

A Giant Leap Backwards Author(s): MALANCHA CHAKRABARTY

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# A GIANT LEAP BACKWARDS

## IS THE ZERO HUNGER GOAL ACHIEVABLE?

*In 2015, there was optimism about the eradication of hunger as most countries had met the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of hungry persons. However, within three years, the number of undernourished people has increased and the world is witnessing a re-emergence of this issue. This article critically reviews the literature on famines and concludes that regarding famines as war crimes is justified in countries where there has been a systematic effort to deny food to the civilian population. Two main reasons behind the increase in global hunger are conflicts and climate induced droughts in vulnerable regions. Therefore, the Zero Hunger Goal cannot be met without the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 13 (Climate Action) and 16 (Peace and Justice).*

MALANCHA CHAKRABARTY

### INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 was one of celebration and optimism. About 72 developing countries out of 129 met the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1c target of halving the proportion of hungry persons and the absolute number of undernourished persons declined from 1,010.6 million in 1990–92 to 794.6 million in 2014–16—a reduction of about 21.4 per cent. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Food Programme, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Meeting the 2015 International Hunger Targets and Taking Stock of the Uneven Progress*,

2015, online at <http://www.fao.org>) This substantial progress in fighting hunger was in the backdrop of global economic recessions in the 1990s and again in 2008, volatile commodity prices, high food and energy prices and a 1.9 billion increase in the world population. Stable political conditions, inclusive economic growth and social protection systems targeted at vulnerable population groups were the main reasons behind the sustained decline in under-nutrition. The remarkable progress in reducing hunger over the past 25 years brought hopes of a complete eradication of hunger by 2030.

“The near achievement of the Millennium Development Goals’ hunger targets shows us that we can indeed eliminate the scourge of hunger in our lifetime. We must be the Zero Hunger Generation. That goal should be mainstreamed into all policy interventions and be at the heart of the new sustainable development agenda to be established this year”. (World Food Programme, *World Hunger Falls to Under 800 Million, Eradication is Next Goal*, 27 May 2015, online at <https://www.wfp.org>)

Unfortunately, three years later the complete eradication of hunger by 2030 seems a distant goal. According to the United Nations’ *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*, (online at <https://unstats.un.org>) after a period of sustained decline, the absolute number of undernourished persons increased from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016 and the percentage of the global population suffering from hunger increased to 11 per cent from 10.6 per cent. (*ibid*) Moreover, the reversal of the decline in hunger has been accompanied by a re-emergence of famines. By the late 1980s, episodes of mass starvation had declined and famine related deaths had also come down dramatically. However, the last couple of years have seen a resurgence of famines. In 2017, famine was declared in parts of South Sudan while northeast Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen experienced crisis-level food insecurity situations, with the potential to turn into famines. The number of people facing crisis level food insecurity (Integrated Phase Classification Phase 3+) was 17 million in Yemen, 5.1 million in northeast Nigeria, 4.9 million in South Sudan and 2.9 million in Somalia. (Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crisis*, March 2017, online at <http://www.fsincop.net>) Despite humanitarian assistance, the situation in these four countries has hardly improved.

The crisis in Yemen is the perfect example of a protracted manmade disaster. The war between forces loyal to the Saudi backed government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement

is being pursued without any concern for the people. On the one hand, the Saudi-led coalition allies of Hadi have repeatedly hindered relief operations by bombing key ports and infrastructure. On the other, the Houthis rebels enforced a blockade in 2015 and systematically hampered the work of humanitarian relief agencies. Given that the country was already almost entirely dependent on food imports, the war has led to a total collapse in the supply and distribution of food. About 462,000 children under five years of age suffer from severely acute malnutrition and 3.3 million children and pregnant or nursing mothers are acutely malnourished. (Food Security Information Network, *ibid*) Similarly, the risk of famine continues to be very high in the Pibor and Kapoeta East regions of South Sudan. In Pibor, 24.3 per cent of households reported a Household Hunger Scale of six, signifying an extreme lack of food indicative of a catastrophe. (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *South Sudan Food Security Outlook Update*, April 2018, online at <http://fews.net>) Similarly, northeast Nigeria is facing an acute food crisis. About 20 per cent of the households in northern Adamawa, Borno and southeast Yobe state face emergency outcomes (Integrated Phase Classification Phase 4) because of restricted access to humanitarian assistance and loss of livelihoods. (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Nigeria Food Security Outlook Update*, May 2018, online at <http://fews.net>) It has also been estimated that about 1.88 million persons have been displaced in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states. These people are heavily dependent on assistance as few livelihood opportunities are available to them. (*ibid*)

