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FOOD SECURITY AND ARMED CONFLICTS

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ABSTRACT

Food security is a basic component of human security and consists in ensuring the food resources necessary for the survival of the population. Food security can be affected both by natural phenomena such as drought, floods, natural disasters, earthquakes and landslides, but also by human activities. Among human activities, armed conflicts have the greatest impact on food security because the destruction caused makes it impossible to produce food resources and limits the population's access to food resources produced in another area. The consequences of conflicts on food security are very difficult to identify and manage, because controlling the causes and limiting the effects are, most of the time, beyond the immediate capabilities of the conflicting parties.

KEYWORDS: armed conflicts, food security, human security, sustainable development, sustainable development objectives

1. Introduction

The quality of the environment and the provision of food for all people came to the attention of international public opinion in 1972, with the publication of the *"Limits to Growth"* report and the holding of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm.

If in 1974, on the occasion of the World Food Conference, food security was ensured by food production and its flow, in 2001, food security is ensured by the simultaneous fulfillment of several criteria. Since 2015, food security has been included in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted on the occasion of the United Nations Summit for Sustainable Development. The second goal – "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" – is an ambitious goal that provides that by 2030, hunger will be eradicated from the world. Unfortunately, natural disasters, climate change, wars, armed conflicts and pandemics are only some of the "obstacles" to achieving this goal.

In the case of local and regional armed conflicts, the human costs are huge. Beyond the loss of human life and the effects on the environment, armed conflicts cause food

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insecurity and starvation, with populations in conflict zones ending up completely without food.

The purpose of this article is to present the link between global food security, the Sustainable Development Goals in general and Sustainable Development Goal 2 in particular, and armed conflict.

The specific objective of our research is to show how armed conflict – regardless of its cause – influences the food security of affected areas, and the population can end up totally deprived of the food resources necessary for survival.

2. Research Methodology

To carry out the research, we chose the qualitative approach. The paper presents how the documents adopted and the application of the measures taken, in the most important conferences of the World Food Organization and the United Nations, to increase food security are influenced by the impact that armed conflicts have on ensuring food and food security in conflict areas. The concepts of "sustainable development" and "food security" are presented and analyzed based on the documents adopted at the most important conferences on sustainable development and food security. The impact of conflicts on food security is presented and analyzed based on specialized literature and own observations.

3. The Concept of "Food Security" and Its Dimensions

The concept of "food security" appeared in the mid-70s as a result of "*the discussions of international food problems at a time of global crisis*" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2002) and "*was initially seen [...] as a 'food problem', particularly that of (a) ensuring production of adequate food supplies and (b) maximizing stability in their flow*" (Overseas Development Institute, 1997).

Global concerns about providing food for all people led to the organization in 1974 of the World Food Conference. In the report drawn up at the end of the conference, food security was defined as "*availability at all time of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices*" (Report of the Food World Conference, 1975). As society has evolved and more and more complex challenges to people's quality of life have appeared, the definition of food security has undergone changes, such as:

– "*revised concept of world food security with the ultimate objective of ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need*" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1983);

– "*food security has to do with the access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life*" (The World Bank, 1986);

– "[…] *our responsibility to achieve food security for present and future generations* […]. *Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996);

– "*A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2001)

Food security comprises 4 dimensions: physical availability of food, access to food, utilization of food and stability of sizes (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2008; The World Bank, 2023).

Table no. 1

Dimensions of food security

Dimensions	Characteristics
Physical availability of food	– addresses the "supply side" of food security; – refers to the presence of safe and nutritious food at a given time in a given place; – determined by the level of production, stocks, net trade.
Access to food	– adequate local, regional, national or international food supply does not guarantee household food security; – addresses the ability to buy or exchange goods for food; – concerns about insufficient access to food have led to a greater policy focus on income, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security goals.
Food use	– the way in which the human organism benefits to the maximum from the nutrients in food; – good practices of care, feeding, food preparation, the diversity of the diet ensure the necessary nutrients; – the provision of nutrients and the good biological use of the food consumed determine the nutritional status of people.
Stability	– availability and accessibility of food throughout life.

(Source: Authors' contribution based on Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2008; The World Bank, 2023)

For food security goals to be achieved, all four dimensions must be met simultaneously.

4. Sustainable Development Goals and Food Security

With the 70s of the last century, as a result of the sharp degradation of environmental factors as a consequence of the increase in industrial production and intensive agriculture, scientists and politicians began to realize that all the models of economic growth used until then led to economic growth at the expense of the quality of the environment. In March 1972, the *"Limits to Growth"* report highlights the contradiction between economic development and the environment: accelerated economic development results in pollution and degradation of environmental factors and rapid consumption of natural and energy resources (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 1972). Awareness of the link between economic growth, environmental protection, the depletion of non-renewable natural resources and the quality of people's lives has led the political class and civil society to address the issue of environmental protection at the highest level.

