Anticipatory Interventions to Mitigate Adverse Food Security Impacts of Conflict in East and Central Africa

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A best practice is a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things. This document is one of a series of reports from the Food Security Portal on best practices for emerging topics in agriculture and food security policy.

Introduction

Across Eastern and Central Africa, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad, and the Central African Republic (CAR), conflict and civil insecurity remain among the leading drivers of acute food insecurity.

According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2024 (FSIN), 64.2 million people in East Africa (approximately 24 percent of the analyzed population) and 49.6 million in Central and Southern Africa (approximately 21 percent) faced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in 2023. The report highlights that conflict and insecurity, compounded by climate shocks and macroeconomic volatility, remain the dominant factors behind these crises.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, persistent conflict in the eastern provinces has deepened the population's vulnerability to food insecurity. The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Analysis from December 2024 estimates that 27.8 million people, roughly one in four, are facing Crisis or worse food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and 4), including 3.9 million facing Emergency-level food insecurity (Phase 4). The analysis attributes this situation primarily to armed conflict, population displacement, market disruptions, and low agricultural productivity caused by insecurity and climatic stress.

Empirical research supports this link between the intensity of conflict and declines in food consumption. A longitudinal study by Tranchant et al. (2021) found that a rise in conflict-related fatalities within 50 km of a household was associated with a decrease of approximately 311 kcal per adult-equivalent per day, as well as a reduction in dietary diversity. Complementary analysis by Omamo, S.W. (2023) showed that in protracted crises, agricultural output losses can reach up to 40 percent of rural GDP, while disrupted markets and population displacement foster chronic aid dependency.

In conflict-affected settings, post-crisis humanitarian responses are often costly, reactive, and insufficient to address the structural drivers of food insecurity.Together, these findings confirm that conflict erodes the foundations of food systems in Africa south of the Sahara by undermining food production, access, and consumption, reinforcing the need for anticipatory, conflict-sensitive food-security interventions.

This analysis seeks to determine which anticipatory interventions, implemented in conflict-affected contexts of Eastern and Central Africa, have empirically demonstrated the capacity to mitigate agricultural losses, sustain food production, preserve local food availability, and enhance household resilience.

Conceptual Framework of the Anticipatory Action (AA) Approach

Anticipatory Action (AA) is defined within the institutional frameworks of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as in the *IGAD Regional Roadmap for Anticipatory Action*, as a set of pre-emptive, forecast-based interventions activated prior to the materialization of a shock's most acute impacts. These actions are underpinned by probabilistic forecasting, risk modelling, and pre-established trigger thresholds (e.g., rainfall anomalies, conflict incident forecasts, or market price volatility). Their primary objective is to reduce humanitarian impacts ex-ante, notably asset depletion, reduced caloric intake, and nutritional deterioration.

In conflict-affected settings, the AA framework expands beyond climate-induced hazards to address multi-dimensional risk environments in which civil insecurity, displacement, and restricted market access exacerbate vulnerability. In such contexts, anticipatory measures may include the pre-positioning of agricultural and pastoral inputs, the protection of livelihood assets, conditional or trigger-based cash transfers, and the securitization of productive access such as farmland, water points, and transhumance corridors.

Objective and Methodology

This study aims to identify and analyze anticipatory interventions that have effectively mitigated the impacts of conflict on food security in Eastern and Central Africa. Each case is structured through the triad *problem → anticipatory action → results*, based on a systematic review and triangulation of institutional and empirical literature.

The analysis covers six countries highly exposed to the conflict–food insecurity nexus: DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Chad. These countries were selected based on the availability of evidence and their relevance for regional scaling and trigger harmonization.

Each good practice follows a scientific framework linking (i) a conflict-related constraint (displacement, limited land access, disrupted transhumance, supply chain breakdowns), (ii) an anticipatory intervention (forecast logic, triggers, implementation), and (iii) documented outcomes on production, markets, or consumption.

Good Practices

Strengthening community agriculture for social cohesion by promoting the pooling of land and resources between formerly opposing communities

In Kabalo, Tanganyika Province (DRC), the *"Peace Villages"* initiative has brought together the Twa and Luba communities, which were once divided by long-standing conflicts over land and resources, through joint agricultural production and peacebuilding activities. Under the slogan *"Your neighbour is your brother"*, local committees, supported by FAO and WFP, organized

collective fieldwork, from land preparation to harvest. These activities are also combined with dialogue and reconciliation sessions. According to the WFP (2023), the program has enabled the two groups to live and farm together peacefully, resulting in strong cassava and groundnut harvests that were successfully marketed locally.

