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Resilience under pressure:

Young women navigating
conflict-affected agrifood systems



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Young women navigating
conflict-affected agrifood systems

World Food Forum

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About the World Food Forum

The World Food Forum (WFF) was launched in 2021 as an independent network of partners hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It serves as the premier global platform to actively shape agrifood systems for a better food future, accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through youth action, science and innovation, and investment, the WFF forges new paths of action and multi-sector partnerships for agrifood impact at the local, regional and global levels to achieve a more sustainable, resilient, inclusive and hunger-free food future for all. Within this framework, the WFF Global Youth Action Initiative was established to harness the passion and power of youth, and to incite positive action for agrifood systems through youth empowerment. It acts as a catalytic movement and driver of youth engagement in food governance and serves as a knowledge centre and innovation lab, fostering and inspiring youth-led solutions. It thus actively contributes to the implementation of the UN Youth 2030 Strategy and enhances youth engagement in the follow-up to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. The WFF Global Youth Action Initiative is implemented through a set of thematic programmes that leverage intergenerational and cross-sectoral collaboration around policy, innovation, education, culture and local action.

About the Young Scientists Group

The mission of the World Food Forum (WFF) Young Scientists Group (YSG) is to provide scientific evidence and technical knowledge to the various initiatives of the WFF, and to develop research on topics of concern to youth related to agrifood systems transformation. Established in 2022, the YSG has completed two cohorts. Its third cohort began activities in May 2025 as part of a two-year tenure (2025–2027).

The composition of the YSG reflects the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind. The diversity of YSG members' expertise mirrors the diversity of challenges and solutions associated with achieving agrifood systems transformations and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Abbreviations

AWARD	African Women in Agricultural Research and Development
B4WE	Beans for Women Empowerment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GBV	gender-based violence
GNAFC	Global Network Against Food Crises
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDPs	internally displaced persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
NEET	not in employment, education or training
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
ScR	Extension for Scoping Reviews
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFF	World Food Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WUAs	water user associations
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Key concepts and definitions

Concept	Definition
Agrifood systems	Agrifood systems encompass all of the interconnected components involved in the journey of food production and consumption, including how food is grown, raised, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, purchased, prepared, eaten, disposed of and reused. They also include non-food agricultural, forest and fisheries products that support livelihoods, along with all of the people, activities, investments and choices involved (FAO, 2021).
Armed conflict and protracted crisis	Armed conflicts are situations of organized violence with profound, long-lasting consequences for livelihoods, economic opportunities and well-being. Conflict may be both a driver and a manifestation of a protracted crisis. A protracted crisis refers to a prolonged state of economic, climatic and/or political crises associated with persistent food insecurity, disrupted livelihoods and limited institutional capacity to respond (FAO, 2010).
Food security and nutrition	A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996; CFS, 2009). This is commonly understood through the dimensions of availability, access, utilization and stability, to which the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition has more recently added agency and sustainability (HLPE, 2020).
Gender-based violence (GBV)	An umbrella term for harmful acts perpetrated against a person's will and rooted in unequal power relations between men and women, including physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations General Assembly, 1993; IRC, 2025).
Resilience	The capacity that ensures shocks and stresses do not have long-lasting adverse development consequences, where capacity encompasses economic, political, social and psychological dimensions. It refers to the ability of individuals, households and broader systems to anticipate, adapt, absorb and transform in the face of shocks and stresses (FSIN Resilience Measurement Technical Working Group, 2014; Béné <i>et al.</i> , 2023).
Youth and young women	This report follows the United Nations definition of youth as individuals aged 15 to 24. Given that much of the evidence on young women's economic participation in agrifood systems, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) classification, extends to a broader young adult band of 15 to 34, this report uses young women to refer primarily to those aged 15 to 24, while evidence covering the wider 25 to 34 range is examined. This report flags explicitly where a cited source's age range differs from the report's core definition (FAO, 2025; UN DESA, n.d.).

Abstract

This report examines how conflict and protracted crises affect young women in agrifood systems, how young women exercise resilience in response, and what enabling conditions shape their ability to mobilise existing capacities and pursue adaptive or transformative responses to conflict-related shocks. Drawing on a scoping review complemented by targeted searches the report finds that conflict does not affect young women through a single channel, but through interlocking pressures that reinforce one another. These include weakened labour-force participation and precarious employment; disrupted food security, nutrition and health; expanded unpaid care work and constrained mobility; unequal access to productive resources; and disrupted education. Critically, pre-existing gender inequalities shape young women's exposure to and ability to respond to these pressures, amplifying the impacts of conflict. Conflict can, in turn, deepen these inequalities by further restricting access to productive resources, opportunities and decision-making. While age and gender may intersect to create additional disadvantages for young women, the evidence reviewed is more limited on these intersectional effects.

At the same time, the report finds that young women are not passive in the face of these impacts. They actively build resilience through individual, psychological, social, economic and livelihood strategies, from informal savings groups and diversified livelihoods to community-based support networks. This resilience is strengthened where governance, social protection, collective action, humanitarian assistance and financial systems are designed to actively enable it, rather than leaving young women to cope alone. Based on these findings, the report puts forward a set of recommendations to inform the programming of humanitarian and development actors, and to contribute to a stronger evidence base for strengthening young women's resilient livelihoods across conflict-affected agrifood systems.

Executive summary

Why this report matters

Armed conflict and protracted crises are increasing in frequency and intensity worldwide, disrupting agrifood systems well beyond the duration of active hostilities. Young women are among those most affected, yet least visible, in the evidence base that informs humanitarian and development responses. This report, a contribution from the World Food Forum (WFF) Young Scientists Group (2025–2027 cohort), addresses this gap through a scoping review conducted in line with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) 2018 guidelines. It complements the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (FAO, 2025) by focusing specifically on how conflict affects young women’s participation in agrifood systems, how they respond and build resilience, and what enabling conditions make this resilience possible.

HIGHLIGHTS

The scale, severity and gendered dimensions of conflict affecting agrifood systems are clear:

1. Recorded conflict and political violence have increased substantially in many regions in recent years, although global long-run comparisons require adjustment for changes in data coverage.
2. Young women face a persistent disadvantage in labour-market participation, with a global not in employment, education or training (NEET) rate of more than twice that of young men in 2023 (28.1 percent vs. 13.1 percent) (ILO, 2023).
3. In a survey of 731 adolescent girls aged 10 to 17 enrolled in a girls’ empowerment programme in Myanmar, 80.6 percent reported psychological violence and 49.8 percent reported physical violence from a parent or caregiver in the past year, with conflict-related stressors sharply increasing this risk (Pearson *et al.*, 2025).
4. Girls in conflict-affected countries are nearly two and a half times more likely to be out of school than girls elsewhere. Separately, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 234 million school-age children of both sexes living in crises required urgent educational support by end-2024 (UNICEF, 2025).

How conflict affects young women's participation

Conflict does not affect young women's participation in agrifood systems through a single channel. It operates through several interlocking pressures that reinforce one another:

- **Economic impact:** Conflict weakens young women's participation in the labour market, restricting their access to formal and fairly paid work while increasing reliance on more precarious and unsafe forms of employment, rather than simply reducing employment outright.
- **Food security, nutrition and health:** Conflict-affected countries account for a growing share of global acute food insecurity, with measurable consequences for physical and mental health, particularly among young people.
- **Social impacts:** Conflict expands young women's unpaid care responsibilities, narrows their safe mobility, weakens their decision-making power within households and erodes the social networks they rely on. Conflict-related sexual violence compounds these effects with long-term social- and household-level consequences.
- **Access to productive resources:** Structural and institutional barriers, combined with disrupted social pathways to land access and other productive resources, leave young women with a narrower resource base than their male counterparts, even when they remain economically active.
- **Education:** Conflict compounds pre-existing weakness in access to education and training, narrowing the skills and credentials young women can draw on to participate in higher-value roles in agrifood systems.

Critically, none of these impacts are produced by conflict alone. Conflict interacts with pre-existing gender inequalities, producing gender-differentiated effects that, across several dimensions, disproportionately disadvantage young women.

How young women respond

Young women are not passive recipients of these impacts. Across the contexts reviewed, they draw on multi-layered resilience strategies that can be categorized as:

- **Individual resilience:** Young women draw on personal agency and psychological strength to navigate crises. Their strategies include making mobility decisions, engaging in cash-for-work activities and adapting infant-feeding practices under extreme displacement constraints. However, in most severe cases, these strategies can be short-term survival responses that coexist with exploitative coping mechanisms.
- **Community resilience:** Community kitchens, collective farm labour and saving groups – built by or with young women, or that young women choose to rely on – help them absorb shocks, rebuild social ties and overcome food insecurity. Young women also engage in youth-led dialogues like community clubs to transform gender norms and negotiate access to productive resources.
- **Economic resilience:** Young women diversify livelihoods across agriculture, informal income-generating activities and entrepreneurship – from hydroponic farming in Gaza to women-led agribusiness in Ukraine. These strategies can expand economic roles and challenge gender norms, but they can also reinforce traditional divisions of labour and expose women to insecure, high-risk work.

What enables resilience

Individual agencies alone cannot sustain long-term recovery. Resilience depends on structural enabling conditions, including gender-responsive governance, inclusive social protection systems, localized collective action, coordinated humanitarian assistance, and secure access to financial resources and land rights. Such enabling conditions are contingent on sociopolitical context, access and control over productive resources, stability and the nature of conflict, and the state of gender in the conflict region. Key strategies for enabling resilience include:

- **Inclusive good governance and youth participation:** Governance processes can enable resilience by accounting for the different needs, experiences, opportunities, limitations and power relations between women and men, as well as addressing gender inequalities in the formulation and implementation of policies.
- **Social protection:** Whether manifested through policies, practices or programmes that focus on safeguarding people from social exclusion, poverty and marginalisation, social protection can better enable women's ability to exercise resilience.
- **Collective action:** Collective mobilization involving inclusive women's participation, leadership and agency can foster sustainable, grassroots action to build resilient solutions to conflict.
- **Humanitarian assistance:** Short term relief, whether through the provision of food, services, cash and/or emergency aid, offers ephemeral reduction in stressors for young women and encourages temporary resilience and survival.
- **Access to employment:** Increasing economic opportunities for young women can facilitate resilience by increasing their access to secure and diversified livelihoods.

Policy and programmatic recommendations

1. **Strengthen intersectional gender- and age-disaggregated data systems.** Improve the collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data so that policy and programming are evidence-based and no group remains invisible in monitoring systems.
2. **Institutionalize support for young women and community organization.** Invest in cooperatives, savings groups, producer associations, water committees and women-led enterprises, combining skills training with support to formalize informal livelihoods and budgeting for childcare, safe transport and flexible schedules.
3. **Integrate young women in gender-responsive resilience building and monitoring.** Ensure the meaningful participation of young women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-responsive social protection and resilience-building programmes in conflict-affected settings.
4. **Improve access to land and resources, protection, education and employment.** These priorities should be embedded across conflict recovery, humanitarian response and peacebuilding frameworks.
5. **Promote gender-transformative governance, conflict-sensitive programming and contributions to sustaining peace.** Include young women in land, water and food-system governance; apply gender and conflict analysis; support locally led initiatives to sustain peace.

Conclusions

Conflict widens pre-existing gaps in young women's participation in agrifood systems. Despite the constraints, young women draw on a diverse range of strategies to absorb, adapt and transform their households, livelihoods and communities under extreme pressure. However, this resilience is often unsupported, unrecognised and difficult to sustain over time, suggesting that the responsibility for building resilience should not rest on young women alone, but on the institutions, governments, organizations and communities that shape the conditions in which they live, study and work. Because the impacts of conflict on young women are deeply interconnected, building long-term resilience requires a holistic, multidisciplinary approach rather than isolated interventions.

Crucially, effective action remains hindered by significant evidence gaps. Existing research rarely examines young women as a distinct demographic, instead merging them into broader categories of "women" or "youth. Intersectional, age- and gender-disaggregated data remains scarce, with small sample sizes and limited representation of vulnerable populations, such as young women with disabilities. Geographically, evidence is concentrated in a few areas, leaving regions like South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Latin America underrepresented. Important gaps also persist in understanding how resilience strategies evolve over time, how young women anticipate conflict, and how context-specific findings apply across different stages of crisis.



Chapter 1.

1.1 Introduction

Armed conflict is escalating worldwide, with consequences extending far beyond the immediate loss of life. Conflict disrupts livelihoods, displaces populations and places sustained pressure on the agrifood systems upon which millions depend.

The growing prevalence of conflict has been accompanied by a substantial human toll, affecting civilians, including women, young women, and children, through both fatalities and forced displacement. According to Bendavid *et al.* (2021), between 2009 and 2017, conflict-induced displacement among children nearly doubled, from 18.5 million to 35.7 million (1.4 percent of the global child population), while the number of displaced women, including young women, increased from 10.6 million to 16.2 million (0.6 percent of women worldwide) (Figures 1.2 and 1.3 in Box 1.1). These trends illustrate how the consequences of escalating conflict extend beyond fatalities, exposing millions of women and children to displacement and associated disruptions to their livelihoods and food security.

Armed conflicts and protracted crises – defined as prolonged states of economic, climatic and/or political instability generating persistent food security challenges – are increasing in frequency and intensity globally, creating systemic disruptions to agrifood systems that extend well beyond the duration of active hostilities (FAO, 2025). Conflicts remain drivers of acute food insecurity and major sources of disruption for agricultural production, assets and services, supply chains and access to markets (Béné *et al.*, 2024; Bilali and Hassen, 2024). Reductions in humanitarian and development financing for countries affected by conflict are constraining access to critical agricultural, financial and social support services essential for sustaining agrifood livelihoods and strengthening resilience.

These disruptions disproportionately affect young people. Youth in conflict-affected agrifood systems face heightened vulnerabilities, including limited skills and work experience, restricted access to productive resources, and a greater reliance on informal and precarious work – all of which are further compounded in contexts of armed conflict and protracted crisis (FAO, 2025). Among young people, young women (15 to 24 years)¹ face the most severe and compounded barriers. Conflicts affect women in agrifood systems through multiple interrelated pathways. These include direct impacts, such as exposure to gender-based violence and sexual violence, displacement and restricted mobility, and indirect impacts in access and control over productive resources, infrastructure, services, labour allocation, markets and decision-making (FAO, 2026; Ronzani *et al.*, 2024). Conflict can also weaken social trust and the networks that support economic and collective activity. Social relationships and networks are an important component of agrifood-system resilience, facilitating access to information, resources and support, and enabling collective responses to shocks (FAO, 2021). Where conflict disrupts these relationships and reduces trust, women may face additional barriers to participating in agrifood systems (Freund and Favara, 2026). These multiple pathways of impact often are associated with shifts in household roles, unequal access to essential agricultural resources, and limited participation of women in financial and decision-making processes. As a result, women tend to experience higher and more severe levels of food insecurity compared to other groups (Bapolisi *et al.*, 2021).

Consistent with FAO's approach to conflict-affected settings, this report treats conflict sensitivity and the "do not harm" principle as

¹ Young women refers to female individuals aged 15 to 24 years, following the United Nations definition of youth. This age range encompasses both older adolescents (15 to 17 years) and young adults (18 to 24 years) (FAO, 2025).

a guiding lens for the analysis as a whole, not only as a precaution for policy implementation. Understanding local conflict and peace dynamics, who is affected, how, and through which pathways, is treated throughout this report as a precondition for any intervention aimed at strengthening young women's resilience in agrifood systems, since interventions designed without this understanding risk deepening existing tensions or exposing beneficiaries to new risks.