Specialists appreciate that the "cornerstone" in solving environmental problems and the need to increase people's quality of life was laid in June 1972 in Stockholm, during the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The most famous document adopted following the discussions is the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which starts from the premise that "*man is both the creator and the destroyer of his environment, an environment that gives him natural support and offers him the possibility of intellectual, moral growth, social and spiritual*" (Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972). The document states that "*problems of the human environment constitute a new and important field for international cooperation, and the complexity and interdependence of such problems require new approaches*" (Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972), the signatories being "*convinced of the need for prompt and effective implementation by governments*

and the international community of measures aimed at saving and improving the human environment for the benefit of the present and future generations of man" (Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972) and that environmental management is that which "*covers functions designed for comprehensive and important planning that takes into account the secondary effects of human activity and therefore to protect and improve the human environment for present and future generations*" (United Nations Conferences Development, 2023).

During the conference, by addressing economic, social and environmental issues, "*legitimacy was conferred on the concept of sustainable development with its three pillars: economic, social and environmental*" (Department for Sustainable Development, 2018).

The concept of "sustainable development" became known to the general public in 1987, with the publication of the report *"Our Common Future"* – also known as the *"Brundtland Report"* – of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The report *"developed guiding principles for sustainable development as it is generally understood today"* (Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, 2023) and *"called for a strategy that unites development with the environment – described by the now common term «sustainable development»"* (Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, 2023) which was defined as *"development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, 1987). At the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the concept of "sustainable development" was accepted in the context of the simultaneous use of the concepts of "growth" and "human development", being included in all local or regional development programs.

An important step in terms of the global partnership for increasing the quality of people's lives, and implicitly reducing extreme poverty and hunger, was made in September 2000 during the Millennium Summit. During this Summit, the Millennium Development Goals were adopted with a final deadline of 2015. The first goal, which called for the "Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger" was largely achieved.

All high-level meetings that took place in the period 2000-2015 and had as topics of discussion sustainable development, environmental quality, poverty of the inhabitants, economic development, use of natural resources – "Summit for sustainable development", 2002, Johannesburg; "Conference of the Organization United Nations on Sustainable Development", 2012, Rio de Janeiro – showed the need to integrate sustainable development at all levels and recognized the links between economic, environmental and social aspects. In the final document of the 2012 Rio de Janeiro Conference, the integration of the dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, environmental – within the United Nations system and the reporting of progress made was requested (Mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system, 2013).

In 2015, at the United Nations Summit for Sustainable Development, "*a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity*" is adopted, known as *"Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"* (Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015). Taking as its starting point the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and solving the unfinished problems of the same Goals, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development establishes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets.

Goal 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture proposed that

"By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round" (Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015). Unfortunately, the number of those facing hunger and food insecurity has increased due to climate change, pandemics, conflicts, population growth in deprived areas and social inequalities. "*Projections show that by 2030, approximately 670 million people will still be facing hunger – 8% of the world's population, the same as in 2015. [...] To achieve Zero Hunger by 2030, immediate and intensified efforts are required to transform food systems, ensure food security and invest in sustainable agricultural practices*" (United Nations, 2023). According to the same document, "*The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already deteriorating food security situation, with about 150 million more people facing hunger in 2021 than in 2019. In addition, nearly 1 in 3 (2.3 billion people) were moderately or severely food insecure in 2021. This represents an increase of almost 350 million people since the beginning of the pandemic. The most worrisome increases were seen in sub-Saharan Africa. The ongoing crisis in Ukraine is yet another threat to food security*" (United Nations, 2023).

In "*The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023 – Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development"*, it is stated that *"at this critical juncture, midway to 2030, incremental and fragmented change is insufficient to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the remaining seven years. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the active mobilization of political leadership and ambition for science-based transformations. This must be achieved globally – leaving no country, society or person behind"* (*The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)*, 2023).

5. Food Security during Armed Conflicts

Ensuring food security is a major concern, both in times of peace and in times of crisis or conflict. The food security of a region or a nation can be affected by both natural phenomena and human activities and the consequences of these activities. In peacetime, for most states, ensuring food security for the majority of citizens is not a problem because the economy is functioning and productive agricultural activities can be carried out without major disruptions. Also, the flow of food from the production areas to the consumption areas is ensured without much difficulty. If drought, floods or other extreme weather phenomena affect the production capacity in a certain region, the population's food needs can be ensured by redistributing the surplus to the affected regions. Also, when the food supply of a region is endangered for limited periods of time, the state can intervene to provide support in order to ensure the necessary resources for the population to carry out its activity in conditions as close as possible to normal ones, through the redirection of basic products from national reserves established specifically to be used in crisis situations (ANRSPS, 2023) or by requesting international assistance in case of major emergencies.

The problem of ensuring the food security of the population and the proper functioning of the state arises in situations of major crisis, in the situation of prolonged economic, political, military, environmental crises or in the case of an armed conflict. In times of conflict, food security is seriously affected both by military actions that can prevent the production, storage and transportation of food within the conflict zone, as well as by the disruptions caused by military actions in other, more distant areas, as a result of the effects manifesting cascading of conflict. Thus, we can take as an example, the closure of grain transport lanes from the Black Sea (Turker, 2023)

from Ukraine to the countries of Africa and the Middle East, which may have the effect of affecting food security on a large scale in some states that are already in situations complicated, or the isolation of the Gaza Strip by Israel, as a result of the conflict that broke out between Israel and Hamas (Jacobo, 2023), which amplifies an already existing food crisis in the Gaza Strip and which may have catastrophic consequences for the directly affected population, who no longer have access to food resources. Considering the aspects mentioned above, we can state that armed conflict represents a direct threat to food security, through the direct destruction caused and through the disruptions that occur in global supply chains.