Somalia has a long history of conflicts, droughts and famines. The famine of 1991–92 led to the death of about 200,000 people and the majority were children. In 2011, the country witnessed the worst drought in 60 years in the Horn of Africa, which killed more than a quarter of a million people. In 2017, the country drifted back to famine like conditions after three successive years of drought. More than half of the country's population or about 6.7 million people are acutely food insecure. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Famine Response and Prevention: Northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen*, May 2017, online at <http://www.fao.org>) The ongoing conflict between al-Shabab Islamist fighters and the government coupled with successive droughts have had severe consequences on child nutrition. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, about 1.4 million children are acutely malnourished in the country. (United Nations News Centre, *Somalia: 1.4 Million Children to Suffer Acute Malnutrition this Year: United Nations Agency*, 2017, online at <https://news.un.org>) There were hopes of recovery due to rainfall in the first half of the year and above average *gu* harvests.

However, some of the gains were mitigated by cyclone Sagar. The Baki, Lughaya and Zeylac districts of the Awdal region were the most severely affected by the cyclone. Flash and severe river flooding caused fatalities and mass displacement, aggravating the already fragile humanitarian situation. Moreover, heavy rains also damaged fishing boats, medical facilities, roads and water wells making relief operations even more difficult. About 168,000 Somalis have been directly affected and about 277 hectares of land have been destroyed in the affected villages. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia Humanitarian Bulletin*, May 2018, online at <http://www.unocha.org>)

In addition, a number of other states including nearly all of East Africa have been facing acute levels of food insecurity as well. On the one hand, recurrent droughts have severely impacted the ability of farmers and herders to produce food and feed livestock. On the other, raging conflicts have displaced a large number of people and further eroded their livelihoods. The droughts of 2016 and 2017 caused large-scale livestock deaths in southeast Ethiopia and about 800,000 persons have been displaced due to the conflict along the Somali–Oromia regional border. (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Ethiopia Food Security Alert*, March 2018, online at <http://fews.net>) Djibouti, another country in the Horn of Africa that suffers from chronic food deficit, has witnessed a further deterioration in the food security situation due to a series of droughts exacerbated by El Niño and raging conflicts that have led to an influx of 22,000 refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen. The above average rainfall in the first half of 2018 brought hopes of improvement but excessive rainfall and the consequent flash flooding caused deaths and washed away crops and shelters in some regions. Apart from East Africa, countries in Central and West Africa are also facing high levels of food insecurity. In the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo, food insecurity has progressively deteriorated and conflict is the main driver. In the former, about two million people need urgent humanitarian assistance and the country is housing about 420,000 refugees, while in the latter

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Internally displaced persons and refugees are the worst off. The Islamist sect Boko Haram has intensified its attacks on civilians, which has caused large-scale displacement and massive destruction of agriculture, cross-border trade, food systems and livelihoods. About 8.2 million persons have become severely food insecure in Cameroon, Chad and Niger due to this crisis. The number of Nigerian refugees in these three countries is estimated at about 183,293. These vulnerable countries were already facing extreme poverty and recurrent droughts and the huge influx of refugees has put extreme pressure on them. Millions of people in southern Africa are also facing hunger because of the severe impacts of El Niño induced droughts in 2015–16. The production of staple cereals like maize fell drastically and its prices peaked. As a result, food assistance requirements in states like Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe has increased rapidly.

The situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Haiti is no better. Insecurity and conflict led to the displacement of over 130,000 Afghans while nearly 7,500 documented and 336,000 undocumented Afghan nationals returned to the country in 2018 from Iran and Pakistan. (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Afghanistan Food Security Outlook*, June 2018 to January 2019, online at <http://fews.net>) Poor rainfall in 2017 also led to a decline in the production of staple crops like wheat. In Iraq, the humanitarian situation has worsened since 2014. According to the *Global Report on Food Crisis*, (*ibid*) about 2.4 million people are food insecure and 1.5 million of them severely food insecure. As in other countries, the internally displaced persons in conflict affected areas and returnees in liberated areas are the most vulnerable. The Syrian conflict has already caused 280,000 deaths and unprecedented displacement in the neighbouring states of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. About seven million people are food insecure and another 2.7 million are at risk of food insecurity. The flow of Syrian refugees to neighbouring countries also has enormous economic and social impacts on host nations. Severe drought in 2015 and hurricane Matthew in 2016 had disastrous effects on agricultural production in Haiti. Crop production declined by more than 50 per cent and 1.5 million persons are currently facing severe food insecurity. (*ibid*) The Food and Agriculture Organisation's *Crop Prospects and Food Situation Report* (online at <http://www.fao.org>) states that about 39 countries globally are in need of external assistance. In a nutshell, food security is the greatest challenge before mankind.

The current rise in hunger must not be seen merely as a short-term departure from a secular decline in hunger. In fact, it poses serious challenges to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in general and the Zero Hunger Goal in particular. Acute food insecurity has lasting impacts on individuals, households and countries. The most severe and enduring affects are felt by children. Prenatal, postnatal and childhood malnutrition have long-term effects that cannot be reversed by adequate nutrition at later stages of life. According to a study by Janina R Galler and L Robert Barret, (“Children and Famine: Long-Term Impact on Development”, *Ambulatory Child Health*, vol7, no2, 2001) malnutrition has a negative impact on cognitive and behavioural functioning throughout childhood and adolescence even after controlling for socioeconomic conditions and other factors. In another study, Stefan Dercon and Catherine Porter (“Live Aid Revisited: Long-Term Impacts of the 1984 Ethiopian Famine on Children”, *Journal of European Economic Association*, vol12, no4, 2014) found that Ethiopian children aged 12–36 months at the peak of the 1984 famine were significantly shorter by at least five centimetres than their older cohorts and other unaffected children. Thus, the current rise in food insecurity will impair the growth and development of the affected children for life. It is therefore imperative to dwell on the reasons behind the increase in global hunger and take swift action to avoid its dangerous impacts.

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#### WHY THE INCREASE IN HUNGER?

This section examines whether existing literature on famines and associated food insecurity offers insights or policy conclusions for the current rise in global food insecurity. The earliest writings on famines were by Thomas R Malthus who argued that they were a natural consequence of excessive population growth and served to keep the carrying capacity of the Earth under check by

reducing the population. Malthusian notions of food availability decline as a consequence of growing population were completely rejected by Amartya Sen in his groundbreaking work on famines. (*Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) Sen revolutionised the study of famines by asserting that they were the result of “entitlement failures” rather than a decline in food availability. In other words, famines occur not because of a lack of food but because some people are not able to access it. It is now well established that the Malthusian fear of population growth exceeding global agricultural production is unfounded and the current productive potential of global agriculture exceeds world population growth. In fact, the 2017 spike in the number of hungry persons and famines occurred on the back of a record global production of cereals. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Global Cereal Production to Hit a Record High*, September 2017, online at <http://www.fao.org>)

Another defining feature of Sen’s analysis is his immense faith in the power of democracies and a free press in preventing famines. According to him, adversarial politics and independent media in democracies ensure that elected governments intervene to protect the entitlements of people. While underscoring the role of wars in famines, Sen contends, “The most pernicious effect of war and war-like situations is a weakening of the opportunity of adversarial politics and social criticism”. (“War and Famines: On Divisions and Incentives”, *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, vol6, no2, Spring 2000) On a similar note, Jean Drèze (“War and Famines” in Vandana Desai and Robert B Potter (Eds), *The Companion to Development Studies*, London: Hodder Arnold, 2002) describes war as “one of the last bastions of famine”. Sen’s conclusions seem valid even in the current context. Most of the countries described in the previous section are affected by armed conflicts, which have disrupted local food production systems, devastated livelihoods and ruined key infrastructure like bridges, ports and roads, preventing the movement of food supplies. Failing health systems are also causing a number of deaths due to easily preventable infectious diseases, which are common in emergency situations.