Despite these barriers, women are reported to have resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems. Women tend to participate more in agriculture during conflicts, as men may be absent and women's participation in the workforce increases to address labour shortages, though buffering roles may weaken under protracted conflict (FAO, 2025). Women and girls often become fully responsible for the economic stability of the household, increasing stress on women to secure income, sometimes involving precarious work and associated risks of gender-based violence. While widespread discourse on conflict and youth primarily focuses on young men as contributors to conflicts rather than as agents of adaptation, this report argues that many young people, especially young women, are critical to building peace in their communities through their relationships to agrifood systems, as the evidence presented in the following chapters illustrates.

Against this background, the focus of this report was identified by the WFF Young Scientists Group (2025–2027 cohort) in collaboration with FAO. The report examines how conflict affects young women's participation in agrifood systems, how they build resilience in response and the conditions that enable this resilience. It is intended to inform humanitarian and development actors, policymakers and other stakeholders working to strengthen young women's livelihoods in conflict-affected settings. The analysis draws on a scoping review conducted in line with the PRISMA-ScR 2018 guidelines, complemented by targeted literature searches.

Evidence from the field

Historically, women's collective organization around food has been a site of both survival and political agency during wartime. During the Second World War in Britain, working-class women mobilized through the Women's Co-operative Guild to contest food inequalities, monitor rationing distribution and lobby government food policy, suggesting that women's navigation of conflict and food systems is not merely adaptive but actively transformative (Gurney, 2020). Similar patterns continue to emerge in contemporary conflicts. In Gaza, amid protracted conflict and severe resource constraints, hydroponic farming has been explored as a water-efficient livelihood and entrepreneurial option, including for youth and women (Mizyed, 2026). Across both historical and contemporary cases, what distinguishes resilient responses is not merely individual capacity but the presence of collective structures – such as cooperatives, community networks and institutional support – that transform survival strategies into sustained agency.

The erosion of social trust mentioned above is not merely theoretical: longitudinal evidence from the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia shows that conflict exposure significantly reduces neighbourhood and generalized trust among young adults, with food insecurity identified as one of the principal mechanisms driving this collapse, and with women experiencing a broader erosion of trust than men (Freund and Favara, 2026). These findings underscore that conflict's impact on women's participation in agrifood systems operates through relational and institutional channels that standard labour market data do not capture.

Beyond social and institutional factors, resilience also depends on psychological well-being. The cumulative trauma of conflict, including food deprivation, forced displacement and exposure to violence, places an asymmetric burden on girls and young women, with a study of adolescent refugees in Uganda (aged 10 to 19 years) finding that girls had higher exposure to traumatic events than boys across

nearly all categories (Ainamani *et al.*, 2024). Severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomatology, in turn, reduces willingness to engage socially and heightens adverse coping responses, constraining the very relational and cognitive capacities upon which resilience depends. Supporting the psychological well-being of young women in conflict is therefore not ancillary to building agrifood resilience; it is a structural precondition for it.

About this report

This report examines how young women in agrifood systems are affected by and respond to conflict, in alignment with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 and its Programme Priority Areas on gender equality and rural women’s empowerment, agriculture and food emergencies, resilient agrifood systems and small-scale producers’ equitable access to productive resources, with youth as a cross-cutting demographic.

The report was produced by the WFF Young Scientists Group 2025–2027 cohort, following consultation with FAO to identify a topic of strategic relevance within the broader theme of youth in agrifood systems. The Young Scientists first conducted a brief literature review to narrow the topic and define the research questions, followed by a scoping review to identify and synthesize the available evidence. It is intended primarily for FAO Members and colleagues, the WFF network, and researchers and practitioners working on youth, gender and conflict-affected agrifood systems, to inform policy dialogue and future programming on resilience.

This evidence synthesis complements the FAO report *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (FAO, 2025), which explores how young people adapt to, absorb, and transform to shocks and vulnerabilities in agrifood systems. This report builds on the FAO report by specifically focusing on the impacts, experiences and resilience capacities of young women in conflict-affected areas, given the greater vulnerabilities and challenges they face compared with young men. By centring the experiences of young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems, this report

aims to shift the narrative from vulnerability alone towards recognition of young women as key actors in resilience, recovery and long-term transformation.

This report addresses three principal questions: how conflict affects young women’s participation in agrifood systems; how young women respond to these pressures; and what institutional, social and economic conditions shape whether these responses remain short-term coping mechanisms or contribute to sustained and potentially transformative resilience.

1.2 Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 1 presents the introduction and conceptual framework. Chapter 2 examines the impacts of conflict on young women's participation in agrifood systems. Chapter 3 analyses how young women are resilient in conflict-affected contexts. Chapter 4 explores the enabling conditions and institutional support mechanisms for young women's resilience. Chapter 5 presents youth-led recommendations for policy and programming. Chapter 6 sets out the conclusions.

1.3 Conceptual framework

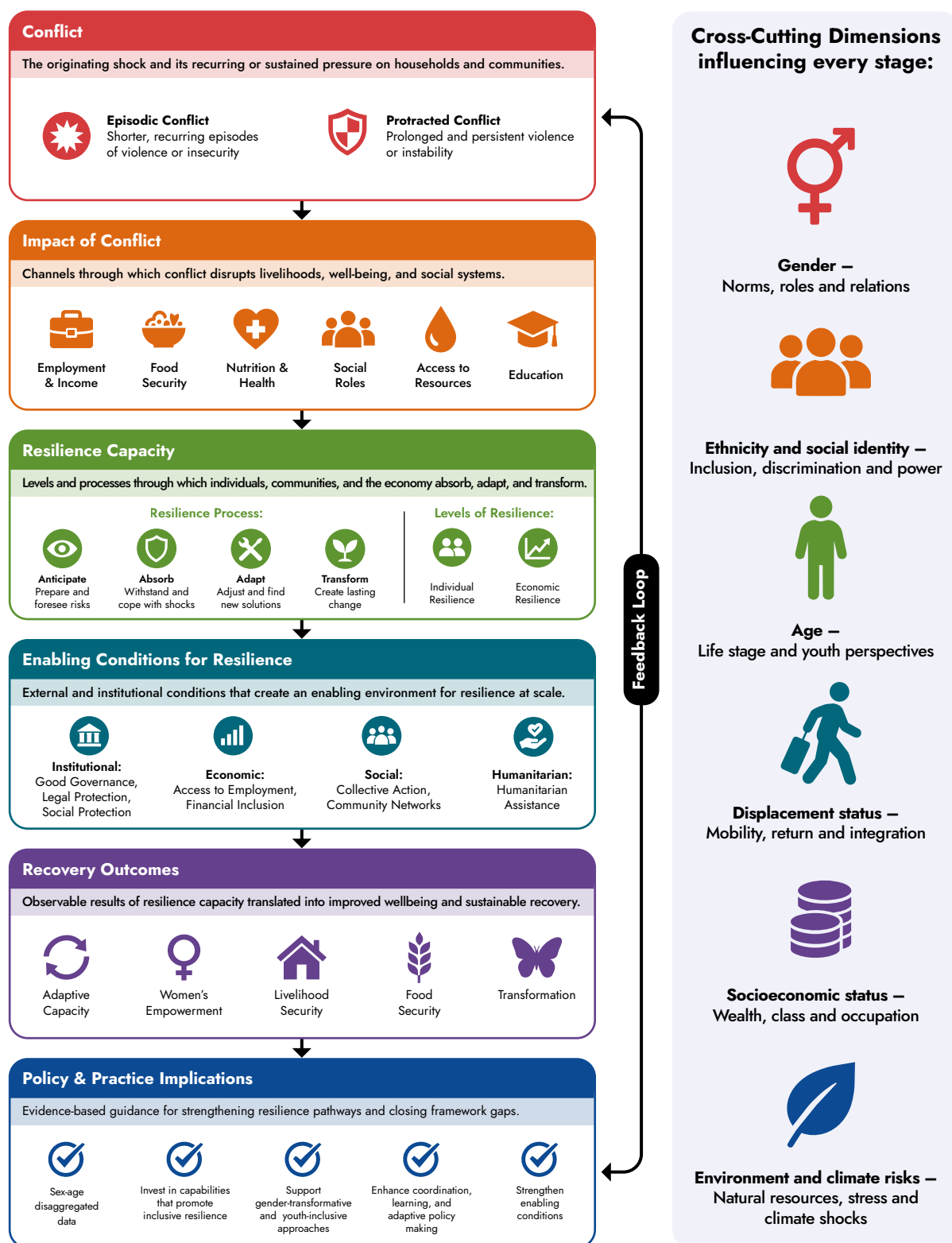
To guide the analysis, this report adopts a resilience-based conceptual framework that captures the interconnected factors shaping young women's experiences in agrifood systems across individual, household, community, institutional and structural levels. These dimensions are interrelated and provide the analytical structure for synthesizing evidence throughout the report. The framework also integrates gender-specific constraints and opportunities, including access to productive resources, economic opportunities, decision-making and institutional support.

Following FAO's *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*, this report distinguishes three related but distinct dimensions of women's engagement in agrifood systems: participation (whether and how much a woman works), quality of participation (whether that work is formal or informal, paid or unpaid, safe or hazardous, and compatible with a manageable care burden), and autonomy and control (whether she has decision-making power over her labour, income and productive assets). A rise in participation alone does not indicate improved well-being, as a young woman may work more hours during conflict yet be worse off if that work is informal, unpaid, dangerous or layered on top of an unchanged care burden. Where the evidence allows, this report signals which of these three dimensions a given finding speaks to, rather than treating "participation" as a single undifferentiated outcome.

Moreover, the conceptual framework (see Figure 1.1) illustrates how episodic and protracted conflicts generate economic, human and social vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect young women. The extent to which these vulnerabilities translate into adverse outcomes depends on a set of enabling conditions, including institutional, economic, social and humanitarian support. Drawing on resilience theory (Marimo *et al.*, 2025), the framework conceptualizes resilience capacity as a dynamic process through which individuals and communities anticipate, absorb, adapt and transform in response to conflict. These capacities operate across individual, community and economic levels, shaping the ability of young women to recover from conflict.

The interaction between conflict, enabling conditions and resilience capacities determines key recovery outcomes, including improved well-being, women's empowerment, food security and transformative recovery. The framework ultimately informs four policy recommendations: (1) collect intersectional gender- and age-disaggregated data; (2) formalize support for young women and community organizations; (3) integrate young women into gender-responsive resilience building and monitoring; and (4) promote gender-transformative and youth-inclusive policies to strengthen long-term recovery (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of young women navigating conflict in agrifood systems.



Source: Adapted from Njuki *et al.* (2022) and Marimo *et al.* (2025).

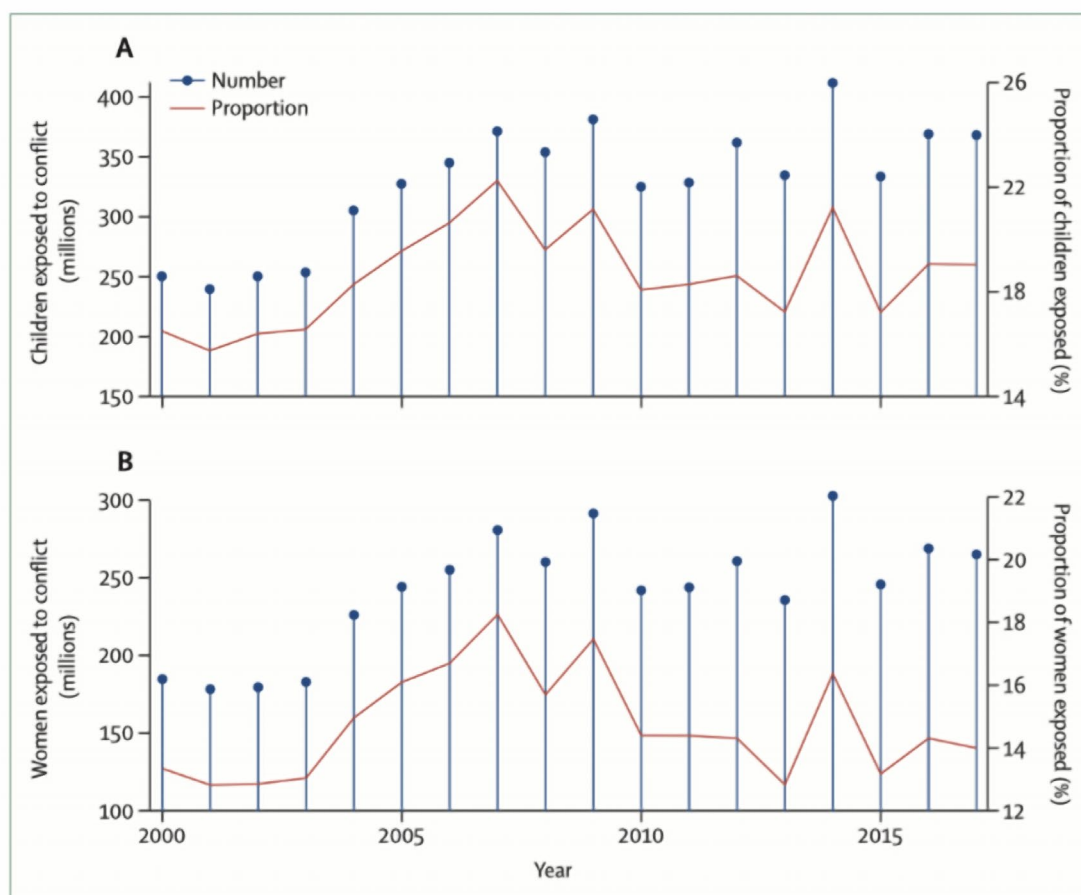
1.4 Methodology

This report draws on a scoping review conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR 2018 guidelines, integrating peer-reviewed academic publications, institutional reports and grey literature (see References and Appendix). The review examined three interconnected dimensions: (i) the impacts of conflict on young women's roles and opportunities within agrifood systems; (ii) the strategies and resources through which young women exercise resilience during and after conflict, including how engagement with agrifood systems can become a pathway for resilience; and (iii) the enabling conditions and structural barriers that shape whether resilience strategies are available, sustainable and scalable.

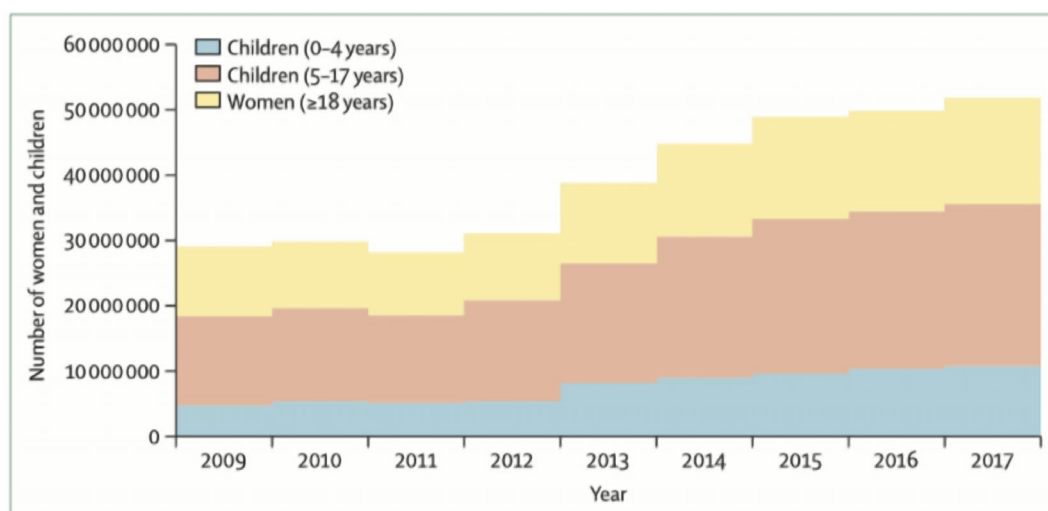
Where the systematic search did not return sufficient evidence disaggregated specifically for young women within a given study, the team conducted supplementary targeted searches, using citation chaining and topic-specific keyword searches, to identify additional peer-reviewed sources focused explicitly on adolescent girls and young women. These sources were screened against the same relevance criteria as those identified through the primary systematic search.