However, we can also affirm the fact that the lack of food resources can be a source of conflict, a source of tension at the level of states but also between states. The population deprived of the means of subsistence will be more prone to carry out violent actions to satisfy the basic needs, which can affect the national security. When the state is unable to fulfill its basic functions, among which we can mention the provision of the necessary resources for the population and the creation of a climate of safety and security, because "*food scarcity exacerbates social tensions such as inequality and poverty and acts as a threat multiplier*" (Food Ethics Council, 2023), we will witness the emergence of a spiral of violence and insecurity that will manifest itself in all areas and will amplify with the passage of time, and only determined, violent action will be able to stabilize the situation.

Food security is not only affected by armed conflicts, but by an accumulation of factors whose interdependencies and hidden effects do nothing but amplify the effects of the lack of necessary food resources. However, conflict is the main cause of food insecurity globally, as shown in the "*2023 Global Report on Food Crisis*" (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2023). According to this report, armed conflict is the main cause of food insecurity, affecting more than 117 million people, followed by major economic shocks that cause acute food insecurity for about 90 million people, and extreme weather that affects food security for more than 56 million people globally.

Internal armed conflicts or between states inevitably cause food insecurity because they directly or indirectly affect all dimensions of food security: "*availability (having a sufficient quantity of food available regularly); access (having enough resources to acquire suitable and healthy food); utilization (having a reasonable food use based on knowledge of essential nutrition and care); and stability of availability, access, and utilization of food*" (Ben Hassen & El Bilali, 2022). First of all, armed conflicts affect the availability of food for the population in the conflict zone, and not only because military actions prevent the production of food for the population, through the direct destruction and the dangers they involve, but also because food resources, the most often limited, will be directed in particular to the support of the armed forces carrying out combat actions and who need food in sufficient quantities both to support the effort made by participating in the battles, but also to maintain the morale of the combatants. The conflict also affects access to food resources because military actions and the destruction caused by them limit the freedom of movement of the population and prioritize concerns for ensuring minimal personal security, at the expense of ensuring adequate nutrition. Also, the armed conflict affects the stability and continuity of the supply of food resources for the population, which will have access to limited amounts of food, as a result of the rationing and unavailability of some types of basic food, the impossibility of transporting and distributing food, etc. Armed conflicts will influence food security

for the population and due to the fact that the already limited resources will become much more difficult to access due to the increase in illegal actions in the field of food, the development of the black market in food and the amplification of food smuggling, which will lead to a steep increase of prices, not only for luxury products, but also for basic foods, which will additionally affect the most vulnerable categories of the population: women, children, the elderly and the population on the verge of poverty. Another form in which conflict increases food insecurity for large masses of people is related to forcing people to leave their homelands as a result of military action and direct destruction. As a result of military actions, the civilian population is forced to leave the conflict zone and seek refuge in other areas, sometimes far away from where the population traditionally lived. This creates waves of refugees who are unable to secure their means of subsistence and who need humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs and who depend on international humanitarian assistance programmes.

Food security is influenced by armed conflicts and is at the same time a cause and an effect of them, and "*the causal relationship between violent conflicts, on the one hand, and food insecurity and famine, on the other, are complex and context-driven*" (Kemmerling, Schetter & Wirkus, 2022). Most of the time, armed conflicts cause food insecurity for the population in the conflict zones, but also for the population that depends on the food resources that previously came from the conflict zone, by limiting access to food, in the necessary quantities and in an appropriate flow. Also, food insecurity can be a source of conflict, because the acute lack of food in an area, due to natural disasters, economic crises or other reasons, will cause the population to move to more prosperous areas, which will put pressure on those areas and will constitute a potential source of conflict.

6. Conclusions

Food security continues to be a particularly important issue in contemporary society. Despite all the high-level meetings and all the decisions taken on the occasion of these meetings, the reality "on the ground" is increasingly shaky. Furthermore, due to climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters or local or regional armed conflicts, millions of people do not have access to food or are at the limit of subsistence.

Armed conflicts are both a cause and an effect of food security. At the beginning of the conflict, the civilian population will have limited access to food, and as the conflict drags on, securing food will become a matter of survival.

In order to ensure food security, regional and global targets and directions for action need to be set. Funding sources and support programmes for disadvantaged and conflict-affected countries and areas also need to be secured. We recommend the involvement of all states of the world in solving food security problems and in combating armed conflicts.

The implementation of measures to strengthen food security requires the cooperation of international economic, political and environmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and governments of states that can provide support, as well as of states that need support, with the ultimate goal of ensuring the livelihoods of people at risk of hunger. In addition to these measures to be taken in the short and medium term, we recommend to develop long-term strategies that combine the issue of combating climate change with that of ensuring the availability of food resources for people in need.

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