

Food Security in Conflicting World: Recent Developments

Chandan Sharma

Visiting faculty, University of Delhi

Abstract

The issue of the food security has always been a big issue for the governments, especially for developing and underdeveloped nations. But recent pandemic of corona has emerged as a party spoiler even for those nations, achieved the goal of food security long ago. The recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Eurasian region has raised new concerns about food security throughout the globe. Known as 'breadbasket' of Europe, Russia and Ukraine have been playing an important role for food security for Indian sub-continent and several Asian nations too. The recent conflict has raised apprehension that the ongoing war between two nations will affect not only energy supply to several nations but it may also disturb the supply of food grain export to several nations as well as food supply chain. The present paper tries to go into the issue of food security in conflict world in the light of recent conflict in the Eurasian region.

Keywords: Food Security, Eurasian Conflict, Food Crisis, Conflict Zones, Ukraine War

INTRODUCTION

A simple petty conflict between two neighbouring nations, due to some substantial security concerns, is now put a big part of the globe at the brink of the famine or starvation of the century in the world. As the globe is still recovering from the trauma of the pandemic of Covid-19 despite all efforts as new cases of pandemic and deaths due to it and its aftershocks; it is still a big concern for health administrators and professionals as well as governments around the globe. The latest research, recently conducted by the Washington University, reveals that number of actual deaths due to Covid is three times more than that of the existing data, given by the WHO. If go by this, about 18 million people have been died due to Corona or related infections in the past two years, since the outbreak of the Corona as WHO's data suggests that about 5.9 million people have been died due to Corona or related infections so far. Even in India, where vaccination drive has been started with the unprecedented pace and over 75 percent eligible

adult population enjoy vaccination shield, over 0.52 million people have been died officially due to Covid or related infections in the last three Covid waves.

But as this biggest human crisis was not enough for ruining the entire humanity, another round of the crisis is taking shape. It is notable that issue of climate change is not still over despite Glasgow summit. Global data suggests that over 10 million people are died due to ailments related to the climate change throughout the world. And, the crisis is deepening day by day despite all efforts. Experts say that the human generated crisis

Address for correspondence:

Chandan Sharma,
Visiting Faculty Delhi University,
Email – chandansharma2@gmail.com

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial Share Alike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: voiceforvoiceless2013@gmail.com

Received 30-Jan-2022	Reviewed 29-Feb-2022	Accepted 04-Apr-2022	Published 10-May-2022
Volume No. 4	Issue No. 1	May 2022	ISSN 2583-1852(P)

How to cite this article: Sharma C. 2022. Food Security in conflict world. *THE THIRD VOICE REALITY AND VISION*. Vol No-4, Issue No-1, May; P: 75-80

ACCESS THIS ARTICLE ONLINE

Quick Response Code:



Website:

thirdvoice.voiceforvoiceless.in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7045424
Article No - TVRV0012

is still the biggest challenge as even if entire globe follow zero emission norms right now, the hazardous impact of the climate change will haunt the world for next three to four decades. The catastrophic calamity is now the most complex silent killer of human being throughout the world.

Russia- Ukraine Conflict: A Way to Food Crisis:

Needless to say that both Covid pandemic as well as climate change have been the biggest concerns for the development and progress of entire humanity. But the recent outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has certainly put grave concerns of food security as well as economic developments. As leaders like Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emanuel Macron, US President Joe Biden and international agencies like FAO, UN and other research organizations have already expressed their grave concerns related to the food security.

The concern can be understood by an India's edible oil scenario. India purchases about 90 percent of edible sunflower oil from Ukraine. After outbreak of the conflict India will have to find out new destination to fulfill its edible oil needs. Cheaper gas, coal and petroleum produce of Russia for EU nations are already come under sanction regime. Moreover, both warring nations are among the biggest wheat producers among the world. According to an estimate both the nations have been producing over 1/3 of the wheat production of the world. In other words, both the nations can be termed as 'wheat bowl' of the world. If go by it the ongoing conflict will certainly going to affect the agriculture in both the nations. That will certainly create food security problem for many countries including in Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. French President Emanuel Macron has already indicated that the ongoing conflict is going to be difficult in the coming days for food security in some of the poor nations of Africa. Even some of the Asian nations too will be affected if the conflict lingers on for a longer period, even not directly but to some extent. It is here notable that the conflict has passed over two months and the latest NATO reports suggested that the conflict can continue for years.