While Sen’s contentions are well founded, some of his critics have extended new approaches to understanding cases of mass starvation, which are particularly relevant in today’s context. One of the earliest critics of Sen’s analysis, Amrita Rangasami (“Failure of Exchange Entitlements Theory of Famine: A Response”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol20, no42, 1985) avers that famines must not be understood as sudden collapses into starvation eventually leading to the death of victims. Such an approach fails

to recognise the economic and sociopolitical determinants of those tragedies. She argues that the intervals between two famines must be studied in detail to understand their underlying reasons and why they recur in some countries. Rangasami's point is particularly valid for states in the Horn of Africa like Somalia, South Sudan and East Africa in general, which suffer from recurrent droughts and famines. Mamadou Baro and Tara F Deubel ("Persistent Hunger: Perspectives on Vulnerability, Famine and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol35, 2006, pp521–38) also underscore the role of socioeconomic processes which increase the vulnerabilities of African households and erode their resilience to shocks like droughts and political conflicts. Their emphasis on structural vulnerabilities seems more appropriate in the context of African countries because most of them, as discussed in the previous section, have been afflicted by protracted conflicts and recurrent droughts, which have withered the ability of local communities to adapt to shocks. These countries are also characterised by endemic poverty and low agricultural productivity.

Given the continuum of hardships in famine-prone countries, William Torry ("Social Science Research on Famine: A Critical Evaluation", *Human Ecology*, vol12, no3, 1984) argues against anthropometric measures of famines and questions regarding their onset. According to him, individuals and households affected by famines do not care about when the famine actually began. For them, a famine means stretching existing coping mechanisms. Moreover, he argues that sharp climatic reversals lead to famines only in regions where the underlying coping capacities of the populations are severely impaired due to poverty, under-nutrition and low agricultural productivity. His observations seem particularly true today in comparing the cases of East Africa and Australia. In the latter, New South Wales and Queensland have been undergoing the worst drought in living memory, crops have failed, the regions face acute water shortages and farmers are struggling to feed livestock but unlike East Africa millions are not dying of hunger.

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A number of scholars have also found flaws in the overemphasis on economic reasons in Sen's explanation of food crises and a neglect of the politics behind mass starvation. His assertion that famines never occur in the context of functioning democracies and free press, though worthy, fails to recognise the complexities of global politics and the internal dynamics of many affected states like Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, despite them being characterised by weak or absent democratic institutions as found in Western democracies. Jenny Edkins ("Mass Starvations and the Limitations of Famine Theorising", *IDS Bulletin*, vol33, no4, 2002) emphasises the politics of mass starvation. She argues that instead of seeking answers to the causes of famines, one should try to find out who caused them because there are groups and individuals that gain from famines. According to her, famines are not failures of socioeconomic systems but actually a product of them. Similarly, noted expert Alex de Waal ("The Nazis Used It, We Use It: Alex de Waal on the Return of Famine as a Weapon of War", *London Review of Books*, vol39, no12, 2017) argues that famines are usually the consequences of political actions and often serve as weapons of war. In his words, "it is something people do to one another, like torture or murder". He gives various examples where hunger has been used as a tool in war—the Nazi plan to starve the Soviets, the starvation inflicted by the Japanese on the Chinese and Koreans during the world war, etc.

