

# BEYOND HUNGER

## THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF THE GLOBAL HUNGER CRISIS

**The world is in the midst of a devastating, and escalating, hunger crisis. At least 345 million people across 82 countries are currently facing or are at risk of acute food insecurity, with 50 million people on the brink of starvation, teetering on the edge of famine.<sup>1</sup> These statistics paint an arresting picture – yet there is much that they obscure. Global headlines tell us nothing about how individuals' vulnerability to and experiences of this food crisis differ, nor the factors that shape these differential impacts.**

The causes and consequences of food insecurity are closely entwined with gender. This report presents new evidence on the gendered impacts of the current global hunger crisis from eight of the countries most affected: Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Haiti. It draws on, and synthesises, data from eight recent Rapid Gender Analyses (RGAs) conducted by Plan International and its partners. The analyses have a particular focus on the inclusion of adolescents and young people, whose specific needs are often not addressed as part of humanitarian responses.

Together, the RGAs analysed for this report involved the participation of 7158 respondents across the eight countries through a combination of household surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews.



### KEY FINDINGS

- Gendered food distribution and consumption practices at the household level often work to the detriment of girls and women. Evidence was found of girls and women eating less and eating after boys and men in the same household. Women and child-headed households, particularly in displaced communities, and girls and women with disabilities face disproportionately higher barriers to accessing food.
- In almost all countries studied, there was evidence that gender-based violence has increased since the onset of the current crisis. Incidences of rape, intimate partner violence, child, early and forced marriages, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation are reported to be on the rise. Strategies employed to cope with food insecurity are increasing girls' and women's exposure to violence both within and outside the home; risks which are further amplified in situations of conflict, insecurity and displacement.
- Households are employing a diverse range of strategies to cope, such as reducing their consumption of food, diversifying and supplementing their sources of income, and migrating in search of food or income opportunities. Coping strategies are shaped by gender, and are accompanied by gendered

protection risks, particularly for children and adolescents. Child, early and forced marriage, already commonplace in many of the contexts studied, was widely reported to be a strategy to cope with food insecurity, along with child labour. Unaccompanied children migrating to urban centres are particularly exposed to risks of violence, abuse and exploitation. Many coping strategies are straining or undermining the longer-term resilience of communities and individuals.

- While household and community roles and responsibilities still mainly divide along gender lines, in most countries some evidence was found of shifts in gender roles. For girls and women, taking on more economically productive roles has extended the hours they work on top of domestic and caring responsibilities, including walking to collect water, food and firewood. For both women and men, increasing burdens are contributing to stress and anxiety.
- In all countries included in this report, the hunger crisis is having a negative impact on children's education, and this impact differs by gender. School enrolment and/or attendance has reduced since the crisis and the evidence suggests that girls' education has been disproportionately deprioritised. Hunger itself is also having an impact on the ability of children who do attend school to learn.
- Girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health needs were already underserved before the crisis. Increasing incidences of sexual violence and sexual exploitation were reported to be increasing the numbers of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, in turn increasing needs, yet there is a lack of accessible services and supplies. Girls' and women's menstrual health and hygiene needs are not being adequately met, and the hunger crisis is making this situation worse.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS, DONORS AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

**Urgently provide USD\$ 22.2 billion** to avert the risk of starvation for 50 million people who stand at the brink of famine. This includes ensuring that adequate funding gender responsive child protection, gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health and rights and education interventions – including critical school meals programmes is provided.

**Use multi-purpose cash and vouchers as a preferred modality of assistance** wherever possible and where markets remain functional.

**Support locally led responses wherever possible.**

**Ensure that food security data is sex- age- and disability disaggregated** and includes information about the needs of school-age children and adolescents, **and that children, adolescents and young people are consulted and engaged in the design of humanitarian programming.**

**Integrate child protection and GBV considerations into food security programming and vice versa.** This includes designing, implementing and monitoring integrated child protection and food security programs.

**Funding and implementing gender responsive, child sensitive and locally led anticipatory action and preparedness** in advance of peaks in food crises, and over the longer-term **increase investment in resilience and climate change adaptation.**

**Support governments to reinforce and scale-up gender responsive, unconditional social protection and income support measures** for the most affected and vulnerable people and families.

**Increase efforts to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity**, promote conditions of peace and security and guarantee humanitarian access in conflict-affected hotspots.