Issue of Food Security:

Food security is not just scarcity of food grain or non-availability of food that finally invite famine or starvation among the people but there are several other agricultural as well as administrative and distribution related aspects

are related to it. The issue of food security can be there even if there is no scarcity of food grain in the country or region. There are several aspects of the food security that can be broadly categorized in the five broad steps. These include:

1. Availability of food or food grain,
 2. Timely access to food,
 3. Timely distribution of food to needy people or a better Public Distribution System,
 4. Food administration and
 5. Stability
- According to WHO's definition, food security is achieved "when all people at all times have access to sufficient safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life."
 - UN's sustainable development goal -2 (SDG-2) defines food security is "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture."
 - According to UN Committee on Food Security, "Food security means that all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs to an active and healthy life."

This definition explains several things about food security. It also makes economic capability as well as safe and nutritious food as important components of the food security that is still a big issue for most of the third world or underdeveloped countries as well as conflict zones.

Russia-Ukraine Conflict:

Russia-Ukraine war is considered as the most severe conflict after the World War-II. Although the war is still limited to the Eurasian region but its wider economic, diplomatic, social, humanitarian and geopolitical impact have been felt everywhere, without exception. The conflict started in 2014 turned into full scale war after Russian recognition to Ukrainian regions Donetsk and Luhansk regions and military intervention thereafter in February third week and converted into a large-scale invasion with the attacks of missiles, tanks and troops as well as armoured vehicles. Wider economic sanctions as well as energy supply restrictions were imposed on Russia. But the most severe conflict in the 21st century

also created most severe humanitarian crisis, especially in Europe as over 60 days war resulted migration of over 10 million people from Ukraine, according to estimates by the global agencies. This is over 22 percent of total population of Ukraine, created severe crisis of food, shelter and other facilities amid post-pandemic era.

Trauma of Humanitarian Crisis in the City of Mariupol:

“The trauma of conflict can be understood by a report, elaborating the situation of Ukrainian city of Mariupol. “By March 15, 2022, the Ukrainian city of Mariupol was deeply engaged with Russian forces. Mariupol’s mayor told news organizations that Russian were intent upon destroying the city and had dropped more than 100 bombs on Mariupol in a single day. Multiple Ukrainian officials have further claimed the Russians were holding hostage the doctors and patients of one of the city hospitals. It is estimated that 350,000 to 400,000 Ukrainians remain in Mariupol, where shortage of food and water are becoming an increasing problem, as humanitarian aid has been slow to reach the city, reportedly blocked by Russian forces. The Russians have also been accused of agreeing to “evacuation routes” meant to offer civilians free passage out of besieged cities, but then shelling those routes with artillery. Russian forces have supplemented the land based artillery shelling the city with additional bombardment from warships in the Sea of Azov. Satellite photos released on March 30, 2022, show entire city blocks flattened by artillery and missile bombardment. Russia has also been accused of forcibly relocating captured Ukrainians to Russia. Russian forces have reportedly stolen, detained and even redirected evacuation buses. It is estimated that the number of Ukrainians abducted and taken to Russia may as many as 40,000 including thousands of children.”¹

Political Fallout of Russia-Ukraine Conflict:

The political fallout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is yet to take shape as several geopolitical as well as diplomatic developments are still in the phase of transition. It is another fact that during his visit to Ukrainian capital Kyiv, UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres on 29th April admitted failure of the Security Council to prevent war between Russia and Ukraine. But with the outbreak of the full scale conflict a large number of Western countries, as well as NATO nations, US, UK and EU not only strongly condemned Russia’s actions but also put toughest economic sanctions and other preventive measures on Russia. “Many countries have sent military supplies and humanitarian aid to

Ukraine, but have not yet sent troops to assist in the countries defence. On March 16, 2022, the international Court of Justice ruled 13-2 that Russia must immediately cease its military operations in Ukraine.”²

“The sentiments of the Russian people as a whole are difficult to ascertain, as the Russian government heavily censors information and blocks social media and news websites. Russia has also made it illegal for the press to offer any opinion or information that does not directly support the highly partisan and factually inaccurate official government stance on the invasion.”³

However, reports of mass exodus of the local residents from Russia, sacking of several media staffs from the state-owned televisions and plummeting of Ruble speak a lot about the humanitarian crisis being faced by the common Russian due to the ongoing conflict.