Box 1.1 Number of young women and women affected by conflict

Between 2009 and 2017, the number of conflict-induced displaced women and children increased substantially (see fig 1.2). In 2009, an estimated 18.5 million children and 10.6 million women were displaced by conflict. According to Bendavid *et al.* (2021), by 2017, these figures had risen to 35.7 million children (1.4 percent of all children worldwide) and 16.2 million women (0.6 percent of all women worldwide) (Figure 1.2 and 1.3). This upward trend highlights the growing humanitarian impact of armed conflict on civilian populations, particularly women and children. Women of reproductive age (18 to 49 years), including many young women, are especially vulnerable as they face displacement while also experiencing disrupted access to essential services such as food, healthcare, education, livelihoods and protection. The significant increase in the number of displaced women underscores the urgent need to place their specific needs, rights and resilience at the center of humanitarian responses and recovery efforts, recognizing that every displaced woman and young woman represents an individual whose safety, dignity and opportunities are profoundly affected by conflict.

Figure 1.2 Women and children exposed to conflict within a 50 kilometer radius

Source: Bendavid *et al.* (2021). The figure illustrates the number and percentage of children under 18 years (Panel A) and women aged 18 to 49 years (Panel B) living within 50 km of conflict events in Africa, Asia (including the Middle East), and Latin America and the Caribbean. The percentage estimates use the total population within the corresponding age groups across these regions as the denominator.

Figure 1.3 Estimated number of children and women displaced by conflict, 2009 to 2017

Source: Bendavid *et al.* (2021).



Chapter 2.

Impacts of conflict on participation in agrifood systems

2.1. Overview

This chapter examines how conflict affects young women's participation in agrifood systems. Three findings recur across every dimension it covers and organize the chapter that follows. First, conflict acts through multiple, interconnected pressures rather than a single channel, affecting employment, food security and health, social roles, access to and control over productive resources, and education. Second, these pressures interact with one another and compound pre-existing gender inequalities, rather than simply adding new constraints to otherwise equal conditions. Third, the strength and specificity of the evidence supporting these findings varies considerably across thematic areas, with some outcomes supported by relatively strong evidence for young women and others relying more heavily on evidence from women, youth or conflict-affected populations more broadly.

The first finding is that conflict acts through multiple pressures. On the economic side, conflict constrains labour participation and reduces income-generating opportunities (Ronzani *et al.*, 2024; FAO, 2025), and disrupts agricultural production and the broader functioning of agrifood systems (World Bank, 2017; FAO, 2025). At the same time, agrifood system work, and primary agricultural production in particular, can serve as a livelihood refuge in conflict settings, providing food and income when markets and other economic opportunities collapse, even as the same work becomes a source of risk and tension in other contexts (FAO, 2025). This dual role helps explain why young women's engagement in agriculture often increases during conflict even as its economic returns decline.

Conflict also reshapes social roles and mobility, as unpaid care responsibilities expand (WFP, 2018; Trako *et al.*, 2024), safety constraints narrow physical and economic mobility, and disruptions to education undermine the human capital young women would otherwise draw on to adapt

(UNICEF, 2025; Tai, El Arab and Ramadan, 2025). Conflict-related sexual violence may also contribute to shifts in household dynamics and social norms, with potential implications for women's access to productive resources and participation (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Taken together, these economic, social and educational constraints contribute to measurable consequences for food security, nutrition and health, which the literature treats less as a separate, standalone impact of conflict, and more as the point where the other dimensions converge and become visible in young women's day-to-day well-being (Elgar *et al.*, 2021; Seino *et al.*, 2008).

The second finding is that these pressures interact with one another and compound pre-existing inequalities, rather than simply adding to them. As set out in the conceptual framework of this report, conflict interacts with pre-existing gender inequalities and structural constraints already embedded in agrifood systems, producing gender-differentiated effects that, across several important dimensions, disproportionately disadvantage young women. This interaction is not abstract. As documented in the following sections of this chapter, reduced mobility and rising care burdens often prevent young women from taking up economic and educational opportunities, while resource-access barriers leave young women with less to fall back on when economic shocks hit. These constraints do not operate independently, and understanding how they interact is as important to this chapter as documenting each one on its own.

Throughout this chapter, young women's participation is understood broadly to include engagement across agrifood systems, from agricultural production to processing, marketing and other livelihood activities where evidence is available. While the literature reviewed places greater emphasis on agricultural production, the

impacts discussed throughout the chapter have implications across multiple stages of agrifood value chains (FAO, 2025).

The sections that follow take each of these dimensions in turn, from employment and resource access to social roles, food security and education. On their own, they document distinct constraints; read together, they show why conflict's effect on young women's participation in agrifood systems is better understood as

cumulative rather than additive, and it is this cumulative effect that the rest of the chapter sets out to trace.

The findings below should be read while keeping in mind the conflict-sensitivity principle set out in section 1.1, in order to understand these impacts accurately. Including where evidence is uncertain or context-specific, is itself part of avoiding harm in any resulting intervention.

2.2 Economic impact

Conflict affects young women's economic participation in agrifood systems through three interrelated pathways: reduced labour force participation, deteriorating employment quality and income security, and constrained engagement across agrifood value chains. Each pathway is discussed below.

2.2.1. Income security and economic precarity

While conflict may increase women's participation in agricultural work, it often does so under deteriorating economic conditions (Ronzani *et al.*, 2024). Such conditions include reduced working hours, unstable employment opportunities (Ronzani *et al.*, 2024) and the destruction of productive assets (Desta *et al.*, 2025), which undermine both income generation and livelihood security (FAO, 2017). Employment therefore becomes increasingly characterised by uncertainty, reduced productivity and declining economic returns (Nwagboso *et al.*, 2025).

Evidence from the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, while not specific to younger cohorts, illustrates these dynamics more broadly. Desta *et al.* (2025) report substantial losses of household assets among women following the war, including furniture, electronics, solar units, generators, ironing equipment and oxen. The loss of agricultural assets is particularly significant because it directly constrains productive capacity and income-generating opportunities within agrifood systems. At the same time, deteriorating household economic conditions were reflected in rising food insecurity, with more than half of surveyed households continuing to experience food insecurity after the conflict. Similar dynamics are documented well beyond this single case. Adelaja and George (2019) combine nationwide agricultural panel data with conflict-event data from the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria, finding that conflict intensity significantly reduced agricultural productivity and hired farm labour, while household labour on the same farms did not decline, suggesting that women may be absorbing the resulting labour gap to compensate for lost hired help. More broadly, Baliki *et al.* (2019) synthesize evidence on rural youth in conflict-affected settings globally and find that exposure to violence damages human capital accumulation and constrains educational and labour-market trajectories in ways that compound across life stages, indicating that the asset and livelihood losses seen in Tigray and Nigeria reflect a broader pattern rather than a single case study.

These findings indicate that conflict affects both employment and underlying livelihood assets. Even where women remain economically active, income generation is often constrained by damaged productive assets, disrupted local economies and reduced access to livelihood opportunities (FAO, 2017). Consequently, participation in agrifood systems increasingly occurs under more precarious conditions.

Evidence specifically on adolescent girls reinforces this picture and shows that conflict can blunt the economic gains that targeted programmes would otherwise deliver. Buehren *et al.* (2017b) evaluated a South Sudanese replication of a girls' economic and social empowerment programme combining vocational and life-skills training. Where conflict did not directly affect participants, the programme raised the probability of income-generating activity, savings and control over cash; but the same gains for girls in conflict-affected areas were considerably weaker, and effects on girls' broader social empowerment were ambiguous. This contrasts with the original programme model in Uganda, which, outside conflict conditions, had raised adolescent girls' engagement in income-generating activity by 48 percent over four years, alongside sharp falls in teenage pregnancy and early marriage (Bandiera *et al.*, 2020). Read together, the two studies suggest that conflict does not just reduce young women's economic opportunities directly; it can also weaken the effectiveness of interventions designed to expand them. Robust evidence specifically on girls' economic empowerment programmes in conflict settings remains limited to these two studies, but the broader pattern is corroborated by a systematic review and meta-analysis of 104 cash and cash-plus livelihood interventions across 43 countries, which found smaller and less consistent effects in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and in sub-Saharan Africa specifically, than elsewhere (Leight, Hirvonen and Zafar, 2024). While this broader evidence is not specific to young women, it supports the same underlying conclusion: namely that conflict and fragility do not just harm intended beneficiaries directly, they also blunt the tools designed to help them.

The concept of dignified work further highlights that employment should be understood not only as a source of income, but also as a source of safety, autonomy, social recognition and opportunity (Nwagboso *et al.* 2025). According to Nwagboso *et al.* (2025), enabling young people to engage meaningfully in agrifood systems requires addressing barriers linked to gender, age and experiences such as conflict and displacement. In conflict settings, these barriers reduce both the quality of available employment and the attractiveness of agrifood livelihoods for young women (FAO, 2025). The economic case for addressing these barriers is substantial, even where the evidence is not conflict-specific. FAO (2023) estimates that closing the gender gap in farm productivity and the wage gap in agricultural employment alone would increase global gross domestic product by close to one trillion dollars and reduce the number of food-insecure people by 45 million. While this estimate covers women in agrifood systems broadly rather than young women or conflict-affected settings specifically, it suggests that improving the quality and dignity of young women's work in these settings is not only a matter of individual well-being, but a lever with meaningful economic returns at scale.

2.2.2. Participation across agrifood value chains

The economic impacts of conflict extend beyond on-farm production to affect participation across agrifood value chains through disruptions to labour availability, infrastructure and market functioning. These disruptions reduce opportunities for market participation and often increase reliance on subsistence-oriented agricultural activities (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2017). Evidence from the war in Ukraine shows a similar dynamic beyond the immediate conflict zone, as disruptions to production, trade and logistics rippled through global agrifood value chains, illustrating how conflict can constrain the market opportunities available to producers, traders and other value-chain actors well beyond the areas directly affected by fighting (Bilali and Hassen, 2024). As a result, women's roles as producers, processors, traders and service providers are increasingly constrained, limiting engagement in higher-value market activities and contributing to a shift towards subsistence-oriented livelihoods (WFP, 2018).

Qualitative evidence from a post-conflict setting illustrates these constraints from young women's perspective. Mdege, Mayanja and Mudege (2022) interviewed and held focus group discussions with young women and young men in the Gulu and Omoro districts in Northern Uganda about their engagement in sweet potato production and agribusiness. The study found that young people's participation in this value chain was shaped by the intersection of community and national context with individual circumstances, rather than by any single barrier, and that young women and young men frequently faced these constraints differently within the same post-conflict setting.

Overall, the evidence suggests that conflict primarily reshapes, rather than uniformly reduces, young women's participation in agrifood systems, and the direction of this reshaping appears to depend on how long conflict persists. Survey evidence from 29 African countries suggests that agriculture can absorb labour displaced by conflict, with the increase in agricultural engagement significantly greater among women and men, even as overall working hours in the broader economy decline and employment becomes more precarious (Roznani *et al.*, 2024). However, this same evidence indicates that the relationship with conflict duration is not straightforward. Employment effects two years on were found to be stronger when conflict had ceased than when it continued, suggesting agriculture's capacity to absorb displaced labour cannot be assumed to hold uniformly over time (Ronzani *et al.*, 2024).

Asset destruction weakens livelihoods for both, but its effects on participation fall unevenly along these same gendered lines. Taken together, these findings indicate that in many settings conflict contributes to changing the economic foundations upon which young women participate in agrifood systems. Understanding these patterns is essential for analysing how conflict influences broader dimensions of participation, including access and control over productive resources, food security and social roles, which are explored in the following sections.

2.3 Food security, nutrition and health

Armed conflicts directly affect food systems across multiple dimensions, negatively impacting food security, nutrition, and physical and mental health. Each is examined in turn below, from the availability of food itself to its downstream effects on the body and mind.

2.3.1. Food security

Recent data from the Global Report on Food Crises (FAO, WFP and GNAFC, 2026) show that in 12 of 33 countries facing food crises, conflict and insecurity have remained the primary drivers of hunger for more than five consecutive years since 2016, overtaking climate shocks. In 2025, 266 million people across 47 countries and territories faced high levels of acute food insecurity, with 19 conflict-affected countries accounting for 147.4 million of these people, more than double the 73.9 million recorded in 2018. That year also marked a grim milestone; famine was confirmed simultaneously in two contexts, Gaza and Sudan, for the first time in the report's history, with six countries or territories reaching Catastrophe levels (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification and Cadre Harmonisé Phase 5) and 1.4 million people affected.

Food security is compromised by the presence of armed conflicts as it interferes with the four dimensions of food security: availability, access and control over productive resources, utilization and stability (Gross *et al.*, 2000). The production of agricultural products is interrupted when farmers leave their land because of threats, insecurity, displacement and the destruction of productive assets. Furthermore, damage to infrastructure like irrigation, storage facilities, farm-to-market roads and

local markets limits the movement and distribution of food, which results in the reduction of both local supplies and market availability (Adelaja and George, 2019). Aside from this, the capacity of farmers to maintain food production after periods of active conflict is constrained by disruptions to agricultural input supply chains, including access to seeds, fertilizers, feeds and fuel.

Young women, who are often relied on to provide food, are disproportionately affected, as they are also expected to participate in farming, food processing or informal food markets. The presence of conflicts often highlights how the purchasing powers and the ability to secure sufficient food are affected by reducing their access to productive resources, employment opportunities, capital and markets – pressures that are not unique to young women, since young men’s access and control over productive resources and employment is also disrupted by conflict, as documented throughout this chapter. What differs is less the presence of economic disruption than its distribution and its social meaning. Structural barriers to land, credit and markets already fall more heavily on young women before conflict begins (section 2.5), so the economic shock leaves them with a narrower resource base to draw from. At the same time, heightened displacement and insecurity restrict young women’s mobility specifically, reflecting the gendered safety and protection norms documented in section 2.4, rather than a constraint experienced equally by young men.

This combination of a narrower starting resource base and tighter mobility constraints results in their limited participation in productive agricultural activities and a lack of diversity in household food sources. Layered on top of this is a distinctly gendered social expectation, as even where young men’s access to income and resources is similarly disrupted, responsibility for turning whatever resources remain into food on the table, and for feeding children specifically, continues to fall disproportionately on young women as household providers and caregivers. Consequently, young women often bear the dual burden in conflict-affected agrifood systems. On one side, they are themselves affected by reduced food availability, often eating last and least within the household when supplies run short, a pattern reported in some food-security literature, though intra-household allocation varies substantially by context. On the other side, they carry the responsibility of managing the scarcity of others, stretching limited food, adapting diets, and absorbing the mental and physical toll of ensuring their households, and particularly their children, are fed, even as their own access to productive resources narrows. These two pressures compound rather than operate separately, since the same conflict-driven scarcity that limits what young women themselves can eat is the scarcity they are then expected to manage and resolve on behalf of their families.

This dual burden extends to infant and young child feeding, an often overlooked dimension of household food security that falls disproportionately on young women of reproductive age as mothers and caregivers. A systematic review of feeding practices in conflict settings found exclusive breastfeeding rates of just 25 percent and continued breastfeeding at two years of just 29 percent, undermined by displacement, maternal stress and malnutrition, family casualties, and the disruptive presence of freely distributed breast-milk substitutes in crisis response (Rabbani *et al.*, 2020). Because breastfeeding is itself a food and nutrition security practice, one that protects both a mother’s own health and a child’s survival and development, its disruption compounds the burden already placed on young women, extending their responsibility for household food security to the nutrition security of the next generation.

