

# “What can we do?”:

## The role of Civil Society Organisations in tackling conflict and hunger

### Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in any community. They can serve as important sources of independent information to both citizens and the government, monitor governments' actions to hold them accountable, engage in advocacy and offer propositions for policies and courses of action. Civil society holds a key role in promoting change, advancing policies and creating space for discussion around topics that might not have been sufficiently considered by politics thus far.

Ending hunger - including hunger driven by conflict - is in line with the goals and objectives of many civil society actors. By adding their voice to the conversation and focusing on this issue, they can ensure it is brought to the table, discussed and considered – and they can hold governments accountable to their commitments.

### What can Civil Society Organizations do to advance the implementation of UNSCR 2417?

#### 1. Provide information on hunger driven by conflict

- *Raise awareness.* Do not underestimate the lack of knowledge around this issue. UN Security Council Resolution 2417 is not widely known or well-understood. Ensuring that all stakeholders engaged in decision-making – governments, members of parliament or ministry employees – have access to the relevant information is the very first step
- *Engage the public.* Hunger is a topic that resonates with many people. Integrate it in public campaigns and press briefings to raise awareness and show governments and parliaments there is widespread concern and support for the issue
- *Highlight the many implications and interconnected issues around conflict and hunger.* Even if you do not work predominantly on hunger-related issues, these are linked with many other areas of concern, including access to basic services like water or health. Include the hunger-conflict dynamic in your analyses on gender, children, refugees and IDPs, or its linkages with water security, climate change or economic shocks
- *Collect and share data.* Knowing the exact impact of an issue is the first step. Evidence-based analysis is vital to explain the issue, informing the design of a good programmatic or policy response. To minimise workload and maximise impact, CSOs should explore secure data-sharing practices
- *Be the voice of operational actors.* Sharing first-hand information on how conflict affects food insecurity on the ground can have an incredible impact. Governments, or members of the public, often do not have access to these stories. CSOs can and should amplify the voices of staff and people who live in conflict contexts.

#### 2. Hold governments accountable

- *Challenge government actions that may contribute to conflict-driven hunger.* For example,

highlight in public or private fora that arms sales to conflict parties may increase the risk of enabling parties that target civilians or destroy food systems. Equally, policies related to counterterrorism and sanctions may prevent NGOs from delivering humanitarian assistance and therefore contribute to conflict-driven hunger

- *Demand transparency* on the government's stance, commitments, and actions taken to address conflict-driven hunger, either publicly or during bilateral meetings and confidential exchanges
- *Draw attention to it*, when government actions contribute to conflict-induced hunger or a government remains silent on the use of starvation as a weapon of war by a party to the conflict. Confront the government with the realities on the ground, the impact their action or inaction has on individuals, families and communities and ask them to justify their decision. This can be done publicly or privately
- *Compare government actions to their commitments* and point out any inconsistency, bilaterally or publicly, as appropriate. Policy coherence across government bodies, especially amongst traditional donor community, must be tabled consistently.

### 3. Engage in advocacy

- *Build alliances*. Unite different (kinds of) organisations to strengthen one common voice and show broad concern for conflict-driven hunger. If feasible, work across the humanitarian, development and peace spectrum to address the short- and long-term impact of conflict-induced hunger
- *Demand political action*. Engage in advocacy work demanding not only funding, but also political action from governments. The fight against hunger needs funds, but it also needs a political landscape in which the use of hunger as a weapon of war or actions that can limit access to food become unacceptable. Advocate for donor states to include clear messaging on UNSCR 2417
- *Promote a joint approach* across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, ensuring joint ownership by different decision-makers to upholding the right to food in conflict
- *Provide innovative ideas* to donor governments on how to approach UNSCR2417. For example, expanding support for early warning and anticipatory action frameworks can be a less politicised way to prevent a hunger crisis in conflict.

## Conclusion

Civil society organisations can significantly impact political action through sustained scrutiny and awareness raising on the topic of conflict and hunger. They are strategically placed to provide detailed evidence from their operations, ensure governments stick to political commitments, and to drive public pressure and engagement.