Conflict in Afghanistan:

Afghanistan has faced longest phase of the conflict during the cold war period and post cold war period. Moreover, Afghanistan is among the few regions, witnessed the regime of the both super powers Russia and US as well as NATO allies. Afghanistan has been in the middle of conflict since late 1980s and continued since August 2021 with the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces in 2021. The hasty withdrawal of US forces in 2021 and over four decades of the intermittent conflicts and terror have put the nation under the immense humanitarian as well as administrative crisis.

Yamen

Yamen is another conflict zone, facing armed conflict for a long time, putting several Asian and African nations under pressure. According to reports, over 140,000 deaths have been counted since the outbreak of the conflict in 2014 with the Houthi rebels took control of capital Sanaa. Saudi Arabia and US have been actively intervened to end the conflict but the long conflict has put the nation under a long humanitarian crisis including hunger and food scarcity. There are a list of countries and regions, either facing conflicts or reeling under the trauma of conflict for a long time. These including Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, South Sudan, Chad, Mali, Palestine, Gaza strip, Lebanon, Tunisia, PoK, Myanmar, Somalia and several others. Humanitarian crisis in these regions too are quite complex including crisis of food. Since all these nations and regions have faced over 10,000 deaths due to conflict, there are several other crisis too are there in the conflict zones.

Concerns of Global Agencies:

Several global agencies have shown their concerns on the developments, taking place after both the pandemic as well as outbreak of the full scale war between Russia and Ukraine. These include WFP, IMF, UN agencies and several others.

“David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), recalled that five months ago he warned the Council that the world stood at the brink of a hunger pandemic, with conflict, climate change and COVID-19 threatening to push 270 million people to the brink of starvation. The world listened, leaders responded and countries large and small took extraordinary measures to save the lives of their citizens and to support their economies. Suspending debt payments alone made a big difference. The World Food Programme and its partners expect to reach 138 million people in 2020 — “the biggest scale-up in our history” — through, among other things, new food and cash programmes to support the hungry in urban areas, support to more than 50 countries to scale up their social safety nets and the provision of food to millions of children who are not in school due to COVID-19 lockdowns. However, “we’re not out of the woods”. Indeed, he said, people on the brink of starvation need more help than ever. Without the necessary resources a wave of hunger and famine still threatens to sweep across the globe — especially in countries scarred by violence. “We have to step up and not step back,” he said, adding that 2021 will be a make-or-break year.

The World Food Programme’s budget for 2020 was set before the pandemic, but it is unclear what will happen in 2021. While Governments are spending billions on domestic stimulus efforts, they must not turn their backs on the world’s hungriest people. Sensible measures to contain the coronavirus must be balanced with the need to keep borders open and trade moving while avoiding unintended consequences that will hit the poor hardest. Summarizing the situation in countries and areas most at risk, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, north-east Nigeria, South Sudan and Burkina Faso, he said that in Latin America, hungry families have been hanging white flags — the universal sign of surrender — outside their houses to show they need help. “We cannot and must not surrender, or tell ourselves there is nothing we can do,” he stressed, urging the private sector must step up and play its part. Some \$4.9 billion is needed to feed 30 million people for a year, yet there are 2,000 billionaires in the world with a

combined net worth of \$8 trillion — some of whom reportedly made billions during the pandemic. With humanity facing its greatest crisis in a lifetime, “it’s time to do the right thing”.

On the other hand the heads of World Bank Group, IMF, WFP and WTO in a joint statement call for urgent co-ordinated action on food security. The joint statement, issued on 13th April urged from leaders call on the international community to support vulnerable countries.