Disruptions to food access are among the most common and immediate consequences of armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. The conflict in Gaza is an emblematic example of how armed conflicts severely disrupt access to food. A modelling study assessing food availability during the first ten months of the conflict found that humanitarian food deliveries remained below pre-war levels, leading to prolonged periods of insufficient caloric availability, particularly in northern Gaza (Checchi *et al.*, 2024). Although existing food stocks partially mitigated shortages, they were insufficient to

meet population needs. In terms of dietary diversity, before the escalation of the conflict in 2023, only 43 percent of children aged 6 to 23 months achieved minimum dietary diversity and 11 percent of households already had a poor food consumption score, highlighting the challenges of ensuring adequate food access and dietary diversity in conflict settings (Checchi *et al.*, 2024).

The experience in Gaza shows how conflict-induced disruptions go beyond temporary shortages to affect the food system's stability over the years. The interaction between reduced agricultural production, constrained humanitarian access, market disruptions and declining household purchasing power poses challenges to the availability of food supply and access to it. This is not an isolated case. In Sudan, conflict since April 2023 has similarly disrupted agrifood systems nationwide, halting agrifood processing activities and blocking trade routes, with modelling suggesting household income losses of up to 40 percent and an economy that could shrink to nearly half its pre-war size the longer that conflict persists (Kirui *et al.*, 2024). These cascading effects show that food insecurity, especially in conflict settings, is driven not only by food supply insufficiency but also by the disrupted agrifood systems that sustain livelihoods and ensure reliable access to food. Therefore, it is apparent that strengthening the resilience of these systems through targeting the barriers faced by young women in accessing productive resources and livelihood opportunities is important to increase food security in conflict-affected contexts.

2.3.2. Nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies

While the heaviest burden of unpaid caregiving typically falls on women aged 25 to 44, rather than on young women specifically, conflict appears to accelerate the onset of these responsibilities for younger women, through early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, or the loss of older caregivers within the household. Malnutrition among children was similarly severe, in the nutrition-crisis contexts covered by the Global Report on Food Crises 2026, an estimated 35.5 million children aged 6 to 59 months were acutely malnourished in 2025, including nearly 10 million with severe acute malnutrition, with the worst nutrition crises concentrated in Myanmar and South Sudan alongside Gaza and Sudan (FAO, WFP and GNAFC, 2026). Where young women do take on caregiving roles earlier than they otherwise would, this burden of child malnutrition falls disproportionately on their time, labour and well-being at a younger age than the general pattern would suggest, compounding the pressures documented in section 2.4, even where the underlying data are not disaggregated by the age of the caregiver (Pacheco *et al.*, 2024).

Evidence on young women's own nutritional status specifically, remains limited in conflict settings, but what exists points in a consistent direction. The nutritional outcomes of conflicts are reflected not only in acute and chronic malnutrition, but also in specific micronutrient deficiencies. In Yemen, anemia linked to iron deficiency is already a public health burden, exacerbated by the ongoing humanitarian crisis, disproportionately impacting children, women, rural populations and older adults (Al-Namer *et al.*, 2026; WHO, 2025), with the prevalence among women of reproductive age reaching around 40 percent (WHO, 2025). A cluster randomised trial in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in northern Uganda offers more age-specific evidence. It found that school feeding significantly reduced anemia among adolescent girls aged 10 to 13, and noted that 43 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 in these camps had already given birth or were pregnant with their first child, compared with 25 percent nationally, underscoring how displacement compounds early pregnancy and its associated nutritional risks for young women specifically (Adelman *et al.*, 2019). Another meta-analysis covering many conflict-affected countries found vitamin A deficiency in 16.3 percent of children and iodine deficiency in 43.4 percent, linking these deficiencies to internal displacement and the destruction of health institutions in protracted war settings (Dessie *et al.*, 2025).

2.3.3. Physical health

Negative nutritional outcomes are not the only health impacts; conflicts also compound both physical disease and psychological suffering. Simultaneously with malnutrition, mass displacement heightens exposure to infectious disease as the breakdown of cold-chain systems, sanitation and health service facilitates outbreaks. FAO (2017) highlighted this with the case of South Sudan, where the collapse of livestock vaccine cold chains increased the risk of disease outbreaks. The same breakdown in health infrastructure that disrupts disease control also has direct implications for young women specifically. Okeke *et al.*, (2024) find that adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately exposed to reproductive health risks in conflict settings, facing restricted access to family planning, prenatal care and emergency obstetric services as healthcare systems collapse alongside the disruptions to agrifood systems described throughout this chapter. These are not separate crises, since the same collapse in infrastructure, personnel and supply chains that drives disease outbreaks and cold chain failures in agrifood systems also removes the reproductive health services young women rely on, compounding the physical toll of conflict for this group.

Chronic exposure to poor living and working conditions also erodes health over the longer term. A study of Syrian migrant agricultural workers in Lebanon found high rates of multimorbidity linked to overcrowded housing and hazardous field conditions (Habib *et al.*, 2016), illustrating how conflict-driven displacement can degrade the health of those who remain economically active in agrifood value chains, women and men alike.

2.3.4. Mental health

Mental health is another major public health concern associated with conflicts. The burden of mental disorders is disproportionately high among conflict-affected populations, and nearly all individuals exposed to conflict experience some degree of psychological distress (Charlson *et al.*, 2019). A meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* estimated that approximately one in five people living in conflict-affected settings (22 percent) experiences a mental disorder, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. This estimate is age-standardized across the underlying studies but is reported as a single pooled figure, not broken down by age group or by sex, so it cannot on its own establish whether young women are more or less affected than other groups (Charlson *et al.*, 2019).

A study investigating the prevalence of and factors associated with PTSD among mothers of children under 5 years of age in Kabul, Afghanistan, following years of conflict, reported a PTSD prevalence of nearly 30 percent (Seino *et al.*, 2008). The study also found that household food security was associated with a lower likelihood of PTSD symptoms, whereas support-seeking behaviour did not have a significant protective effect (Seino *et al.*, 2008). These findings highlight the link between food insecurity and mental health outcomes, reinforced by gender-based inequalities, and the compounded effects of conflict and crises (Suri and Ray, 2025).

This link between food insecurity and mental health is not confined to adults, it also registers clearly among young people. Elgar *et al.* (2021) analysed Gallup World Poll data for 164 118 youth aged 15 to 24 across 160 countries and found that youth in more fragile states, as measured by the Fragile States Index, faced more than double the risk of food insecurity in stable states, alongside more mental health symptoms and lower well-being, even after accounting for household income and state wealth. Severe food insecurity was independently associated with substantially more mental health symptoms and lower well-being among these young respondents. Because state fragility captures much of the instability associated with conflict, this evidence indicates that the mental health

toll documented above extends into the youth population that this report is concerned with. As with Charlson *et al.* (2019) above, however, this study does not report results separately by sex, so it cannot confirm whether young women are more, less, or equally affected within this youth population, a further instance of the data gap behind Recommendation 5.1.

Consistent findings emerge among conflict-affected youth more specifically. A study of Congolese adolescent refugees in Uganda found high rates of post-traumatic stress symptomatology, compounded by feelings of vengeance that complicated recovery and social reintegration (Ainamani *et al.*, 2024), underscoring that the mental health burden documented above extends to the younger cohorts of concern to this report.

These health and nutritional outcomes also have implications for participation in agrifood systems. Poor nutrition, increased disease burden and psychological distress can reduce individuals' capacity to engage consistently in agricultural work and other livelihood activities, while limiting opportunities to adapt to changing livelihood conditions. In this sense, deteriorating health represents not only a consequence of conflict, but also one pathway through which conflict further constrains young women's participation in agrifood systems (Charlson *et al.*, 2019; Seino *et al.*, 2008; FAO, 2025). These pressures also interact with the social dynamics examined in the next section, particularly where illness and caregiving needs add further unpaid demands on young women's time.

2.4 Social impacts

Conflict reshapes the social terms on which young women participate in agrifood systems, including how their labour is divided, how freely they can move, how much say they have over decisions, and how much they can rely on their social networks. This section examines each in turn, closing with conflict-related sexual violence as a distinct but connected thread running through all of them.

Unless otherwise specified, the evidence in this section draws on studies of women and girls in conflict-affected settings that are not always disaggregated by age. Where a source specifically isolates young women (ages 15 to 24) or adolescent girls, this is noted explicitly; where it is not, the finding is presented as relevant context rather than as evidence specific to young women.

2.4.1. The double burden of paid and unpaid labour

In conflict and post-conflict agrifood systems, the death, absence, or displacement of male household members often forces young women to step outside their traditional roles and assume the position of primary breadwinners (WFP, 2018). However, this shift in economic responsibility does not usually coincide with an equitable redistribution of reproductive and domestic labour, resulting in a severe "double burden" for women (WFP, 2018). This time-use evidence comes from studies of women in conflict-affected households more broadly rather than young women specifically, but the pattern it documents is consistent with the labour-market findings in section 2.2 and is a plausible example of the time poverty young women report facing.

The unequal division of unpaid domestic labour documented here reflects a pre-existing gender norm rather than one created by conflict, consistent with the conceptual framework in section 1.1, which holds that conflict acts on and intensifies existing gender inequalities rather than generating them from nothing. For instance, diagnostic data from the Democratic Republic of the Congo reveals that women spend over 3.5 hours more per day on household chores than their male counterparts, severely limiting their leisure and personal time (Trako *et al.*, 2024), a pattern also documented in

non-conflict settings globally and not unique to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's conflict-affected areas. In Syria, entrenched patriarchal norms continue to assign childcare and domestic duties primarily to women, even as they take on paid or informal agricultural work to ensure household survival (WFP, 2018).

This pre-existing baseline extends beyond unpaid labour into paid work itself, since globally, women earn just 82 cents for every dollar earned by men in agricultural wage employment, reflecting multiple structural inequalities, including occupational segregation, unequal access to opportunities, social norms and discrimination (FAO, 2023). Where this new breadwinner role forced by conflict pushes young women into paid agricultural work, they enter it already facing a gap that has nothing to do with the conflict itself. What conflict specifically adds to this pre-existing baseline, as the opening of this section notes, is the forced take-up of breadwinner responsibilities without any corresponding reduction in domestic duties, layering a new paid-work burden onto an unchanged unpaid one. This time poverty constrains young women's capacity to engage in more productive, time-intensive agrifood activities or skills training (WFP, 2018).

2.4.2. Mobility, safety and gender-based violence

The breakdown of the rule of law in conflict zones exacerbates protection risks for women generally, heavily restricting their mobility and dictating the terms of their participation in the agrifood sector. Evidence specific to young women's mobility constraints is limited, but the pattern is consistent with the age-general findings reported here (WFP, 2018). Women face significant threats of gender-based violence, sexual harassment and exploitative wage-labour conditions when working outside the home or in isolated agricultural fields (WFP, 2018). To mitigate these risks, families often restrict women's movement to daylight hours or specific "safe" areas, which subsequently limits them to lower-paying, localized, or home-based food preparation work rather than lucrative, traditionally male-dominated segments of the value chain (WFP, 2018). This is not confined to informal family-level restrictions. In Yemen, all parties to the ongoing conflict, including the Houthis, the internationally recognized government and the Southern Transitional Council, enforce checkpoints requiring women to travel with a mahram (male guardian), with women reporting being stopped and turned back for hours or altogether when traveling without one. Human Rights Watch documents that these restrictions directly harm women's ability to access work, alongside education and healthcare, illustrating how conflict-era mobility restrictions can formalize into enforced policy rather than remaining an informal family safety response (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Similar dynamics of restricted mobility persist in various forms even outside active conflict, but conflict conditions appear to entrench and formalize them further. In extreme cases of economic desperation, the loss of agricultural livelihoods and lack of safe employment have forced some displaced women to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as transactional sex or marrying off daughters at an early age, merely to secure food and shelter for their families (WFP, 2018). This is not an isolated pattern. In South Sudan, families most commonly cite conflict-related poverty and food insecurity as their reason for marrying daughters early, particularly where cattle-based bride prices offer one of the few remaining sources of household income (Bailey and Meelan, 2022). In Sudan, humanitarian organizations report that girls are being married at a lower age as a direct economic coping mechanism amid the ongoing conflict, alongside rising rates of forced marriage linked to displacement (InterAction, 2024).

Evidence focused specifically on adolescent girls shows a sharper version of this same pattern. Pearson *et al.* (2025) surveyed 731 adolescent girls aged 10 to 17 enrolled in a girl's empowerment programme across five regions of Myanmar following the 2021 military coup. Survey findings revealed

that 80.6 percent reported psychological violence and 49.8 percent reported physical violence from a parent or caregiver in the past year. Girls reporting three or more conflict-related stressors were more than twice as likely to report physical violence, and those reporting one to two stressors were twice as likely to report psychological violence, compared with girls reporting no conflict-related stressors. The authors note that parents and caregivers, often trying to protect daughters' safety and reputation under conflict conditions, may respond by restricting their mobility and autonomy, which can, in turn, curtail girls' engagement in activities, including in agrifood livelihoods, that take them outside of the home.

2.4.3. Agency and decision-making power

Despite their critical contributions to household survival and food production, women often experience a disconnect between their economic participation and their actual decision-making power (Trako *et al.*, 2024). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while women participate in the labour market at significantly higher rates than men – primarily as unpaid or self-employed workers on family farms – men continue to dominate major household decisions, including those regarding women's own healthcare (Trako *et al.*, 2024). This extends to decisions over food itself, since a systematic review of intra-household food allocation found that men and older household members are traditionally favoured in many contexts, with women commonly serving others first and themselves last, and that this inequity becomes most pronounced precisely in households facing severe or unexpected food insecurity, the very condition conflict tends to produce (Harris-Fry *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, in Syrian households, women generating income often report having limited say over major financial decisions or taking on debt, reflecting deeply embedded cultural norms that inhibit true empowerment and maintain female subordination even as their economic roles expand (WFP, 2018).

2.4.4. Social cohesion and network resilience

Conflict disrupts community social structures and trust, creating isolating environments for women generally, a pattern this report treats as relevant context for young women given the absence of age-disaggregated evidence (WFP, 2018). Longitudinal evidence from the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia shows that conflict exposure significantly reduces neighborhood and generalized trust among young adults, with food insecurity identified as one of the principal mechanisms driving this decline, and with women experiencing a larger decline in trust than men (Freund and Favara, 2026).

Reduced trust carries direct consequences for participation in agrifood systems, since market engagement, access to credit and collective action all depend on relational networks that conflict systematically dismantles. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, social networks remain heavily segregated along tribal lines, with extremely low levels of trust reported among community members and government institutions (Trako *et al.*, 2024). Displacement further fragments the extended family support systems that women traditionally rely on for childcare and agricultural assistance, leading to profound feelings of loneliness and anxiety (WFP, 2018).

Conversely, targeted agrifood interventions can sometimes foster social healing and integration (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019). For example, in displacement contexts in Lebanon, the establishment of community kitchens provided Syrian refugees and host-community workers not only with food security and income but also a critical space for companionship, trust-building and social cohesion, actively reducing the social isolation commonly experienced by displaced women (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019).

2.4.5. Conflict-related sexual violence and its social effects

Conflict-related sexual violence can have long-term social and household-level effects that extend beyond immediate physical and psychological harm (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Evidence from northern Uganda shows that women survivors of wartime sexual violence, including those with children born as a result of such violence, often face stigma linked to prevailing gender norms and moral judgements around sexuality and motherhood (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). This stigma can affect social acceptance within families and communities, and is shaped by broader sociocultural norms rather than being uniform across contexts (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Girls and young women appear especially exposed to related risks, as parents and caregivers under conflict-related stress may respond by facilitating early or forced marriage in an attempt to protect daughters, which the wider literature links to heightened risk of intimate partner violence and poorer mental health outcomes for the girls concerned (Pearson *et al.*, 2025).

