

Study Guide - Week 17

WFP - Addressing famine and conflict-related hunger

1) TDLR:

One of the things that is undeniably common to all of mankind are daily necessities such as food and water. And yet over 8% of the global populations still suffers from hunger. Despite modern agriculture, technological advancements and rise in the global GDP, hunger is a persistent and serious threat to the lives of many. Conflict is of the primary causes of hunger, followed by natural disasters. The UN's World Food Program is tasked with difficult role of alleviating and one day hopefully eliminating hunger. Unfortunately, the support of this organization is waning. Lack of funding, complications caused by political roadblocks and sometimes even outright violence restrict the WFP's ability to deliver aid where it is most needed. Funding shortfalls also undermine the WFP's ability to find and provide long-term solutions to areas which are at high risk of food scarcity and famine. With ongoing crises, the WFP must revise its approach and look for new and unique solutions to get a step closer to its goal of global food security.

2) Background Information:

Food scarcity, namely famine and hunger caused by armed-conflict, is one the most urgent global humanitarian issues. It is estimated that approximately 318 million people face acute hunger, 70% of which is driven by conflict. Disrupted farming, markets and aid access are the most direct symptoms of the crisis. These issues are further worsened by climate change, economic inequality and lack of funding. According to the UN and the World Food Program, there are currently two ongoing famines (Sudan and Gaza) and 16 'hunger hotspots'.

The World Food Program (WFP) is the UN's main agency meant to combat hunger. Delivery of emergency food aid, cash assistance and long term solution-based programs are just a few of the many ways that WFP tries to alleviate worldwide hunger. In Sudan for example, the WFP has coordinated UN convoys to reach cut-off communities. In Gaza, WFP made substantial contributions to mitigate famine conditions by coordinating and scaling up food distribution with partners like FAO, UNICEF and WHO.

One of the most important tools of the WFP is the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), founded in 2003. This organization is managed by the WFP and it provides safe reliable, cost-efficient and effective passenger and light cargo transport to and from areas of crisis. This service is the only one of its kind which provides equal access to all humanitarian entities. UNHAS allows aid to be delivered in the most remote and dangerous locations, performing actions such as landings without airstrips and air drops. Unfortunately, despite its immense value, UNHAS faced a massive \$206 million funding shortfall in 2025. This led to many flight missions being halted, leaving many remote communities without access to aid.

3) Key Issues:

3.1) Humanitarian Access in Conflict Zones: The most prominent problem with conflict zones is the blockade or restriction of aid. Whether its violence, blockades or bureaucratic hurdles, lack of access can easily be turned into a weapon during conflict. Sudan, Gaza, South Sudan and Yemen are currently just a few examples of high-risk areas where barriers delay or outright prevent life-saving food distribution. High risk areas also raise the costs of aid through the complications and danger that humanitarian workers face. How can the WFP circumvent the restrictions on aid? Is there a way to negotiate with conflict parties to create access? How can the UNHAS be used to bypass ground barriers? Can the WFP minimize the risks that aid workers face?

3.2) Lack of Funding and Poor Resource Management: Facing huge resource shortfalls, the WFP is forced to prioritize certain issues over others and implement cuts. This means smaller rations and reduced reach, increasing famine risk in hunger hotspot areas. The WFP requires \$13 billion in 2026 to assist 110 million of the 318 million in acute hunger. Estimates show that only half of the required funds are available due to donor fatigue and competing crises. An unfortunate example being Somalia, where it is estimated that food aid will stop within a few weeks due to funding shortfalls. How can the WFP ensure stable long term funding? Is there a way to find donors in other unexplored areas such the private sector? What priorities should be considered when allocating resources?

3.3) Long-term Solutions to Prevent Hunger: Regions which suffer under prolonged conflict often become dependent on external aid. This dependence is caused by the destruction of agricultural resources and markets. Farming is often impossible due to a lack of workable land, expertise and general safety. Despite WFP's resilience building initiatives, funding shortfalls often require long-term solutions to be cut first in favor of immediate aid. Is there a way for the WFP to both provide immediate help and long-term solutions? What long-term solutions should the WFP focus on (drought-resistant seeds, or skill training, encouragement of private investments, ...)? How can the WFP cooperate with local governments to ensure long-term food security?

4) What can the UNHRC actually do?

The WFP, led by the Executive Board comprising of 36 Member States, coordinates global responses to humanitarian crises. This includes policy, advocacy and strategic coordination. While its resolutions are not binding, they are often implemented. The WFP is entirely funded through voluntary contributions. This means that its resolutions are commitments made by the Member States to support certain humanitarian actions and financial frameworks. Some of the WFP functions are:

- Organizing and approving of emergency operations and programs;
- Coordinating of food assistance policies such as guidelines for specific conflict zones;
- Directing of resources and budgets, such as allocation of funds for programs and high-risk areas and creation of long-term funding commitments;
- Advocating and recommending of actions, such as appeals for funding directed at NGO's and/or governments;
- Promotions of issue-specific campaigns meant to gather global support

5) Major Stakeholder's:

5.1) The United States of America: The US is a largest donor of the World Food Program and aims to achieve efficient use of resources and tangible outcomes and promotes transparency. They are concerned with preventing instability that could result in conflict-spillover and consequent mass migration caused by food crises. In the debate, the US would advocate to determine areas/countries of highest concern, which have potential to threaten global or regional security. Given this the US would call for strict monitoring systems to ensure there is no aid diversion. Nevertheless, the US may still stress budget constraints and call for burden-sharing among donor states.

5.2) China: China strongly advocates for non-interference in domestic affairs. If the food assistance respects China's state authority and is coordinated with national governments they are ready to offer support. In the debate, China would advocate for long-term developmental solutions such as increased investment in agriculture, agricultural infrastructure, and collaboration among the Global South. Crucially, China would oppose any attempts in politicizing food assistance or humanitarian aid.

5.3) Germany: Germany is a major European donor state and promotes itself as a nation that prioritized humanitarian principles, international cooperation and protection of vulnerable communities. Germany supports addressing emergency food aid and furthermore long-term solution oriented programmes that deal with famine or conflict driven food insecurity. In the debate, Germany would call for increased funding, strong and reliable coordination mechanisms that are kept neutral, focused on needs rather than political aspirations.

5.4) India: India puts a great emphasis on food sovereignty therefore believes countries should focus on strengthening their national agriculture and avoid depending on food aid for extended periods of time. In the debate, India would push for more solutions aiming to strengthen the vulnerable agricultural infrastructure. India would further call for assistance in technology that would support food supply chains. As India positions itself as the voice of developing countries, it would stress the importance of representation of developing countries in decision-making.

5.5) Ethiopia: Ethiopia faces both conflict-driven food insecurity in addition to climate related food crises. Ethiopia is a large recipient of WFP assistance and its central concern is to have access to predictable and reliable funding while also protecting its national sovereignty over operations. In the debate, Ethiopia would urge for operations to take place coordinated with the national authorities and emphasize their aim to become more self-reliant in its food production. Ethiopia would call for increased investment in local agricultural programmes that combat climate change related food insecurity. While it would accept international support in the form of food aid, and funding, their main focus would be on strengthening national capacity.

6) Sources and further reading:

<https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis>

<https://www.wfp.org/conflict-and-hunger>

<https://www.wfp.org/unhas>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/food-aid-somalia-could-halt-within-weeks-due-funding-shortages-wfp-warns-2026-02-20/>

<https://www.devex.com/news/exclusive-wfp-to-cut-up-to-30-of-staff-amid-aid-shortfall-109932>

<https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/report/global-report-food-crisis-2025/>

<https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/report/global-report-food-crisis-2025/>