This community agriculture model acts as an anticipatory peace-and-livelihoods mechanism, preventing renewed violence by ensuring food security and equitable land access. Collective planning and transparent sharing of production reduce competition for scarce resources, while joint monitoring builds mutual accountability. These mechanisms help stabilize food systems in fragile environments and strengthen community resilience to both conflict and climate shocks.

The initiative followed a *conflict-sensitive agricultural planning cycle* combining:

- participatory dialogue and land-sharing agreements facilitated by local leaders and women's associations,

- collective farming and input support (tools, seeds, training), and

- joint storage and marketing, ensuring equitable benefit-sharing and reinvestment in community assets.

Local *peace committees* ensure that agricultural cooperation remains a foundation for lasting reconciliation.

Between 2018 and 2019, yields increased significantly, household food stocks improved, and reports of land-related incidents dropped. The project directly benefited more than 18,000 households in Kabalo and Nyunzu, while demonstrating that shared agricultural production can consolidate peace and revive local economies.

Preventing agropastoral conflicts through local dialogue mechanisms and community committees for shared natural resource management

In Central and West Africa, recurrent farmer–herder conflicts are primarily driven by competition over land, water, and grazing resources. To address these tensions, community-based dialogue platforms and shared resource management committees have been established at the local and provincial levels. In the DRC and the CAR, these *community committees for the prevention and management of agropastoral conflicts* bring together pastoralist and farmer representatives, local authorities, and traditional leaders to identify emerging tensions, mediate disputes, and agree on common rules of access to farmland and water points. In Chad, similar mechanisms operate through demarcated transhumance corridors and mixed consultation committees that regulate pastoral mobility and prevent seasonal clashes. These participatory structures rely on local mediation and customary negotiation, forming genuine systems of shared governance of natural resources (UNOCA & UNOWAS, 2023).

These local mechanisms hold a strong anticipatory function: They detect early signs of tension, such as herd accumulation, land disputes, or water scarcity, before that tension escalates into violence. Acting as community-level social early-warning systems, they translate social signals into preventive action. By stabilizing access to productive assets, they prevent crop losses, livestock destruction, and forced displacement, thereby strengthening food system resilience and preserving rural livelihoods.

Committee establishment follows an inclusive participatory process: risk-area mapping and stakeholder identification; creation of consultation frameworks endorsed by local administrations; co-definition of resource-use rules (transhumance calendars, grazing zones, water management); member training in mediation and non-violent conflict prevention; and integration into broader land-governance systems.

In the DRC, committees have significantly reduced transhumance-related conflicts in Tanganyika and Haut-Uélé, enabling local resolution without judicial recourse. In the CAR, local conventions have improved coexistence between sedentary farmers and transhumant herders, reducing field destruction. In Chad, community platforms have synchronized agricultural and pastoral calendars, lowering the incidence of seasonal clashes. Collectively, these experiences have enhanced social stability, community cohesion, and food security, demonstrating that shared natural resource governance can serve as a concrete instrument for sustainable peace and structural prevention of food crises (UNOCA & UNOWAS, 2023).

This approach demonstrates that collaborative natural resource governance is a concrete instrument for food security and sustainable peace. By institutionalizing dialogue between farmers and herders, community committees function as local preventive diplomacy mechanisms, protecting crops and pastures and ensuring a steady local food supply. They sustain market connectivity by preventing clashes that disrupt trade and rural mobility, while promoting equitable use of land, water, and fodder.

Securing land access for displaced populations through temporary or shared use rights

In the fragile contexts of Eastern and Central Africa, the loss of land access remains a primary driver of food insecurity and social tension. Displacement caused by conflict and climatic shocks deprives households of their livelihoods, while host communities face increasing pressure on arable land. To address this dual challenge, pilot programs in the DRC, Somalia, and Western Sudan have introduced temporary or shared land-use rights. These rights are negotiated locally and endorsed by traditional and administrative authorities. These mechanisms enable displaced people to resume agricultural production without triggering land disputes, strengthening both peaceful coexistence and community resilience (UN-Habitat, 2025).

Granting land use rights before tensions escalate functions as an anticipatory measure that prevents conflict and preserves local stability. By restoring access to cultivation, these agreements support staple crop production, reduce dependence on food aid, and sustain rural market circulation. Host communities benefit from the productive use of idle land and the equitable sharing of agricultural returns, fostering mutual trust and social cohesion. This preventive land tenure security thus serves as both a peace guarantee and a livelihood insurance mechanism, essential to resilient food systems.