This early marriage pathway also carries consequences for the next generation. Girl child marriage is independently associated with a higher risk of childhood stunting among the children later born to these young mothers, an effect that persists even after accounting for household wealth and the mother's education (Efevbera *et al.*, 2017). The first 1 000 days are a critical window for preventing linear growth faltering, and early stunting is associated with important long-term consequences for cognitive development and future earning potential, although some catch-up growth after age two is possible. Because of this, conflict-driven early marriage among young women can translate into economic and development harm that extends well beyond the period of conflict itself, reinforcing the case for targeted support to young women in these circumstances.

These dynamics may have implications for economic and social participation, as stigma and exclusion can constrain women's access to household and community resources and weaken their ability to access support networks relevant for livelihoods (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). The same study also finds that households affected by wartime sexual violence report higher levels of post-conflict violence within the household compared to other households, indicating potential longer-term effects on intra-household relations and safety (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018).

2.5 Access to and control over productive resources and services

The disconnect between participation and power documented in section 2.4 is most visible in young women's access to and control over productive resources and services. In conflict-affected settings, this access and control is constrained by both physical disruptions and structural and institutional barriers that shape how resources are distributed and controlled. Pre-existing gender norms and unequal power relations often limit young women's access to and control over key assets such as land, inputs and markets, even in situations where their participation in agricultural activities increases (Ronzani, *et al.*, 2024; FAO, 2025), reflecting the pattern of increased labour contribution without corresponding control identified in section 2.4. These constraints affect both access to resources and control over their use and returns.

2.5.1 Structural and institutional barriers

The above structural constraints are reinforced by institutional fragility and weak governance systems, which can restrict access to formal land rights, financial services and market opportunities. In many conflict-affected contexts, reduced state capacity and weakened institutions further exacerbate inequalities in resource access and control. While this evidence is not always age-disaggregated,

it is consistent with the pattern young women report facing (Lecoutere *et al.*, 2023; Christensen and Romano, 2023). Beyond land tenure, conflict also disrupts access to essential agricultural inputs and productive services that enable participation in agrifood systems. Damage to transport networks, insecurity along trade routes and the collapse of local markets can interrupt the supply of seeds, fertilizers, livestock feed and farming equipment, while weakened financial institutions reduce access to credit, savings and agricultural extension services.

The same breakdown in infrastructure also disrupts access to health and nutrition services, as discussed in section 2.3, underscoring that these are not isolated failures but part of a broader collapse in the systems young women rely on. It might seem plausible that conflict could increase young women's de facto control over land where male relatives are mobilized, killed, or displaced, but the documented pattern runs in the opposite direction. Because land titles are typically registered in the name of husbands or fathers under prevailing inheritance systems, their death or absence often triggers property grabbing by other male relatives rather than a transfer of control to widows and daughters, as the Uganda evidence in section 2.5 above illustrates. Consistent with this, these constraints disproportionately affect young women, who are already less likely than men to possess collateral, formal land titles, or established relationships with financial institutions. As a result, even where land remains available, limited access and control over complementary productive resources constrains productivity and reduces opportunities to invest in more resilient and profitable agricultural activities.

2.5.2 Social norms and community dynamics

Conflict also reshapes social norms and community dynamics in ways that influence access and control over productive resources (Freund and Favara, 2026; Eckenwiler, 2018). Limited social cohesion and reduced trust, which reflect the erosion of relational networks discussed in section 2.4 of this chapter and section 1.2 of the previous chapter, weaken the informal networks that are often critical for accessing shared productive resources, inputs and market opportunities (Freund and Favara, 2026; Eckenwiler, 2018). Ethnographic evidence from post-conflict Acholiland in Northern Uganda shows concretely how this can happen. Land access there conventionally ran through fathers for young men and through husbands for young women. War and years of displacement in camps disrupted this pathway, and young women who lacked husbands were left to negotiate access through their fathers' relatives instead, often needing to combine this with renting or buying land to secure enough to farm (Whyte and Acio, 2017). This illustrates how conflict can re-route young women's access to land through weakened and less reliable social ties, even where the land itself remains available.

2.5.3 Access versus control over productive resources

The literature also distinguishes between access to productive resources and control over them (WFP, 2018; Lecoutere *et al.*, 2023; Trako *et al.*, 2024). Young women may contribute labour or use productive assets without having equal influence over decisions about land, production or income. As a result, increased participation does not necessarily translate into greater decision-making power, particularly where gender norms remain unchanged (WFP, 2018; Lecoutere *et al.*, 2023; Trako *et al.*, 2024). These barriers and constraints have direct implications for participation in agrifood systems, affecting not only whether young women participate in agrifood systems, but also the benefits they derive from that participation. Unequal access to, and control over, productive resources limits opportunities to improve productivity, increase earnings and participate in higher-value activities within agrifood systems (FAO, 2023).

Limited access to land, inputs and markets constrains young women's ability to engage in productive activities, reduce risks and diversify livelihoods (Adam *et al.*, 2024; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2025). This, in turn, limits their capacity to move beyond subsistence-level activities and participate in more profitable segments of agrifood value chains (Adam *et al.*, 2024; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2025). This is the structural counterpart to the economic findings in section 1.2, as it is not only that conflict weakens young women's attachment to the labour market, but even where they remain economically active, they do so with a narrower resource base than their male counterparts.

Market access represents another critical dimension of resource inequality, and while limited market access is a common constraint across many low- and middle-income countries, conflict appears to add a distinct and measurable layer on top of this baseline. In Somalia, conflict has been found to specifically slow the transmission of prices between markets for imported staples, consistent with conflict-driven transaction costs rather than poverty alone (Hastings *et al.*, 2022). In Colombia, administrative lending data show that civil conflict directly reduces rural credit and investment through the banking channel, an effect distinguishable from the general market frictions rural producers already face (de Roux and Martínez, 2022). This suggests that conflict does not simply add to pre-existing market access barriers in low- and middle-income countries, but introduces additional, conflict-specific frictions – particularly around security-driven transaction costs – and a chilling effect on credit and investment (Ronzani, *et al.* 2024; FAO, 2025). Insecurity, damaged infrastructure and disrupted value chains often restrict producers' ability to transport goods, access buyers, or participate in formal markets (World Bank, 2017; Lecoutere *et al.*, 2023). For young women, these challenges are frequently compounded by mobility restrictions, safety concerns and persistent social norms that limit independent participation in commercial activities (WFP, 2018). Consequently, they may remain concentrated in low-value or subsistence production while facing greater barriers to entering higher-value segments of agrifood value chains, limiting both income generation and long-term economic resilience.

2.5.4 Implications for participation

Overall, the literature suggests that access and control over productive resources in conflict settings is shaped by a combination of structural inequalities, institutional constraints, and shifting social dynamics, the same three forces that run through sections 2.4 and 2.5 in different guises. Together, they limit young women's ability to participate fully and meaningfully in agrifood systems, reinforcing existing disparities and constraining opportunities for economic empowerment. Just as unequal access and control over productive resources narrows young women's economic options, unequal access to education narrows the skills and credentials they can draw on to pursue those options, which is the focus of the next section.

2.6 Education

Education is the final piece of this chapter's picture. It is what allows young women to convert the labour-market, health and resource conditions examined above into durable skills and credentials. Conflict disrupts education just as it disrupts the other dimensions.

2.6.1 Access to education in conflict-affected settings

The disruption of education documented across conflict-affected settings is not a peripheral effect of war but a direct constraint on young women's future participation in agrifood systems. This is because skills, credentials and mobility strongly influence access to higher-value roles in the sector. Girls in

conflict-affected countries are today nearly two and a half times more likely to be out of school than girls elsewhere. Separately, the number of crisis-affected, school-age children of both sexes requiring urgent educational support has risen sharply in recent years, reaching an estimated 234 million by the end of 2024 (UNICEF, 2025). This access gap compounds an existing labour-market disadvantage, since young women globally are already twice as likely as young men to be classified as NEET, even before conflict is taken into account (FAO, 2025). The long-term consequences of this disruption are well documented. Tracking Cambodians exposed to civil war and genocide during primary-school age decades later, Islam *et al.*, (2016) found that each additional year of conflict exposure during primary school reduced educational attainment and lifetime earnings, and increased fertility. These effects are still measurable in adulthood, long after the conflict itself had ended. For young women in particular, this suggests that education lost to conflict today does not simply delay entry into agrifood systems, but can permanently narrow the higher-value roles and earnings they are able to access throughout their working lives. This gap compounds, rather than simply adds to, the economic and social constraints already described in sections 2.2 and 2.4.

2.6.2 Conflict exposure and schooling outcomes

Recent quantitative evidence specifically links the disruption of education to conflict exposure. Geo-referenced conflict data matched to survey data across 28 African countries find that proximity to armed conflict is associated with reductions in girls' years of schooling, with the most negative effects concentrated in wealthier locations that had comparatively low female educational attainment to begin with (Tai, El Arab and Ramadan, 2025). This pattern, while counterintuitive at first glance, reflects two things according to the authors. In the poorest locations, girls' school attendance is already very low regardless of conflict, leaving little room for a further decline, while in wealthier locations where female education was not already prioritized, households appear more willing to withdraw girls from school at the first sign of conflict, consistent with a household decision-making pathway rather than damage to school infrastructure itself. Effects were somewhat less severe in Eastern Africa. The study suggests that recurring conflict episodes may be associated with partial habituation, with positive effects in later years of exposure partly offsetting earlier losses. Notably, and in a point of accuracy worth preserving for this chapter, the same study did not find that conflict exposure increased child marriage or parental death in its data, pointing instead to school closures, safety concerns and reallocation of household resources as the more likely pathways (Tai, El Arab and Ramadan, 2025). This nuance matters: education loss during conflict should not be attributed automatically to child marriage, even though the two are often assumed to be linked.

2.6.3 Rural education and training infrastructure

Conflict also compounds pre-existing weaknesses in rural education and training infrastructure that already limited young women's pathways into agrifood livelihoods (WFF, 2026). This finding draws on a global, youth-led consultation process spanning the Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Development Goal 5 in New York, the WFF Geneva Thematic Youth Assembly, the 69th Commission on the Status of Women, and the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum that was implemented through a global survey of young people and youth organizations in agrifood systems (WFF, 2026). Youth consultations conducted through the WFF's global thematic consultation on young women's empowerment in agrifood systems found that schools in rural and conflict-affected areas are frequently underfunded and lack basic infrastructure, sanitation and trained teachers, while hands-on agricultural, entrepreneurship and climate-resilient training remains scarce and poorly aligned with agrifood challenges. The consultations also identified cost, travel distance, rigid scheduling

and unmet caregiving needs as barriers to young women's participation in vocational and technical training, intersecting with the mobility and unpaid-care constraints identified above in section 2.4 (WFF, 2026).

2.6.4 Implications for future participation

The education losses above have shown measurable downstream implications for participation in agrifood systems. A systematic review of youth skills-training programmes in low- and middle-income countries finds that structured agricultural skills training is associated with improved job creation, income and entrepreneurship outcomes for young people engaging in agriculture (Maïga *et al.*, 2020). Where conflict disrupts access to schooling and training, including through displacement, insecurity and disruption to education systems, it narrows the pathways available to young women beyond low-paid, informal or subsistence roles. Evidence from conflict-affected settings highlights how these barriers can make continued participation in education particularly difficult for girls and young women (UNICEF and IDMC, 2019). This compounds an existing disadvantage: globally, young women are twice as likely as young men to be classified as NEET (FAO, 2025). Conflict does not create this gap but can widen it, leaving young women with fewer skills and credentials from which to rebuild livelihoods. The extent of these effects varies by context and by the intensity and duration of conflict (FAO, 2025).

Taken together with the economic, health, social and resource-related constraints described above, these education gaps complete the picture of how conflict narrows young women's participation in agrifood systems, the synthesis to which the chapter now turns.

2.7. Synthesis

Three findings emerge from the evidence in this chapter. First, conflict restricts young women's participation in agrifood systems through multiple pressures rather than isolated shocks. Reduced and lower-quality employment, limited access to and control over productive resources, constrained mobility, weakened social networks and trust, and increased unpaid care responsibilities narrow livelihood choices and undermine economic security, social positioning, and well-being.

Second, these pressures interact and compound pre-existing inequalities. Conflict intensifies structural barriers, gender norms, and unequal control over resources that already shape young women's participation in agrifood systems. Conflict-related sexual violence can further reinforce disadvantage through longer-term effects on household relations, social exclusion, and access and control over productive resources.

Third, the strength of evidence varies across thematic areas. Evidence is strongest for labour-market and food-security outcomes, but more limited for young women specifically across agrifood value chains, resource control, social dynamics and some health outcomes. Evidence is also limited on how experiences differ by age, marital status, displacement history and location.

Chapter 3 builds on these findings by examining how young women respond to these constraints, from individual to community-level strategies.



Chapter 3.

Young women's resilience strategies in conflict-affected agrifood systems

3.1. Overview

Chapter 2 highlighted how conflicts affect young women's participation in agrifood systems through multiple, interconnected pathways that shape livelihood opportunities and access and control over productive resources. Young women impacted by conflicts continuously adapt, respond and create opportunities under difficult circumstances. In many cases, they exercise remarkable resilience, often overcoming not only the challenges due to conflicts but also the gender norms and social constraints that existed before the onset of conflict.

This chapter explores how young women exercise resilience within conflict-affected agrifood systems and the resources, strategies and forms of agency they draw upon to navigate uncertainty and sustain their livelihoods. Understanding these resilience strategies is essential for transforming agrifood systems in ways that better support and empower youth, particularly young women, to withstand and mitigate the impacts of shocks on their lives. Interventions that strengthen resilience must recognize and build upon the capacities and resources that young women already have, rather than just relying on solutions that may not reflect local realities. Examining how young women currently respond to conflict can help identify context-specific pathways for strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to future shocks.

Given the multiple ways in which conflict affects young women's lives, resilience takes many different forms. The evidence reviewed for this chapter highlights a diverse range of capacities through which young women respond to, cope with and adapt to conflict. These capacities operate across different levels, from the individual and household to the community and institutional level, and encompass multiple dimensions of resilience, including psychological, social, environmental, political and economic (United Nations, 2020). Because these levels and dimensions frequently overlap, we chose to synthesize the evidence under three overarching analytical categories, based on the areas most consistently represented in the selected literature: (3.2) individual resilience, (3.3) community resilience and (3.4) economic resilience. While presented separately, these forms of resilience are interconnected and often overlap, with (young) women frequently relying on multiple sources and levels of resilience that interact and reinforce one another.

Most studies reviewed for this chapter focus on women more broadly. While all included women within the age range used in this report (15 to 24), none disaggregate results by age. Therefore, their findings cannot be attributed specifically to young women. We draw on this broader evidence to illustrate resilience strategies that are likely to be relevant to young women. Where findings come from studies of young women specifically, this is clearly indicated.

As with Chapter 2, the resilience strategies documented here are not, by themselves, a blueprint for programming; applying them requires the same conflict-sensitive, context-specific judgement introduced in section 1.1.

3.2 Individual resilience

Individual resilience refers to the capacity of a person to sustain functioning under adversity through behavioural and material means such as adapting livelihoods, reconfiguring social roles, developing coping strategies, and maintaining or restoring economic agency (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2008). This includes psychological resilience, which refers to the mental and emotional dimension of that same capacity through preserving well-being, regulating distress, sustaining self efficacy and a sense of purpose, and constructing meaning in the face of loss (Bonanno, 2004; Southwick *et al.*, 2014). Principally, the research found that individual resilience was used as a common adaptive measure amongst women during conflict.