Unlike Sen who reposes faith in the ability of states to prevent and address famines, Edkins and de Waal do not have a particularly benign view of the state. In fact, state forces have in many ways contributed to the crises in some of the countries. The famine in South Sudan has been described as "government-made" because the administration has been killing its own people by denying humanitarian relief and targeting its own population. Sudanese officials impede the work of humanitarian workers by increasing the fees that nongovernmental organisations and other relief agencies have to pay to negotiate access to deliver aid. (Christine Monaghan, "In South Sudan, Denial of Humanitarian Aid is a War Tactic", *Reliefweb*, 2018, online at <https://reliefweb.int>) There have been instances where civilians have been outrightly denied access to relief material while government and rebel forces routinely target the civilian population. Soldiers from forces on both sides also steal food from locals and raid cattle. Similarly, to recapture rebel towns, the Syrian government has repeatedly used the "surrender or starve" tactic, causing immense suffering to civilians who are often also hostages of insurgents and terrorists and deprived of food by them.

Edkins also states that it is naïve to expect the international community to fight against mass starvation because famines are beneficial to some and those interests play a significant role in creating, perpetuating and ignoring cases of mass hunger. The crisis in Yemen, for instance has been partly abetted by the policies of countries like the United States of America (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) by turning a blind eye to the pleas of their own humanitarian specialists. The US primarily views Yemen through the lens of counterterrorism as well as its own and Israel's war against Iran and provides support in the form of intelligence sharing, funding and refuelling facilities to the Saudi-led coalition. Washington has also sold arms worth billions of dollars to the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Its funding of the Saudi-led air campaign in Yemen has led to many civilian casualties and

severely damaged medical facilities and crucial infrastructure in the country. The pleas of humanitarian agencies to stop the offensive on the port of Hudeidah have been completely ignored by the coalition. The attack on the port has proved lethal for the starving millions in Yemen as the country imports about 80 per cent of its food requirements and the port handles the bulk of the cargo. Although, under the Geneva Conventions the destruction of objects critical for the survival of the civilian population is prohibited, humanitarian concerns have been completely disregarded. (Jane Fergusson, "Is Intentional Starvation the Future of War", *The New Yorker*, 11 July 2018, online at <https://www.newyorker.com>)

Two points from the above analysis are relevant in the current context. First, in some protracted armed conflicts, the parties involved have no respect for international law or humanitarian principles and hunger is used as a weapon of war. These are the main reasons behind the famine in Yemen and the near-famines in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. In many ways, the hostilities in these countries are far more complex than the wars of yesteryears.

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Although, on the surface they seem to be less lethal than traditional conflicts, they are intractable and the continued violence over decades plays havoc with lives, food systems, livelihood opportunities and social relations. The mass exodus of people from conflict ridden regions to neighbouring countries adds to the stress on receiving nations. Second, famines should not be understood as discrete events and efforts must be made to address the underlying vulnerabilities of populations. The states detailed above have suffered decades of civil strife and their populations are extremely vulnerable. Climate change poses an additional stress on food security in these countries and its impact will be felt disproportionately by some of the poorest countries in Africa and in them by the most vulnerable sections of the population, namely indigenous people, marginal farmers, pastoralists, etc. The frequency and intensity of droughts are also likely to increase in the future.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

“Exacerbated by climate related shocks, conflicts seriously affect food security and are a cause of much of the increase in food insecurity”. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme and World Health Organisation, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Building Resilience and Peace and Food Security*, 2017, online at <http://www.fao.org>)

The United Nations’ *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018* (*ibid*) finds conflict and climate change induced drought to be the two main reasons behind the increase in the number of undernourished people. The report acknowledges that working in conflict affected contexts cannot be business as usual but rather requires a conflict sensitive approach. The recommendations provided in the report highlight the need for supporting agriculture in conflict afflicted countries, the importance of creating better livelihood opportunities and addressing the special needs of children, displaced persons, women, etc. These recommendations though important for the development of conflict affected countries, especially to mitigate global hunger and for sustainable development, suffer from a major problem. That is, the report fails to mention the practicalities of achieving targets in conflict zones. A “conflict sensitive” approach, as recommended in the report is not an appropriate long-term solution

to hunger crises with roots in intractable conflicts.