Implementation follows an inclusive, participatory process: participatory mapping of available plots; negotiation among displaced households, landowners, and local authorities; formalization of use agreements validated by traditional chiefs and municipal entities; registration and archiving in line with CCCM Cluster (2023) guidance on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) governance; and establishment of local mediation bodies to resolve disputes. This process embeds conflict prevention within local land governance systems.

In the DRC, households benefiting from secure land access resumed food production during the first season, cutting their reliance on humanitarian aid by nearly half. In Somalia and Sudan, formalized tenure agreements significantly reduced land disputes, improved inter-community

relations, and strengthened municipal capacities in land management and governance. These results confirm that shared land use frameworks enhance both agricultural productivity and social stability (UNOCA & UNOWAS, 2023).

In Baidoa (Somalia), where conflict and drought had weakened social cohesion, the municipality, with support from *UN-Habitat* and the *HLP Sub-Cluster Somalia,* issued more than 1,300 land tenure documents to 70,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) through leases lasting five to eight years. Half of the leases went to women heads of household. Beneficiaries were able to prevent forced evictions, resume farming, and rebuild livelihoods, while municipal authorities improved cadastral systems and governance capacities. This initiative stabilized relations with host communities and transformed land access into a driver of peace and food system recovery.

In El Geneina (West Darfur, Sudan), an inter-community reconciliation process led to local peace agreements between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers, establishing shared land use rights, participatory zoning of farmland and water points, and construction of joint community infrastructure such as schools, boreholes, and markets. This participatory management framework reduced land-related violence, improved food security, and enhanced women's participation in local land committees. By securing usage rights and rebuilding trust, the approach converted coexistence into productive cooperation, reinforcing both local peace and economic resilience. *(UN-Habitat 2024)*

These practices demonstrate that secure and equitable land tenure is a structural lever for preventing food crises and communal conflicts. By stabilizing usage rights, they prevent field destruction and evictions, preserve rural market continuity, and protect vulnerable livelihoods. Land thus becomes a platform for cooperation and reconstruction, anchoring local peace in agricultural production and strengthening households' capacity to withstand future shocks.

Integrating displaced people into local agricultural value chains by facilitating access to inputs, credit and markets

The integration of displaced people into local agricultural value chains aims to transform these populations from simple beneficiaries into active economic actors. This means giving them access to agricultural inputs, rural credit, technical training, and market opportunities, often through mixed cooperatives (hosts + IDPs). In fragile contexts such as the DRC, South Sudan, or Ethiopia, such mechanisms both promote the recovery of agricultural incomes and reduce inter-community tensions by aligning the economic interests of displaced people with those of host populations.

According FAO–IFPRI (2023),"integrating displaced and conflict-affected people into food systems, whether in their new places or places of origin, helps them rebuild their lives." By connecting these populations to value chains, their risk of economic marginalization is reduced, while their capacity to produce, sell, and reinvest is increased. This systemic inclusion strengthens the resilience of both displaced households and local economic stability. It does so by:

- identifying profitable local agricultural sectors (food crops, horticulture, light livestock) compatible with displaced populations,

- facilitating the provision of subsidized inputs, resistant seeds, low-interest credit, and adapted technical training through NGOs, development programs or microfinance institutions,

- structuring mixed productive groups (IDPs + hosts) to promote shared governance and collective access to markets, and

- using institutional purchase guarantees or access to processing/sales chains (urban markets, public procurement programs).

Empirical evidence from multiple conflict-affected settings indicates that integration into value chains has enabled displaced households to increase their agricultural incomes by 25-40 percent, diversify their production, and actively participate in local markets. These effects reduce pressures on humanitarian assistance and strengthen positive interdependence between communities, decreasing friction over access to resources or opportunities.

By integrating displaced people into local agricultural channels, this strategy protects food production, increases access to income, and stabilizes markets, which are essential for sustainable food security. At the same time, economic integration reduces resentment and social tensions, as displaced people become stakeholders in local development rather than burdens. It is therefore a two-pronged approach: reducing the risk of conflict while strengthening food and economic capacities.