For instance, the individual choice to relocate and exercise mobility can be considered a strategy of resilience employed by women. In northern Uganda, women aged 20 to 40, who had survived wartime sexual violence deliberately chose to marry, cohabit or relocate from rural areas to peri-urban or urban settings to escape stigma, rejection and abuse from both family members and intimate partners (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Relocation to towns not only offered anonymity and the opportunity to rebuild social networks but also reduced exposure to the patriarchal expectations and kinship pressures that dictate gendered expectations of an ideal wife. Consequently, this form of individual resilience allowed women to reclaim their autonomy in their new place of residence. In other cases, women chose to exercise individual resilience for the motivation of strategically safeguarding her children's futures. Faced with customary systems in which children's identity and access to land depended on patrilineal lineage, one 29-year-old woman re-established contact with her former captor, or the captors' family, to secure inheritance and land rights for their children, suggesting agency even within deeply traumatic circumstances (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Herein, it can be noted that while women can face enduring challenges and memories of abuse and struggle from conflict periods, they may elect to exercise individual resilience for the rights and quality of life for their offspring.

Relatedly, the clear expression of individual resilience can often be exhibited by women as a means of securing better household stability and opportunities. In Yemen, FAO's evaluation of the "Water for Peace" project documents women engaged in cash-for-work activities wherein they received direct income for agricultural labour, a significant transition from surrounding communities where women's labour was uncompensated (FAO, 2022). The evaluation recorded women aspiring for a stable future rather than mere survival or crisis coping. These women engaged in cash-for-work labour also expressed a desire to move from casual daily-waged status to secure, fixed employment, framing continuous income as an existential need. This display of individual resilience suggests how women are not only seeking new and sustained economic activity for themselves, but are pursuing individual resilience as a means of providing and supporting their family unit during crises.

A distinctive feature of women's individual resilience in conflict is that of gendered duties in the household, particularly around childrearing and caregiving. A study on Ukrainian refugee and immigrant mothers documented how women adapted child-feeding practices while escaping from conflict and during relocation (Artzi-Medvedik, Tsikholska and Chertok, 2024). These mothers sustained breastfeeding through displacement, navigated disrupted food access, and adapted children's diets and feeding practices to the food environment of their new host country. In this case, women's practices of individual resilience involve adapting personal decisions and strategies around childrearing as a primary priority, due to their maternal role.

Despite this prioritization, the study also highlights the psychological cost that displaced mothers experience upon moving away from familiar and social networks that would otherwise have offered support and guidance in culturally based child-feeding practices. Interestingly, this loss of support, combined with mother and child psychological distress, was linked to poorer diet quality (Artzi-

Medvedik, Tsikholska and Chertok, 2024). This interaction between individual agency and the broader enabling environment is further illustrated by Iellamo *et al.*, (2024), whose study title is drawn from a Ukrainian mother's statement that she "couldn't find the strength to resist" pressure from medical staff to accept commercial infant formula. Although mothers wished to continue breastfeeding, they faced opposition from maternity hospital staff and language barriers that limited access to lactation support and inadequate professional guidance. This contradiction between women's desires during conflict and the pragmatic realities of childrearing during conflict reflects the limitations and challenges that women face in exercising individual resilience against systemic challenges. Thus, it is suggested here that in constraining circumstances, individual resilience can be defeated by hostile or limited institutional environments.

Beyond prioritizing the family and household unit, individual resilience has also been evidenced by the sacrifices and precarious work that women sometimes must undergo to survive. This was evident in literature examining the experiences of IDPs living in settlements in Mozambique. Despite lacking formal ownership of land, women were described as the backbone of agricultural production, securing access to land through short-term rental arrangements and informal agreements to produce food (Synnestvedt, Maviza and Maphosa, 2025). Beyond agricultural activities, women engaged in anticipatory actions by securing food, water and firewood in preparation for potential disasters. However, structural inequalities impose limits on women's resilience. For instance, limited control over productive assets and financial resources constrained women's ability to cope with economic shocks (Synnestvedt, Maviza and Maphosa, 2025). In case of crop failure, women reported engaging in sex to cope with financial distress as a means of survival. Furthermore, while humanitarian actors sought to strengthen women's financial autonomy by channeling assistance to them, increased access to and control over productive resources, such as finances, could also generate tensions within households, with some women experiencing violence from male partners as financial pressures intensified (Synnestvedt, Maviza and Maphosa, 2025). This reflects that individual resilience does not necessarily yield positive measures of adaptation; rather, women's experiences and manifestations of individual resilience can be short-term and rooted in a fundamental need for survival.

Ultimately, the findings are consistent with broader evidence suggesting that young people often possess important psychological strengths that support their capacity to cope with adversity. As highlighted in *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (FAO, 2025), although youth generally control fewer material resources than adults, they tend to report higher levels of subjective resilience, that is, greater self-confidence in their ability to deal with shocks and stresses. An analysis conducted in household data from countries affected by protracted crises, including Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, found that younger people generally express stronger beliefs in their capacity to bounce back, learn from past experiences and adapt to changing circumstances. Notably, when the gender of the household head was considered, the analysis found no significant interaction between age and gender, suggesting that young women may possess psychological resources and confidence in their ability to cope with adversity that are comparable to those of young men, even where their material resources, rights and opportunities are more constrained (FAO, 2025).

However, while it is evident that women were able to find ways to react to their condition during conflict in an effort for individual and household survival, it is important to note that in some cases, such adaptive measures can further exacerbate the limited rights and autonomy of women. When disaggregating by gender, the manifestations of individual resilience reveal that the intentions behind women's adaptive strategies during conflict are often due to their gendered roles in the household, such as childrearing and maintaining the domestic unit (FAO, 2025). While individual resilience can prolong or support immediate survival, it is fundamental to recognize its constraints and even limitations on sustainability and capacity for women to achieve individual, structural and sustained rights.

3.3 Community resilience

There is no single universally accepted definition of community resilience. However, a systematic review by Patel *et al.* (2017) identified nine recurring elements across literature used to characterize community resilience: local knowledge, community network and relationships, communication, health, governance and leadership, resources, economic investment, preparedness and mental outlook.

Across the literature reviewed, young women's community resilience manifested as the relationships, practices and collective structures that women built or leaned on in a community, especially when other forms of support had been weakened or lost. In this chapter, community resilience refers to the ways these relationships became organized into collective actions, shared spaces and locally led solutions.

The literature highlighted how community networks and relationships were built and leveraged to overcome food insecurity. In Lebanon, Syrian refugee women aged 25 to 35 years, participated in community kitchens to prepare meals together. Women in these groups described the experience as building companionship, reducing loneliness and strengthening cohesion between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host-community (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019). Syrian refugee mothers who received these meals as food aid described a related but different form of community resilience; knowing that each family received the same food created a sense of unity, agency and equity across the wider community (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019). Addressing food insecurity through such community efforts offered both material and psychosocial benefits, including reduced food expenses, less anxiety about feeding their families, and peace of mind that came from not having to constantly worry about feeding their households.

The food systems and community resilience centred around women is seen in collective farm labour, such as in Uganda and Colombia, where women, not only offer social support to each other but also engage in collective food production on land and livestock, as well as sharing skills and local knowledge (Seff *et al.*, 2024; Ortiz-Araque *et al.*, 2026). During crises, where working individually can be challenging, group-based coping mechanisms through material and social support can provide a buffer to maintain food security.

Community support played a similarly important role among Ukrainian refugee mothers adapting to relocation in host countries (Artzi-Medvedik, Tsikholska and Chertok, 2024). Women, between 21 and 37 years old, reported not being able to sustain breastfeeding or finding culturally familiar food for supplemental feeding in the new location. Women who struggled to access nutritious foods for their children, due to financial constraints and the limited supplies they could carry during displacement, described how local communities supported them by providing meals and other forms of assistance. This suggests that while at the individual level women adapted to ensure nutrition for their children, community networks also functioned as a source of resilience.

Other forms of community resilience offered to young women and youth are exercised through governance and leadership, and are more intentionally structured. In Colombia, an Embera Dobidá Indigenous community displaced from its ancestral territory in Chocó due to armed conflict, developed a community-led and interculturally supported intervention to reinstate collective well-being (Agudelo-Hernández, Mecha-Chamorro and Marulanda-López, 2025). The study focused on children and adolescents – 46 percent of which were females aged 6 to 17 years – and examined psychological well-being, food security and grief related to displacement after an intervention. The intervention combined traditional ceremonies, including those led by women, infrastructure development such as improved sanitation and clean water, community engagement through intercultural mental health support and psychological first aid adapted to the community's cosmovision. As a result, significant improvements were observed in mental health, food security, environmental distress and family bonding

dynamics, despite modest improvements in economic conditions. This case illustrates both individual and community resilience being built through culture, land, food and relationships, rather than through service delivery alone.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Trako *et al.* (2024) found that women's trust in extended family, close neighbours and village chiefs remained comparatively strong during conflict, while trust in the wider village, government and foreigners had largely collapsed. Social networks also remained sharply clustered along tribal lines. This suggests that community resilience does not operate evenly across all scales. Close family and neighbourly ties may hold even when broader community cohesion and institutional trust deteriorate.

However, the literature, although limited, suggests that the resilience provided by these networks may not always be sustainable over time, but rather serve a temporary buffer during the early stages of a crisis. As conflict becomes prolonged and resources become increasingly scarce, the capacity of relatives, neighbours and friends to provide assistance may gradually diminish. This is illustrated by the experience of a 24-year-old woman living in Syria who reported that relatives, neighbours and friends were no longer able to meet the growing demands for support, as many members of the community had "nothing left to give" after years of conflict (WFP, 2018).

In other contexts, very little may hold. In Syria, a World Food Programme (WFP) study of urban livelihoods found that displacement had fractured many women's social networks, leaving some isolated and without the family and neighbourly support they previously relied on (WFP, 2018). In Aleppo, host-community members expressed mistrust toward newly arrived IDPs, although the study notes that tensions between these groups were not examined in depth because of the sensitivity of the topic (WFP, 2018).

Community resilience is also developed through community groups in post-conflict settings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, FAO and WFP launched informal community groups known as Dimitra Clubs where women, men and youth could discuss local problems and take collective action (FAO, 2019). These Clubs function as spaces for dialogue and action at the community level, supporting socio-economic empowerment, community mobilization, gender equality and collective decision-making. In one of the clubs, women reported owning their own fishing nets and fishing, an activity that they had not done prior to joining the club. This example shows that community resilience can also involve changing what women are socially permitted to do within agrifood systems.

Similarly, in a post-conflict context in Northern Uganda, young people reported community resilience to secure livelihood resources (Mdege, Mayanja and Mudege, 2022). They did this by exercising collective agency to tactfully circumvent structural barriers to accessing finances for participating in agrifood systems. Young men and women formed a collective labour pool and leveraged saving groups to attain agricultural inputs and generate income.

Taken together, these examples suggest that community resilience is not simply the presence of social ties and networks. It depends on whether those ties can be organized into safe, trusted and meaningful forms of collective action to complement and enhance individual resilience. It is also important to recognize that in conflict contexts, community resilience may not be sustainable, as the increased duration and spread of conflict can further deepen resource constraints for communities as a whole. Interventions intending to support young people, especially young women in conflict or post-conflict settings, should identify the community-level structures that can be leveraged to ensure programmes are delivered to those who need them the most. While host communities can offer buffer to IDPs and refugees, these support channels can also weaken over time and to maintain community resilience, interventions need to focus on creating opportunities that people can use with their own agency. This is where economic resilience becomes an important element, which is covered in the next section.

3.4 Economic resilience

Economic resilience among women in conflict-affected agrifood systems is driven by their ability to adapt livelihoods, diversify income and benefit from new economic opportunities. As discussed in section 2.2.1 above, exposure to conflict is associated with a shift in women's labour towards agriculture, particularly in earlier or more episodic stages of conflict. For rural women, engaging in agriculture serves as a critical mechanism to maintain household food security, especially when male household members are absent due to conflict-related mobilization (Ronzani *et al.*, 2024). FAO (2025) similarly finds that young women tend to engage more in agricultural work during conflict and are also more likely than men and adult women to work longer hours. However, as discussed in section 2.2.3, this buffering role is not indefinite and agricultural employment and hours worked among young women may decline as conflict becomes protracted.

Rather than relying on a single livelihood strategy, young women, and women more broadly, frequently combine agricultural activities with entrepreneurship, shifting occupations as circumstances change and identifying innovative ways to sustain their households. Livelihood diversification emerged consistently across the literature as one of the primary ways in which women respond to conflict. In northern Uganda, rural women who had survived wartime sexual violence combined farming with a range of informal income-generating activities, including tailoring, brewing alcohol, beadwork and clothing sales (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). For some, severe injuries sustained during conflict made agricultural labour physically impossible, leading them to shift towards occupations that better matched their physical conditions, such as tailoring. Others entered sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as riding in trucks to sell goods in villages or taking up work in alcohol and cotton-ginning factories. These activities enabled women to provide food, education, rent and healthcare for their households to reduce reliance on their husbands while increasing their ability to participate in family decision-making. Some women used their earnings to support extended family members and rebuild social harmony and standing within their families and communities.

A similar pattern of diversification is evident in the Acholi region of Uganda, where young people combined construction work, carpentry, restaurant work, fishing, hunting and trading, some of which they were able to pursue even while in displacement camps (Oosterom, Namuggala and Szyp, 2022). Comparable dynamics emerge in South Sudan, where research on young women and adolescent girls aged 14 to 24 found that conflict altered livelihood choices: Young women affected by civil war were more likely to engage in farm self-employment than those not directly affected by conflict, a finding the authors interpreted as a response to the need to provide for their families under conditions of crisis (Buehren, *et al.* 2017b).

While conflict can expand women's economic roles, these opportunities continue to be shaped by prevailing gender norms. In northern Nigeria, young women and women up to age 35 from non-displaced households faced social disapproval for engaging in groundnut trading, since trading was viewed as a male activity. Evidence of this is from an age range broader than this report's core 15 to 24 definition, but is included here as the best available source on this dynamic (Nwagboso *et al.*, 2025). However, this was different for IDPs, as community members were more accepting of an internally displaced woman engaging in trading, since her higher financial needs made such livelihood strategies more socially legitimate. Together, these findings highlight how resilience is shaped not only by gender norms, but also by the specific social circumstances in which young women find themselves. At the same time, the same South Sudan study by Buehren *et al.* (2017b) suggests that conflict can reinforce rather than challenge traditional gender attitudes. Conflict-affected adolescent girls expressed more traditional views regarding gender roles than girls who had not experienced conflict, suggesting that increased insecurity may encourage a return to more conventional divisions of labour in which women assume responsibility for domestic work while men are viewed as protectors of the household.

Beyond diversifying livelihoods, conflict also creates conditions in which entrepreneurship and innovation become important pathways for resilience. In the Gaza Strip, hydroponic farming emerged as an adaptive response to the combined challenges of political instability, land degradation, water scarcity and damaged agricultural infrastructure (Mizyed, 2026). Young farmers adopted soilless cultivation not only because it offered a more environmentally sustainable production system, but also because it enabled continued agricultural production despite contaminated soil caused by military activities, repeated electricity shortages, input restrictions and the destruction of conventional farming systems. Young farmers reported further resilience by improvising irrigation equipment and manually adapting production systems when essential materials and hydroponic input were unavailable due to Israeli blockade restrictions. Beyond enabling agricultural production under extreme constraints, for young men and women in densely populated urban areas with little access to land, hydroponic farming represented a way to both generate income and secure food supplies. In several cases, family-based hydroponic projects that began as ways to secure household food security evolved into micro-enterprises. One young woman, for instance, branded her initiative and spoke of wanting to scale it up and employ other young people in her community. A sign of how, for her, resilience extended beyond survival and coping towards creating new economic opportunities and imagining a future.