World Bank Group President David Malpass, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, WFP Executive Director David Beasley and WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala issued a joint statement saying that “The world is shaken by compounding crises. The fallout of the war in Ukraine is adding to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that now enters its third year, while climate change and increased fragility and conflict pose persistent harm to people around the globe. Sharply higher prices for staples and supply shortages are increasing pressure on households worldwide and pushing millions more into poverty. The threat is highest for the poorest countries with a large share of consumption from food imports, but vulnerability is increasing rapidly in middle-income countries, which host the majority of the world’s poor. World Bank estimates warn that for each one percentage point increase in food prices, 10 million people are thrown into extreme poverty worldwide.”

“The rise in food prices is exacerbated by a dramatic increase in the cost of natural gas, a key ingredient of nitrogenous fertilizer. Surging fertilizer prices along with significant cuts in global supplies have important implications for food production in most countries, including major producers and exporters, who rely heavily on fertilizer imports. The increase in food prices and supply shocks can fuel social tensions in many of the affected countries, especially those that are already fragile or affected by conflict.”

“We call on the international community to urgently support vulnerable countries through coordinated actions ranging from provision of emergency food supplies, financial support, increased agricultural production, and open trade. We are committed to combining our expertise and financing to quickly step up our policy and financial support to help vulnerable countries and households as well as to increase domestic agricultural production in, and supply to, impacted countries. We can mitigate balance of payments pressures and work with all

countries to keep trade flows open. In addition, we will further reinforce our monitoring of food vulnerabilities and are quickly expanding our multi-faceted policy advice to affected countries guided by the comparative advantages of our respective institutions.”

As we have seen there are over two dozen nations and regions are facing conflicts due to various reasons, so the humanitarian crisis too. The past two years of the pandemic has aggravated the crisis in these zones. According to a report, released from Cairo on 27th May 2021 clearly indicates severe issue of food security in the conflict zones.

According to the report, nations in the conflict zones already facing food crisis are hit hardest by the pandemic. According to the reports pandemic has worsen the situation in the countries like Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen as far as quantity, frequency and diversity of the food for children and families. Keeping aside Ukraine, these nations are among top 10 countries in the world with worst food crisis in 2019 with nearly 40 million people affected. The Ukraine crisis has added another 10 million new people under this category putting additional burden on the globe for food, shelter and other necessary needs putting one in five people undernourished in the region.

According to a World Bank report the issue of food security is not limited to the Ukraine, Yaman, Afghanistan only. “Food insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a growing challenge. Even before COVID-19, UN agencies estimated that over 55 million of its population of 456.7 was undernourished. The pandemic, protracted conflict and other factors make hunger more common. In 2020, MENA’s share of the world’s acutely food insecure people was 20%, disproportionately high compared to its 6% share of the population. The situation is worse where there is conflict, such as in Yemen and Syria. The UN estimates the number of Yemenis afflicted by food insecurity reached 24 million ~83% of the population – in 2021, with 16.2 million needing emergency food. The war in Syria has had devastating consequences: over 12 million Syrians are food insecure, an increase of 4.5 million in 2020 alone. Added to this, half of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon were food insecure in 2020, up by 20% from 2019. Refugee populations are especially vulnerable: according to the Food Security Information Network, a quarter of the 0.7 million Syrians registered by the UN in Jordan are in immediate need. Iraq has also seen a rise in food insecurity, caused by intermittent

conflict and fluctuating global oil prices, with over 4 million Iraqis today needing humanitarian help. In Lebanon, food insecurity has mainly been driven by hyperinflation. In the Maghreb, Egypt, and Djibouti, the number of people who were food insecure was stubbornly stable before the pandemic. Food insecurity is thought to have risen since, with the recent increase in poverty in the region – the effects of the pandemic threaten to push another 16 million people into extreme poverty.”

Food Security Challenge :

The food security challenge is now going to be more complex and puzzling this time. The prolonged pandemic was already a big reason for it. But the Eurasian conflict has rubbed salt on wound. Spiraling food prices and global disruptions to supply chains due to Russia-Ukraine war and sanctions on energy supply have aggravated the complexities of the already complex food crisis around the globe.