Thus, the Zero Hunger Goal cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying cause, which is conflict. In fact, none of the main Sustainable Development Goals—1 (No Poverty); 3 (Good Health and Well-Being); 4 (Quality Education); 5 (Gender Equality) or 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)—can be achieved without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance. The economic cost of violence and conflict on the world economy has been estimated at about US\$14.3 trillion or about 14.3 per cent of the world gross domestic product. (Mahmoud Mohieldin, *Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace*, United Nations General Assembly Event, 2017, online at <https://www.un.org>) Therefore, Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is at the heart of all goals without which sustainable development will not be possible. Sustained peace and stability, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development is achievable only through political solutions to conflicts and they thus hold the key to breaking the conflict–hunger cycle. Sustained efforts to address the root causes of violence and conflict need to be undertaken. Otherwise, the need for humanitarian aid will keep increasing. Unfortunately, the recent actions of the most powerful countries of the world, notably the US and the UK do not inspire confidence. Not only have they gained by selling arms to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, they have done little to prevent the outright violations of international law and humanitarian principles by the coalition. Moreover, under the Donald Trump administration, the US has consistently reduced its aid budget.

In May 2018, members of the United Nations Security Council recognised the link between armed conflict and food insecurity and the imminent risk of famines threatening the lives of millions of persons. In a resolution, they condemned the use of starvation as a weapon of war and called for humanitarian

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personnel to be given unhindered access to civilians in conflict zones. Efforts to secure peace between the Iran backed Houthi rebels and the Saudi-led coalition were made by Martin Griffiths, the United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen. However, the failure of the Houthi delegation to appear for the peace talks in Geneva on 6 September 2018 shows that there is no easy way to end the suffering of the Yemeni people. Negotiations between conflicting parties however started in Sweden in early December. Sincere and sustained efforts are required to broker a peace deal between the two sides before a national unity government can be formed in Yemen. Similarly, efforts must be made to bring about political resolutions to the conflict in Syria and other armed conflicts around the world. Such solutions are impossible without political will, which cannot come about without accountability for the perpetrators of war crimes. Alex de Waal (*More than Malnutrition: Famine as Social Crisis*, International Peace Institute Global Observatory, 28 April 2017, online at <https://theglobalobservatory.org>) suggests the formation of a panel to examine each episode of mass starvation to find answers to questions of what led to the famines and who was responsible with the findings reported to the United Nations Security Council.

In addition to peace and security, prioritising adaptation to climate change is critical to eliminating global hunger as climate change poses a significant threat to global food security. According to the World Meteorological Organisation, the five-year global temperature from 2013 to 2017 was the highest on record and 2017 was one of the three warmest years ever. The adverse impacts of climate change on desertification, food production, food systems, livelihoods, etc are already well established. Eradicating hunger requires bold efforts to improve the ability of people to adapt to climate change, particularly in the poorest regions of the world most vulnerable to the phenomenon, such as East Africa. Therefore, climate change must feature prominently in the discourse on the Zero Hunger Goal and thus goal 13 (Climate Action) “to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” is central. For developing countries to adapt to climate change, developed nations need to honour the Paris Accord commitment of providing US\$100 billion a year from 2020. However, developed countries are still debating on what should count as climate finances. It is important to recognise that the Paris Agreement cannot be implemented without funding. In addition, global political leaders must understand that the bulk of adaptation needs lie in the agricultural sector of developing countries.

Therefore, the share of agriculture in international aid must be increased. The share of agriculture and rural development in official development assistance has declined consistently from the 1990s and currently stands at about seven per cent. This declining trend needs to be reversed as improving agricultural productivity in the least developed countries of Africa would be one of the most effective ways of reducing poverty, providing livelihoods and eradicating global hunger.

In a nutshell, the combination of conflict and climate change is proving to be a major stumbling block in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in general and the Zero Hunger Goal in particular. Any effort to address the hunger problem without addressing the underlying causes will not be fruitful. Political solutions need to be found to the intractable disputes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, etc. Peace building efforts must be accompanied by a slew of long-term climate adaptation measures to address the vulnerabilities of affected populations. 