The war in Ukraine provides another example of how entrepreneurship can emerge as a pathway to resilience during conflict (Shkarupa, Vlasenko and Makedon, 2025). With male labour force mobilization and disruptions to agricultural supply chains, women have increasingly taken on responsibilities traditionally performed by men, including farm management, food production and agricultural trade (See Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Women's entrepreneurship in Ukrainian agribusiness during wartime: challenges, resilience and strategic empowerment

Before the full-scale invasion in 2022, women already played an important role in Ukrainian agriculture and rural economies. Their participation has continued to grow despite wartime disruptions, with women accounting for 56 percent of new individual entrepreneurs in Ukraine in 2023. However, the war has created unprecedented challenges, compounding general barriers such as displacement, labour shortages, market instability, damaged infrastructure and limited access to finance, with gender-specific obstacles including unequal access to land, bureaucratic constraints, rising caregiving responsibilities and persistent stereotypes around women's leadership, all intensified by increased security risks and reduced economic opportunities.

Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs are reported to display resilience by adapting their businesses, seeking new partnerships, entering foreign markets, adopting innovative practices, and developing strategies to overcome uncertainty. Using a fuzzy cognitive mapping model, the researchers identified that legal frameworks, government support, market opportunities, mentorship and women's role in post-war reconstruction are the most important drivers of entrepreneurial success in rural areas. Access to financing, education and training, networking opportunities, technological inclusion and institutional support also play essential roles.

Women-led enterprises are contributing not only to economic growth but also to rural community development, job creation, innovation and sustainable agricultural practices, underscoring their strategic importance for rebuilding Ukraine's agricultural sector and strengthening food security. The authors therefore call for targeted policies to reduce structural barriers and strengthen women's participation, including improved access to financing, simplified regulations, mentorship programmes, training in technology and business management, stronger market integration, and greater public recognition of women entrepreneurs. Overall, the case study suggests that although war has intensified existing inequalities and created significant obstacles for women entrepreneurs, it has also highlighted their capacity for adaptation, leadership and innovation (Shkarupa, Vlasenko and Makedon, 2025).

Economic resilience is also strengthened through collective initiatives that reduce financial vulnerability while creating employment opportunities. Community kitchens in Lebanon helped Syrian refugee families reduce food expenditures, avoid debt and redirect limited household resources towards other essential needs (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019). For women employed in the kitchens, the regular income increased financial independence, reduced reliance on humanitarian assistance and contributed to greater psychological well-being, suggesting how community-based initiatives can simultaneously strengthen economic and social resilience.

Yet, economic activity during or after conflict is not without risks. Women and girls often assume primary responsibility for maintaining the economic well-being of their households, regardless of whether male family members participate directly in conflict. This responsibility can push women towards insecure and high-risk income-generating activities, including sex work (FAO, 2025). Agrifood systems, in this sense, can be a source of both livelihood and risk, as general insecurity increases exposure to violence, including sexual and physical violence for those engaged in agricultural activities. As a result, exposure to conflict is often associated with a reduction in agricultural production, agricultural land use and agricultural labour (FAO, 2025).

This pattern can occur not only during conflict, but also in its aftermath. In northern Uganda, for example, young men and women found it difficult to re-engage effectively in agriculture once the war ended: many returned home with nothing, lacked the practical skills and knowledge to farm, feared landmines, and remained dependent on parents and existing power hierarchies for access to land. As a consequence, to earn income independently, young women and men turned to a range of alternative livelihood strategies, including fetching water for block making, selling vegetables, cooking food at construction sites and brewing and selling alcohol (Mdege, Mayanja and Mudege, 2022).

3.5 Synthesis

This chapter demonstrated that while conflicts severely disrupt agrifood systems, young people, especially young women, are not merely passive victims. Instead, they adapt, respond and create opportunities under the most difficult circumstances. They continuously exercise individual resilience, overcoming conflict-driven shocks while simultaneously challenging the gender norms and economic constraints. As evidence across the three types of individual, community and economic resilience show, these strategies are mutually reinforcing. These findings also align with existing evidence such as shown in the FAO guidance note *Gender, food security and nutrition in protracted crises: Women and girls as agents of resilience* (2016) that suggests women ensure household food security by pivoting into agricultural production even though their domestic work burden increases during crises. To manage the intensifying pressure, young women leverage community-based platforms whether through saving groups, communal kitchens or other available means to secure livelihood. The resilience strategies presented in this chapter show how individual burden, community structures and economic opportunities are deeply interconnected.



Chapter 4.

Enabling conditions for resilience

4.1. Overview

While the previous chapter examined the various types by which young women, and women more broadly, display resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems, resilience cannot be understood solely as an individual capacity and may be contingent on the resources and access available to them during conflict. Rather, it is shaped by their capacity to cope, adapt and transform their livelihoods depending on the resources, supportive institutions and inclusive relationships available to them. As such, resilience cannot be understood uniformly across women or contexts. This chapter therefore shifts the focus from resilience as an outcome to the enabling conditions that make resilience possible. Enabling conditions refer to the institutional, social, economic and environmental factors that create opportunities for women to access productive resources, exercise agency and adapt their livelihoods during conflict. These conditions do not automatically produce resilience; rather, they influence the extent to which existing capacities can be mobilized and adaptive or transformative responses to conflict-related shocks can be pursued.

Drawing on evidence across conflict-affected contexts, this chapter attempts to identify the structural and contextual factors that strengthen the adaptive capacity of young women, and of women more broadly where evidence on young women is limited. It illustrates how these conditions influence whether young women or women can respond to conflict-related shocks, sustain their livelihoods and participate successfully in agrifood systems. Rather than identifying their reactive responses to conflict, the purpose of this chapter is to build a framework of youth- and age-responsive conditions that foster the ability for young women to exercise resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems. To do this, each section considers how conflict disrupted the livelihoods of young women, how a certain enabler played within its context, and how it interacted with other institutional and social factors. This approach allows the chapter to interrogate whether an enabling condition is transferable across contexts, or whether its effect was contingent on the particularities of a given crisis.

The enabling conditions discussed in this chapter should likewise be assessed against local conflict dynamics before being translated into programming, consistent with the “do no harm” principle introduced in section 1.1.

4.2 Inclusive governance and youth participation

One major enabling condition that fosters resilience among young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems is inclusive, gender-responsive governance and youth participation. Gender-responsive governance refers to approaches that recognize the different needs, experiences, opportunities, constraints and power relations of women and men, and seek to address gender inequalities in the formulation and implementation of policies and governance processes. It also recognizes the additional risks and burdens women may face when taking on public governance roles, including backlash, harassment, safety concerns and increased workloads, particularly due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities.

This concept was built on the foundation laid by feminist policy scholars, who have long argued for the importance of explicitly addressing men’s and women’s differentiated opportunities, challenges and needs in policy (Bhattacharya and Rani, 1995; McPhail, 2003). Within agrifood systems, gender-responsive governance includes gender-responsive laws and policies, securing land and resource

rights, inclusive institutions and governance processes that enable women to participate meaningfully in decision-making while ensuring equitable access to productive resources and opportunities (Lecoutere *et al.*, 2023).

The main argument is that the use of gender-neutral language in policy fails to acknowledge and address the gender differences that exist in society and even end up exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. Policy documents play a foundational role in the transformation of unequal gender power relations (Jacobs *et al.*, 2021), and integrating gender-inclusive language in agrifood systems development policies is seen as crucial for holding governments and institutions accountable to their commitments (Ampaire *et al.*, 2020; Brown, 2011).

Evidence suggests that gender-responsive governance is fundamental for building women's resilience because it addresses inequalities embedded within institutions. Governance also depends on women having meaningful representation within local decision-making structures. Takeshima *et al.* (2025) show that female political representation increases women's participation in community meetings, collective action and voluntary associations, while helping to reduce the negative effects of conflict and climate shocks on women's civic engagement.

An example comes from a case study in the FAO "Water for Peace in Yemen" project, implemented in a context characterised by prolonged conflict, water scarcity, and institutional fragility (FAO, 2022). The initiative strengthened local water governance through the establishment and support of water user associations (WUAs), while also promoting the formal inclusion of women in water resource management and conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. The benefits for women in the project generated tangible improvements in local livelihoods, particularly through the creation of paid employment opportunities on farms following increased access to water. As one group of women explained, "With the construction of the dam, water became available to all the farms; so the farmers planted crops, and we, as female workers, worked" (FAO, 2022).

At the same time, the project contributed to strengthening women's participation in local governance. Through mediation training, institutional recognition and increased involvement in decision-making processes, women transitioned from largely informal community roles to recognized positions as mediators and local governance actors. This institutionalization of women's participation enabled them to contribute more effectively to the resolution of water-related disputes, facilitate community dialogue and strengthen collective cooperation in the management of shared natural resources.

Together, these changes suggest how improved access to productive resources, coupled with capacity-building and institutional inclusion, can simultaneously expand women's economic opportunities and strengthen their agency and participation in local governance.

This governance intervention also supported resilience in agrifood systems. The Yemen case suggests significant economic achievement and gender-related results by contributing to the recovery of agricultural livelihoods, with more than 1 200 families able to return to agricultural land that had been abandoned for 12 years, while 36 percent of respondents reported increased livestock production, indicating positive effects on community productive capacity and livelihoods (FAO, 2022).

In terms of women's empowerment, 133 women participated in WUAs, while 9 women occupied positions on WUA administrative bodies, representing 30 percent of leadership, a substantial increase compared with the 3 percent minimum female participation established in the WUA bylaws. In addition, 40 percent of respondents identified women's involvement in conflict resolution as one of the intervention's impacts, suggesting that the project combined economic opportunities with increased female participation in community decision-making and water-resource management (FAO, 2022).

Regional evidence further highlights that effective governance requires legal protection, institutional support and collective action. FAO, African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Natural Resources Institute (NRI) (2025) identify secure land and resource rights, women's organizations, gender-transformative policies and investment in women-led movements as key governance mechanisms enabling women's resilience across sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, FAO (2016) argues that strengthening women's leadership, developing gender-responsive policies, improving access to land and other productive resources, supporting women's organizations and collective action, and strengthening gender-sensitive information systems create the institutional conditions necessary to improve women's food security, agricultural productivity and livelihood resilience during protracted crises.

Collectively, these studies suggest that gender-responsive governance enables resilience by transforming the institutional environment within which women and young women operate. While women often display remarkable adaptive capacity during conflict, resilience is considerably strengthened when supported by governance systems that protect women's rights, secure access and control over productive resources, promote meaningful participation in decision-making and establish inclusive institutions capable of addressing structural gender inequalities.

4.3 Social protection

Another enabling condition that fosters an environment for resilience is social protection. Social protection, whether through formalized or informal programmes, serves as critical interventions across regions to ensure basic services, economic stability, and capacity building for the most marginalized communities during ongoing and recurring humanitarian crises (FAO, 2017). Social protection can be defined through a myriad of policies, practices and programmes, that are fundamentally focused on safeguarding people from social exclusion, poverty and marginalization (FAO, 2017).

Frequently, they can be led by governments, humanitarian agencies and other institutions, or they can be co-created between them. Importantly, social protection comprises policies and programmes designed to prevent and reduce poverty and vulnerability, protect income and livelihoods, and strengthen people's capacity to manage risks and shocks. This is critical for women and young people, considering the central role that they play in upkeeping and maintaining their household units. Social protection initiatives serve as relevant interventions particularly in fragile contexts where good governance and institutions may be weakened, and where social cohesion may be limited and fractured.

In these scenarios, social protection programmes can fill essential gaps by providing support to affected communities, from cash assistance and social insurance, to labour market protection (FAO, 2017). Notably, however, the literature surrounding social protection as enabling conditions of resilience rarely disaggregates the needs specific to young women, revealing how while young women may be beneficiaries of such programmes, gender- and age-differentiated support may not be conceived or rolled out.

When government capacities become heavily constrained under conflicts, humanitarian agencies can co-create or support the implementation of national social protection programmes to build resilience. For instance, organizations like WFP have supported countries to improve their national social protection, where social protection programmes were upscaled and supported to shape policies and legislation, and deliver services and assistance (WFP, 2024). Through national social protection, organizations like WFP have assisted in critical humanitarian interventions, from working with governments to provide school meals or cash-based transfers (WFP, 2024). This reflects the need of multisectoral collaboration in facilitating social protection for local communities to access essential services and needs during times of conflict.

While social protection programmes have expanded manifold in the last three decades (FAO, 2017), their relevance in conflict-affected scenarios is highlighted by their focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, such as youth and women. Research has shown that social protection can foster resilience by reducing immediate vulnerability in contexts of displacement, food insecurity and income loss (FAO, 2017). As social protection can manifest frequently through cash transfers, food assistance and social safety nets, this stabilizes household consumption and improves sustainable coping strategies (FAO, 2017). In conflict-affected settings where young women often carry caregiving and food provisioning responsibilities, these interventions can thus improve women's economic resilience because the scope of support manifests primarily through the household-level.

In light of humanitarian funding cuts, investing in social protection offers sustainable, long-term and more preventative visions for resilience building. When a conflict occurs, those who are on the frontlines of food production – from smallholder women farmers, to fishers, to forest communities who maintain the food chain and steward crops, animals and forests – are among the first to lose their livelihoods (FAO, 2017). Social protection programmes thus focus on building the capacities of people to diversify their assets, protect their rights and mitigate negative impacts of conflicts through holistic and sustainable means (FAO, 2017). In fragile contexts where conflict is rampant, coordinated social protection has facilitated and focused on initiatives that are also gender-specific to reach women, from expecting mothers and breastfeeding women, to girls and children in home and refugee communities (WFP, 2024), revealing how initiatives can also target communities along gendered lines according to time-sensitive needs.

Social protection can also serve as an enabling factor for resilience for displaced communities facing conflict-affected food insecurity. A study by Baer *et al.* (2021) examined food insecurity faced by refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and how sustained experiences of food scarcity prior to migration, both while in refugee camps and post-resettlement, shaped dietary practices, health outcomes, and social and cultural adaptation among displaced families. The findings indicate that food insecurity was not a phenomenon attributable to the post-resettlement context, but rather the outcome of an extended period of vulnerability which began after armed conflict and persisted throughout displacement (Baer *et al.*, 2021). This deprivation contributed to ongoing difficulties in accessing adequate and culturally appropriate food even after migrating to the host country.

Despite these challenges, the study found that social protection, whether through community-based support networks, assistance provided by resettlement organizations, along with the sharing of food and information among refugee households, played a central role in mitigating the severity of food insecurity. In particular, the preservation of cultural food practices contributed to continuity of identity and dietary familiarity, while younger individuals showed a greater capacity to adapt to new dietary environments and food systems in the host country (Baer *et al.*, 2021).

Collectively, these findings underscore that adaptation and resilience is shaped by interconnected social, institutional and cultural mechanisms that operate across multiple stages of conflict. Underlying the ability for conflict-affected communities to increase livelihood options, leadership positions and nutritional access during their experiences of conflict is the fundamental role of social protection. By investing in robust social protection, whether through formalized programmes by governments and humanitarian agencies, it can serve as a key enabling condition for young women to exercise resilience during conflict. However, it is also critical to note that the literature assessed overwhelmingly ignored the specific needs of young women, and instead spoke about social protection in supporting marginalized communities at large. This reinforces a major challenge: Gender and youth-responsive social protection programmes and initiatives are not heavily considered in the formation of responses to humanitarian and crises scenarios.