According to report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, around 6 million people – about 40% of the population, face extreme food insecurity. Around 6 million people — about 40% of the population, face extreme food insecurity, according to a new report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

Experts believes that the Ukraine war and aftershocks of the Covid pandemic have contributed to soaring commodities and food prices worldwide, especially import dependent nations. According to World Food Programme’s report Middle Eastern countries, North African nations and sub-Saharan nations are worst hit. In the post pandemic world, these nations cannot afford to buy the most basic foods.

“Food prices in the region have increased by 20-30% in the past five years. The UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization has said that food prices could increase globally by another 20% in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine. For the six countries in West Africa that import at least 30% — for some at least 50% — of their wheat from Russia or Ukraine, the war presents a particular strain. Several countries in the region have also been plagued by Islamist insurgencies that have fostered instability. For countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso, militaries have tried to use this as justification for overthrowing elected leaders.

To make things worse Tuesday’s report warns that European donors may cut aid to the region to focus on Ukraine. Denmark has already said it will postpone parts

of its assistance to Burkina Faso and Mali. “There should be no competition between humanitarian crises,” said Mamadou Diop, regional representative of Action Against Hunger. “The Sahel crisis is one of the worst humanitarian crises on a global scale and, at the same time, one of the least funded. We fear that by redirecting humanitarian budgets to the Ukrainian crisis, we risk dangerously aggravating one crisis to respond to another.”

Challenges of food security are multi dimensional and require structural changes in many areas. As World Bank report says “We remain very concerned: The region is having to contend with structural challenges that make feeding a growing population particularly difficult.

- The first is climate change; an increase in the frequency of extreme weather and higher temperatures is affecting local agriculture. Half of the population of MENA already lives under conditions of water stress; with the population expected to grow to nearly 700 million in 2050, per capita water availability will be halved. 2020 also saw one of the worst desert locust outbreaks in over 23 countries, including Yemen and Djibouti, affecting livelihoods and food security for millions of people.
- The second challenge facing our region is the population growth rate itself, the highest worldwide, and the growth of urban areas, with 66% of people expected to be living in cities by 2030. Agriculture productivity rates are not keeping up with population increase, with the exception of Egypt, where productivity gains are above the world average.
- The third challenge is diet and nutrition. We are exceptionally dependent on food imports, especially of wheat and other staple grains. Half of MENA’s food is imported, rising to 90% in Gulf Cooperation Countries. One third of the calories people consume are wheat products subsidized by governments. Between a quarter and one-third of the region’s adult population is obese.

CONCLUSION

Our food system is failing to support people’s health. The food provides calories but insufficient nutrition. As

a result, people suffer from the double burden of malnutrition, both stunting and obesity. Nearly half the children in Yemen and one-third in Djibouti are underweight for their age, with long-term consequences on their individual cognitive development and the economic trajectories of their countries.” But apart from all these food security requires a robust administrative system as well as effective distribution system. In absence of this mere availability of food grains cannot eradicate food crisis, especially in the era of the new conflict and fast changing global scenario emerges after the pandemic and outbreak of the war in Eurasian region. So, food security must be in the top most agenda of each country.

Financial Support and Sponsorship:

Nil.

Conflict of Interest:

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Countries currently at War: World Population Review (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-currently-at-war>); accessed on March 30, 2022
2. Food Security amid Eurasian crisis by Chandan Sharma “*The Hawk*”; Saharanpur, page-10; Date: 15th March
3. West Africa food insecurity at worst level in 10 years, <https://www.dw.com/en/west-africa-food-insecurity-at-worst-level-in-10-years-report/a-61368564>), accessed on 10th April 2022
4. Joint Statement: The Heads of the World Bank Group, IMF, WFP and WTO Call for Urgent Coordinated Action on Food Security, April 13, 2022
5. UN report: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14308.doc.htm>; accessed on 5th April, 2022
6. World Bank report by “Ferid Belhaj and Ayat Soliman (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/09/24/mena-has-a-food-security-problem-but-there-are-ways-to-address-it>), accessed on 5th April 2022