Deploy community alert and agricultural planning systems

Food crises in fragile areas are often the result of a combination of climatic hazards and security instabilities that weaken production and the resilience of rural communities. Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) are an integrated response based on local vigilance, community coordination, and adaptive planning. They train communities to observe agroclimatic, economic, and security conditions, interpret early signals, and adjust agricultural cycles before shocks occur. According to Van Ginkel et al. (2021), direct producer participation in *drought early warning systems* increases data reliability and responsiveness to hazards. This approach transforms vulnerable households into active actors in prevention and planning, thus consolidating local resilience.

The CBEWS reflects the principle of "Early Warning, Early Action" promoted by FAO and WFP. This principle emphasizes preventive action over post-crisis response. By combining community knowledge and scientific forecasting, CBEWS make it possible to trigger agricultural, financial, or logistical decisions earlier and to reduce the human and economic costs of shocks.

In Ethiopia, WFP's Anticipatory Action Programme protected more than 130,000 households ahead of the 2022 drought through cash transfers and early information dissemination (WFP, 2022). In the DRC, the CREWS Hydro-Weather project, implemented by UNDP and WMO, forms community committees to collect and disseminate hydrometeorological warnings, covering about 300,000 people (CREWS, 2024). In Somalia, activating anticipatory actions before recurrent floods and droughts improved the food security of exposed households and reduced negative coping strategies, protecting crops and limiting displacement related to livelihood losses (WFP, 2025; Anticipation Hub, 2024).

These experiences confirm that community anticipation strengthens both household preparedness and social stability in high-risk areas.

The deployment of a CBEWS follows a structured and interrelated process. It begins with the organization of the community through the establishment of representative monitoring committees that include women, youth, producers, and traditional authorities, alongside the definition of a local governance protocol. Communities then collect and analyze data on rainfall patterns, market

prices, livestock mobility, and security incidents, which are combined with information from national meteorological and early warning services. Alerts are disseminated through multiple communication channels such as community radios, SMS, public meetings, and billboards to ensure timely and inclusive access to information. Finally, the system is integrated with national and regional platforms, including FAO Early Warning Early Action mechanisms, FEWS NET, and IGAD, to ensure coherence and coordinated activation of responses. (*FAO EWEA*, *FEWS NET*, *IGAD)*

The FAO/IFRC Guidance (2023) highlights three key principles: local participation, effective communication and capacity for immediate action (FAO, 2023).

Empirical evidence supports the appropriateness of the approach:

- In Kenya (Turkana), communities with a local warning system improved their adaptive capacity by 40 percent, while reducing livestock losses and inter-community tensions (Namoe et al., 2022).

- In Ethiopia in the Tigray region, despite the conflict, anticipatory actions have enabled households to preserve their food stocks and avoid mass displacement (Tufts, 2024).

- In Somalia, WFP's Anticipatory Action Plans have protected crops before shocks and reduced pressure that could otherwise lead to displacement, illustrating the indirect preventive role on humanitarian crises (WFP, 2025).

- Globally, the WFP (2025) estimates that anticipatory action leads to an average reduction of agricultural losses of 25-30 percent, as well as faster recovery of livelihoods.

The CBEWS are a lever for transforming whistleblowing into local peace governance. By promoting the flow of reliable information between farmers, herders, and local authorities, they reduce competition for resources, stabilize food markets, and strengthen inter-community trust. According to Chatham House (2025), food security integrated warning systems directly contribute to decreasing the likelihood of scarcity-related conflicts and participate in the consolidation of a "social infrastructure for peace" (Chatham House 2025). In fragile contexts, they ensure the continuity of community dialogue even when formal institutions are weakened and thus become a central tool for structural prevention of food and security crises.

Conclusion

Conflict-related shocks remain one of the main drivers of food insecurity in East and Central Africa. However, documented experiences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Somalia demonstrate that anticipatory, inclusive, and conflict-sensitive interventions can effectively counter this dynamic. The five good practices analyzed in this report—community-based agriculture for social cohesion, early warning and anticipatory systems, conflict-sensitive livelihood support, secure access to land, and the economic integration of displaced populations—share a common characteristic: They link preventive action with productive resilience.

These approaches show that food security is not merely a question of supply but is rather fundamentally one of local governance, socio-economic inclusion, and equitable management of natural and productive resources. By strengthening communities' capacity to anticipate risks, negotiate access, sustain production, and plan collectively, such interventions help create the structural conditions for durable peace and collective self-reliance.

The cumulative effects are twofold. First, these interventions contribute to stabilizing food systems through sustained production, diversification, and market continuity. Second, they reduce conflict risks by reinforcing local cooperation, trust, and inter-community resilience.

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