredients, cook food improperly or eat spoilt food and thus may be exposed to unfamiliar foodborne hazards (Lawlis et al. 2018).

When arriving in a new country, refugees face many challenges that increase the risk of food insecurity, including poverty and unemployment, compromised mental and physical health, language and cultural barriers, and high household expenses related to relocation (Mansour et al. 2020; Southcombe 2013). Refugees may find it challenging to maintain a nutritious and safe diet as they must adjust to life in a new community, with new markets and foods. Therefore, during their resettlement process, refugees can be highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Persistent food insecurity can result in malnutrition, inadequate dietary intake and nutrient deficiencies contributing to the development of chronic diseases (FAO 2020).

Food is a human right. Thus, ensuring that refugees have access to adequate, safe and nutritious food and water is essential for protecting the safety, health and wellbeing of this population. In addition, food security is important for refugee integration, minimising health inequality and a sense of belonging to a new country (Lawlis et al. 2018). Achieving food and nutrition security involves food availability, food access and food utilisation. In this perspective, the implementation of food and nutrition educational programmes addressing the diversity of local food products, food conservation and food preparation could provide care and support of this vulnerable group of people, contributing to the improvement of the nutritional status and overall health.

Conclusions

Humanitarian aid and food security are the key elements to guarantee human security in its broader sense. Indeed, the core principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) have remained unchanged since their foundation by the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The aim of humanitarian aid is, as in the past, to restore the autonomy of populations affected by crises caused by natural disasters or armed conflicts. Yet, the forms of humanitarian aid are evolving, adapting to a changing international context: the new principles of accountability and transparency are now basic requirements for all humanitarian actors, including the European Union; the traditional areas of humanitarian aid (water and hygiene, shelter, health) integrate now new dimensions, such as human rights and advocacy. Moreover, the concept of Responsibility to Protect is also a part of humanitarian aid work. It underlines the need to integrate security as a structural element, to provide more sustainable conditions of reconstruction and development after a crisis. It also implies a new form of conceiving humanitarian aid, not only as a short-term or emergency action, but also in the long-term.

The EU, as a community of states opened to the world and sharing the core principles of humanitarian aid, is using specific tools to provide the new forms of humanitarian aid: the EU services, composed mainly of a European Commission body, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), are able to respond to both internal crises and international ones. In doing so, the EU also promotes its own core values, namely: human rights, the respect for the rule of law and separation of powers, and transparency of the aid delivered (which is funded by the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the EU Trust Funds and the EU Member States themselves).

Addressing more specifically food security is also a challenging structural issue, requiring innovative forms of understanding its complexity. In the next decades, climate change, environmental degradation and water availability as well as water quality, can put at risk more vulnerable regions. In the EU, the Mediterranean region will be particularly affected by such a trend. Humanitarian aid is crucial to the alleviation of hunger and undernutrition in most conflict regions. But strong partnerships and international commitments to achieve sustainable food systems are needed to support more integrated

actions to address the populations most vulnerable to food insecurity, and to mitigate related challenges such as migration.

The aim of the EU is to achieve food security as a public health priority goal, and to promote food security without leaving no one behind. To do so, it needs to embrace the food system as a whole and integrate systemic solutions to change the dynamics that result in the existing social, economic and environmental disparities. Context specific approaches need to identify the underlying causes of food insecurity and disease burden in regional and local communities (HLPE 2017; Candel 2018). Nevertheless, the developed and developing regions are not separated apart, as increasingly observed with migration issues in the EU. Such trends indicate that local actions need to be strengthened by international commitments and food trade regulations that prioritise food security, public health and sustainable food systems for wellbeing. Sustainability and solidarity promoted within the EU cannot be limited to the EU only, as illustrated by the paradigmatic issue of climate change and its impact on both humanitarian crises and food insecurity.

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