FACT SHEET

THE IPC FAMINE

WHAT IS FAMINE?
The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) defines famine as an extreme deprivation of food. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition are or will likely be evident.

The IPC plays a critical role in identifying famine conditions, and informing the response needed to save millions of lives. The IPC is now the primary mechanism the international community uses to analyse data and arrive at a conclusion whether famine is happening or likely happening in a country. Analyses are based on evidence gathered by a wide range of partners and multistakeholder technical consensus.

PREVIOUS IPC FAMINE CLASSIFICATIONS

Famine (IPC Phase 5) is the highest phase of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale, and is classified when an area has:

- **20%** of households facing an extreme lack of food
- **30%** of children suffering from acute malnutrition
- Deaths of two adults or four children for every 10,000 each day due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease

COMMON CAUSES OF FAMINE AND EXTREME FOOD CRISES

**Conflict** often leads to population displacements and disrupts people’s traditional ways of dealing with food scarcity.

**Natural Hazards**, such as drought, flooding, and cyclones, as well as human and animal diseases and crop pests, affect food access and availability.

**Economic Decline** greatly impacts access to food, through disruptions to food trade, food price inflation, and currency volatilities.

**Inadequate Humanitarian Response**: When a shock occurs, and the humanitarian response is not sufficient, well-coordinated, or fast enough, the affected populations can only cope for a short period.

HOW TO AVERT FAMINE

- Early Warning/Action
- Humanitarian Access
- Multisectoral Response
- Cessation of Conflicts

In 2011, famine was declared by FSNAU and FEWS NET in parts of Southern Somalia due to conflict, drought and poor rains.

Three years of civil war, coupled with an ailing economy and high food prices, led to famine being declared in 2017 in South Sudan’s Unity State.
THE IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY SCALE

The IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale has become the global standard for the classification of acute food insecurity. It is used principally to inform decisions on resource allocation and programming globally and within countries, especially for countries experiencing recurrent or protracted food crises.

**IPC Phase 5 Explained**

**Famine**

IPC Phase 5 Famine can only be classified at area level. In a given area, Famine occurs when food security, nutrition and mortality altogether portray famine conditions, meaning at least 20% of the population is in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe, with about one out of three children being acutely malnourished and two deaths for every 10,000 inhabitants, or four child deaths out of 10,000 children per day, due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

**Catastrophe**

IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe can only be classified at household level, not at area level. An area might have some households in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe linked to very high levels acute food insecurity. However, an entire area can only be classified in IPC Phase 5 Famine or Famine Likely if this high level of acute food insecurity is accompanied by certain levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.

**Famine Likely**

Like IPC Phase 5 Famine, IPC Phase 5 Famine Likely can also only be classified at area level, not at household level. It is used if there is insufficient data for Famine classification, usually because either nutrition or mortality data are lacking, but the available information indicates that Famine is likely occurring or will occur.

The Famine Likely classification thus allows the IPC to warn about potential Famine in contexts when there is limited data. Famines tend to occur in areas where access is not possible or very restricted, which has implications on the ability to collect data and makes it difficult to meet all the criteria for a Famine classification. Based on this observation, it has been realized that famine situations can be reliably identified and classified through a robust analysis process using available data. Even in cases with less than optimal evidence, Famine Likely applied to projections acts as an early warning mechanism and allows the IPC to inform decisions and humanitarian response to help food insecurity crises from deteriorating further. It is important to note that Famine and Famine Likely are equally severe; the only difference is the amount of reliable evidence available to support the statement.
THE IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY SCALE

When a country IPC analysis shows a potential, or already identified situation of famine, a specific procedure is activated in order to confirm or disprove a Famine classification. Famine Reviews can be triggered in several ways:
(i) when the country IPC Technical Working Group (TWG) reaches the conclusion that at least one area is classified in Famine or Famine Likely; (ii) when there is a breakdown in technical consensus regarding a Famine or Famine Likely classification; (iii) when the IPC Global Support Unit is concerned about famine conditions; (iv) when an IPC Global Partner officially requests its activation.

Once the process is triggered, the Famine Review Committee (FRC) is requested to conduct a review to ensure technical rigor and neutrality of the analysis before the results are confirmed and communicated. The FRC is a team of leading independent international food security and nutrition experts. The committee is tasked with reviewing and debating available evidence and IPC analysis results and reach conclusions on whether a Famine/Famine likely classification is warranted.

COMMON CAUSES OF FAMINE AND EXTREME FOOD CRISSES

In many cases, famine has multiple causes which can be man-made and nature-driven or a combination of both. Data from the most recent famines shows that the phenomenon is often driven by the complex interaction of four dominant causes related to:

CONFLICT: Conflict often leads to population displacements and disrupts people’s traditional ways of dealing with food scarcity (such as gathering wild foods), prevents people from cultivating their land, destroys market centres and transport links; hinders humanitarian access, and brings about long-term economic decline as infrastructure is destroyed and foreign investment collapses.

NATURAL HAZARDS: Natural disasters, such as drought, flooding, and cyclones, can have a great impact on food availability and access, and drive high levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition. Human pandemics and epidemics such as measles, animal diseases and crop pests such as desert locusts or the Fall Armyworm can also contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition.

ECONOMIC DECLINE: Ailing economies, especially in developing countries, greatly impact access to food. Economic conditions can affect both the prices vulnerable people have to pay for food and their employment opportunities. Disruptions to food trade, food price inflation, and currency volatilities push vulnerable people to extreme levels of hunger and malnutrition.

INADEQUATE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: When a sudden onset shock occurs, informal safety nets tend to dry up along with the capacity of people to cope, in the short to medium term, depending on the resilience of households and the communities they live in. If the humanitarian response is not sufficient, well-coordinated, or too slow, the affected populations can only cope for a short period.
KEY FACTS ON PREVIOUS FAMINE CLASSIFICATIONS

The last decade has witnessed two examples of famine classification, in Somalia in 2011 and in South Sudan in 2017, that resulted in widespread acute malnutrition and the deaths of tens of thousands of people. The famines in Somalia and South Sudan were extreme food crises in which large populations lacked adequate access to food, mainly driven by conflict and erratic weather patterns.

2017 SOUTH SUDAN FAMINE

Famine was declared in parts of South Sudan on February 20, 2017, where nearly 80,000 people faced Famine conditions (IPC Phase 5) in parts of Unity State (the central-northern part of South Sudan), with another one million people being classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). By then, three years of civil war had devastated livelihoods, coupled with an ailing economy and high food prices. Unity State, which borders Sudan, was at the centre of some of the fiercest fighting, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee from their homes.

Source: The South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group

80,000

2011 SOMALIA FAMINE

On July 20, 2011, the FAO-managed Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia (FSNAU) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) declared a famine in parts of Southern Somalia including Balad and Cadale districts of Middle Shabelle, the Afgoye corridor IDP settlement, and the Mogadishu IDP community. About 490,000 people in Somalia were experiencing Catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 5) due to conflict, drought, and poor rains.

Source: FSNAU/FAO Somalia & FEWSNET

490,000

RISK OF FAMINE

The IPC has also recently started conducting Risk of Famine analyses. Risk of Famine refers to the reasonable probability of an area going into Famine in the projected period. While this is not perceived necessarily as the most likely scenario, it is a scenario that generally has a realistic chance of occurring. It complements the Famine and Famine Likely projections of the most likely scenario by providing insights of potential Famine if prospects evolve in a manner worse than anticipated.
HOW TO AVOID AND AVERT FAMINE

Famines should be avoided at all costs. Although further deaths can and should be prevented by urgent action, it is evident that these actions will be a late response because many people will have died by the time a famine is declared. The IPC supports famine prevention by highlighting the following:

Cessation of Conflicts
Where conflict is a key driver of famine conditions, the suspension of active hostilities will allow for the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to affected populations.

Early Warning/Action
Early warning messages should trigger early response, especially for households classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) to save lives and livelihoods. This requires a robust multi-stakeholder monitoring tool of all drivers and outcomes of food insecurity.

Humanitarian Access
Humanitarian access is a fundamental pre-requisite to effective humanitarian action to avert famine conditions. Full and unimpeded access is essential to establish operations, as well as move goods and personnel where they are needed.

Multi-sectoral Response
A massive multi-sectoral response is critical to prevent additional deaths and total livelihood/social collapse. This includes coordinated access to food, agricultural inputs, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition response, among others.

“Famines should be avoided at all costs”
- IPC Technical Manual 3.1

About the IPC
The IPC is a global, multi-partner initiative that facilitates improved decision-making through the provision of consensus-based food insecurity and malnutrition analysis. It is founded on a complementary set of analytical tools and procedures for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition. The IPC was developed in 2004 in Somalia, based on the need for a common food security classification tool driven by evidence to provide actionable information and facilitate effective humanitarian responses. Today, the IPC is used in over 30 countries, including in protracted crises and contexts of chronic food insecurity. The IPC works in close collaboration with the Cadre Harmonisé, a similar tool used in the Sahel and West Africa for food insecurity and malnutrition analysis.

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