4.4 Collective action

Collective action refers to the ability of groups within a community to act in a coordinated manner to address common challenges, achieve shared goals and promote social change. This concept encompasses processes such as community innovation, self-organization, collective mobilization, women's and youth participation and leadership, support from local leaders and the strengthening of collective rather than exclusively individual efforts. It also involves building strong social relationships, high levels of social capital, mutual trust, cooperation and a social environment conducive to collaboration.

Together, these elements strengthen community resilience, expand adaptive capacity, and enhance the effectiveness of collective responses in promoting sustainable development and social well-being during and after conflict. Such actions depend on the willingness and mobilization of community members to organize themselves in response to a crisis, enabling resilience, mainly among young women.

Examples of such initiatives and experiences can be found across diverse regions of the world. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, collective action consistently emerges as a key mechanism through which communities strengthen resilience within agrifood systems. Evidence from Ethiopia highlights the importance of social trust as a foundational element of collective resilience. Freund and Favara (2026) found that exposure to armed conflict significantly undermined interpersonal trust among young people, with particularly pronounced effects among young women. As violence intensified, trust within communities and between neighbours declined, while conflict-induced food insecurity increased competition over scarce resources, further fracturing social relationships. These findings suggest that beyond institutional support and material assets, resilient agrifood systems depend fundamentally on stable interpersonal relationships and strong social capital.

The importance of collective organization is reinforced by the Status of Women in Agrifood Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025), which synthesises evidence from Mali, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana and other West African countries. Nevertheless, women's cooperatives, savings associations, advocacy groups and gender-transformative social movements strengthen resilience by expanding women's access to finance, land rights and productive resources while simultaneously challenging discriminatory gender norms.

However, these enabling mechanisms continue to face structural barriers, including insecure land tenure, unequal access to financial and digital services, and the persistent invisibility of women's unpaid labour in policy and data systems. The report therefore argues that strengthening resilience requires legal reforms securing women's resource rights, greater social protection, infrastructure investment and sustained support for women's organisations capable of transforming social norms.

According to Oosterom, Namuggala and Szyp (2022) and FAO (2016), informal savings groups, farming collectives and peer support networks enabled young people, including young women, to pool labour, access informal credit, diversify livelihoods and receive emotional support where formal institutions remained weak. These locally embedded support systems substituted for disrupted public services and strengthened resilience by allowing young people to combine farming, informal trade and small enterprises to cope with prolonged insecurity.

In the Middle East, collective action frequently develops as a response to protracted conflict, displacement and severe resource scarcity, suggesting how community organization can compensate for weakened formal institutions. The most striking example comes from Gaza, where prolonged blockade and the destruction associated with the war since 2023 severely damaged agricultural land, water infrastructure and livelihoods (Mizyed *et al.*, 2026). In response, communities invested collectively in hydroponic agriculture, particularly by supporting women to establish agricultural micro-enterprises.

Hydroponics offered them a robust alternative in a place like Gaza, where 95 percent of the water supply is not suited for consumption, while enabling year-round production of vegetables and herbs. Beyond improving household food security, these initiatives created new entrepreneurial opportunities, illustrating how collective investment in women simultaneously strengthens resilience, economic recovery and social inclusion in conflict settings.

Community-based collective action is also reported to have been effective among Syrian refugee mothers participating in community kitchens (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019). Through shared food preparation and collective work, women gained financial independence, improved psychological well-being, strengthened social cohesion, reduced loneliness and developed stronger organizational skills. The kitchens created safe spaces for exchanging information and mutual support while fostering positive relationships between refugee and host communities. However, challenges related to financial sustainability, entrepreneurial skills and long-term funding remained important barriers to maintaining these initiatives.

Studies conducted in Europe primarily examine collective resilience among displaced populations affected by war, highlighting the importance of social support networks during forced migration. Among Ukrainian refugees, Artzi-Medvedik, Tsikholska and Chertok (2024) found that displacement severely disrupted infant feeding practices by limiting food access, altering caregiving routines and interrupting culturally established feeding behaviours. Nevertheless, resilience emerged through several interconnected mechanisms. Mothers' strong motivation to protect their children encouraged persistent efforts to secure food despite adversity. Maintaining culturally rooted infant feeding practices fostered continuity, emotional stability and cultural identity during displacement. Family members, fellow refugee mothers, humanitarian organizations, healthcare providers and reception services collectively supplied practical assistance, emotional support and nutritional guidance, enabling mothers to sustain appropriate feeding practices throughout resettlement.

Complementary evidence is provided by Roitblat *et al.* (2022), who assessed over 19 000 Ukrainian refugees arriving in Israel. Refugees travelling individually experienced greater physical fatigue and poorer somatic health than those travelling in organized groups. Access to collective support during displacement including coordinated movement, shared resources and group organization reduced physical exhaustion and strengthened adaptive capacity. Together, these studies suggest that collective organization, social support and coordinated humanitarian responses significantly enhance resilience among displaced populations.

Across Latin America, collective action frequently centres on protecting Indigenous knowledge, territorial governance, cultural identity and traditional food systems, all of which contribute to long-term agrifood resilience. In Peru, Sarapura-Escobar and Hoddy (2022) describe how Indigenous communities in Quispillaccta rebuilt resilience following the country's internal armed conflict (1980–2000) through community-led territorial planning. Community assemblies collectively assessed environmental risks, allocated land across ecological zones and coordinated decisions regarding crops, biodiversity and water management.

These collective governance mechanisms strengthened resilience by distributing environmental risks and rebuilding social cohesion. However, despite contributing substantially to agricultural production, young women remained underrepresented in formal decision-making and land ownership.

Similarly, research among Inga Indigenous communities in Nariño, Colombia, highlights the importance of preserving ancestral agrifood systems (Amaya-Castellanos *et al.*, 2022). Grandmothers identified intergenerational knowledge transfer, maintenance of the chagra farming system, community-recognised authorities, home food production, and supportive public policies as essential enablers of resilience. At

the same time, younger generations' preference for Western foods, changing environmental conditions and limited time available for traditional food preparation threatened the continuity of Indigenous knowledge. Strengthening collective cultural practices therefore becomes central to sustaining resilient food systems.

Across these diverse geographical contexts, collective action consistently emerges as an important enabler of resilience within conflict-affected agrifood systems. Whether through women's cooperatives in Africa, community agriculture and water governance in the Middle East, refugee support networks in Europe, or Indigenous territorial governance in Latin America, collective organization strengthens social capital, facilitates resource sharing, reinforces cultural continuity and expands adaptive capacity. Although the specific mechanisms vary according to local contexts, the evidence consistently suggests that resilience is most sustainable when communities organize collectively, when young women are meaningfully included in leadership and decision-making, and when local institutions strengthen rather than replace existing social relationships. Together, these findings suggest that collective action is not merely a complementary strategy but a foundational component of resilient agrifood systems in contexts affected by conflict.

4.5 Humanitarian assistance

According to the approach adopted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations, life-saving actions constitute the most immediate response to a crisis, with the priority of preventing deaths and reducing acute suffering through emergency assistance, such as food, drinking water, shelter, health services and protection. Humanitarian action, in turn, has a broader scope, seeking to alleviate suffering and protect the lives, livelihoods and dignity of populations affected by crises; it may extend over prolonged periods in contexts of recurring or protracted crises. Early recovery begins even during the humanitarian response and seeks to repair services, livelihoods, local capacities and conditions for self-sufficiency, incorporating development principles to reduce dependence on emergency assistance and create conditions for a more sustainable recovery (IASC, 2008).

Long-term programming, on the other hand, which is geared toward development and resilience, focuses on reducing structural vulnerabilities and strengthening systems, institutions, livelihoods and capacities so that communities can weather future shocks and move forward in a sustainable manner. It is important to note that these approaches should not be understood as rigid, sequential stages but rather as overlapping dimensions. In particular, early recovery can begin while humanitarian assistance is still underway, and humanitarian actions can incorporate elements of resilience and development from the outset. This logic is linked to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus approach, which seeks greater synergy between immediate humanitarian responses and actions aimed at development and strengthening resilience (IASC, 2023).

According to *Gender, Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises: Women and Girls as Agents of Resilience* (FAO, 2016), humanitarian action enables women's resilience in contexts of acute crisis, displacement and institutional collapse. In conflict-affected settings, young women often face disrupted livelihoods, reduced mobility and increased caregiving burdens. Therefore, humanitarian assistance in forms of emergency food assistance and cash-based support helped stabilize household consumption and reduce reliance on negative coping strategies during periods of extreme vulnerability.

Often, when considering humanitarian aid, it is perceived as providing emergency relief in directly providing food, water, shelter or other physical immediate needs. Survival commodities provided by humanitarian aid clearly suggest how humanitarian aid acts as an enabler in achieving resiliency. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that short-term relief is not a sustainable solution to supporting women

in conflict-affected agrifood systems. That being said, humanitarian assistance also has the power to enable young women's resilience through bridging short-term survival assistance into transformative long-term success.

A common method of humanitarian assistance is direct economic support during times of crisis and does not only acknowledge and support immediate needs during conflict but also promotes long-term success and empowerment. For example, in Syria, over 6 million people have been internally displaced and 7 million people have become refugees in other countries due to prolonged violence since 2011. The governorate of Raqqa was hit particularly hard due to fighting, and gender-based violence has left women with compounding violence, on top of little income to cover food, water, utilities and housing services (Falb *et al.*, 2020). Such impacts have disproportionately hurt women, who already had little income before the conflict, but have seen a reduction in income post-conflict. As part of an intervention, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a global humanitarian assistance organization, provided cash assistance to women to cover basic needs of their households (Falb *et al.*, 2020).

After interviewing women recipients, some of whom were young women, the recipients spoke about how they were able to significantly alleviate their household conditions by fulfilling basic needs, like food, water and medical equipment, and reported having less stress. In this specific study, it was clear that this cash assistance by humanitarian agencies is fundamental in supporting food security and household resilience and improving women's sense of stress and emotional stability (Falb *et al.*, 2020). This reflects how humanitarian support and cash assistance can improve women's sense of psychological and emotional resilience, in addition to total household resilience, for a short period of time, when needs are dire. Falb *et al.* (2020) observed improvements over time in households' ability to meet basic needs and in food-security-related outcomes among women receiving unconditional cash assistance; the study was not designed to establish whether cash was more effective than food assistance.

Overall, humanitarian aid, whether it be through providing immediate commodities like food and shelter, or cash-based support, suggests the potential to serve as an enabling factor for young women's resilience. While humanitarian aid has shown success in enabling women's resilience, it is important to consider that in order to best protect its beneficiaries, humanitarian aid should encourage safe participation through accessible information, feedback and complaint mechanisms, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, risk mitigation and monitoring in instances of unintended consequences. If the prior is considered, providing immediate alleviation of stressors while simultaneously considering, preparing for and strengthening communities' future success, humanitarian assistance enables young women to survive, adapt, cope and build more resilient futures during times of crisis.

4.6 Access to employment and finances

This report's findings identified access to employment and finance as another critical enabling condition for resilience. Life under conflict exposes young women and girls to a range of risks, including sexual violence and poor economic activities, which makes secure and diversified livelihoods especially important. Young women's knowledge and ability to be a part of the workforce are particularly important to the continuity of agrifood systems during conflict. When men leave, migrate, join armed groups or are killed, young women frequently assume greater responsibility for farming and household food provision. Their work helps sustain agricultural production and household access to food. However, this contribution supports genuine resilience only when women have access and control over productive resources, control over production and income, protection from violence and a manageable distribution of labour (FAO, 2025).

Against this same backdrop, diversified livelihoods are also consistently identified as a key enabler of resilience. Atim, Mazurana and Marshak (2018) found that conflict-affected girls and women engaged in diverse livelihood activities, including taking up jobs that are traditionally performed by men, gave them greater agency and independence to make decisions for themselves and for their family. In particular, women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children have revealed that labour and economic empowerment was critical to adapting and healing from the stigma and violence they experience during conflict (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018). Herein, diversification of livelihood and labour security interestingly led women to exercise better psychosocial resilience and economic resilience (Atim, Mazurana and Marshak, 2018).

These findings are echoed in the report *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (FAO, 2025), which suggests that education, familiarity with digital technologies and the ability to move in search of opportunities can strengthen young people's access to employment, information and support. The report notes that livelihood diversification also contributes to resilience by reducing dependence on a single crop, activity or source of income. In crisis situations, agriculture can serve as a livelihood refuge, providing food and income when markets, businesses and formal employment opportunities are disrupted. Psychological resources, including confidence, agency and a belief in one's ability to create a better future form an important part of resilience; the report finds that, despite severe material hardship, young people in some protracted-crisis settings maintain relatively strong perceptions of their own ability to cope and recover.

Beyond immediate crisis, access to employment and finance also shapes recovery once conflict subsides. Desta *et al.* (2025) and FAO (2016) found that access to employment and financial resources enabled women's resilience by supporting livelihood recovery after conflict-induced economic collapse. This was largely attributable to engagement in small-scale agriculture, particularly poultry farming, alongside access to financial and livelihood recovery programmes allowing women to rebuild income, assets and economic independence. In post-conflict Tigray and similar fragile settings, women experienced severe losses of livestock, savings and productive resources, limiting livelihood sustainability. The scope of support operated at household and microenterprise levels through recovery programmes, agricultural interventions and financial inclusion mechanisms aimed at rebuilding post-conflict economies.

For instance, young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems can be heavily constrained by poor agricultural yield, soil quality, economic disruptions and lack of economic opportunities. To circumvent the challenges that young women have to face individually, agricultural cooperatives have emerged to support young women economically and improve their capacity as young women farmers to resuscitate their land and link crops to profitable markets (Box 4.6.1). Herein, the initiative provides improved seed and market-linkage support and is reported to have created income-generating opportunities for participating women; evidence on sustained income, productivity, dropout and food-security impacts remains limited. Such enabling conditions reflect how economic inclusion can improve young women's resilience through livelihood protection, and strengthen their leadership capacities and labour force participation.

Box 4.6.1 Resilience through the bean: supporting women bean entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Protracted and armed conflicts in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have yielded unstable agrifood systems, mass outmigration and restricted land access for several decades. Driven by factions' desire to control mineral-rich lands, this conflict has led to a volatile humanitarian crisis, with widespread displacement, loss of harvest, damaged seed and food storage facilities, and disruption of financial systems (Awotide *et al.*, 2025). This has rendered communities in the eastern province vulnerable to food insecurity, and has especially threatened the livelihoods and lands of agricultural communities. To support communities during ongoing conflict, cooperatives like Union des Producteurs et Vendeurs des Produits Agricoles and Association des Déposants et Vendeurs de Vivres in North Kivu have been critical in recent years to help ensure stable agrifood supply chains, improve crop yields and connect farmers to markets (Awotide *et al.*, 2024). However, their work has not only centred on improving the quality of life for all communities, it has especially focused on the capacities of young women to become bean entrepreneurs. The Beans for Women Empowerment (B4WE) initiative has been working with the University of Goma to strengthen young women's capacities to become leading bean entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As part of the project, women farmers plant different bean seed varieties to improve harvests and improve their income (Chideya, 2024). Beans are a critical staple that has been addressing unemployment in the region; by equipping young women entrepreneurs to sell and connect beans to a wider market, these women are able to develop a robust source of income (Awotide *et al.*, 2024). B4WE has been securing the production of the basic seeds needed to sustain agricultural diversity and production, and have distributed them across rural communities (Awotide *et al.*, 2025). While the challenges and cost of resilience is not clear, including dropout rates, market access barriers, and the labour costs and burdens faced by women in this case study, such initiatives have been critical for placing young women at the heart of agricultural revival, and improve their ability to exercise their resilience against conflict-affected food insecurity. By equipping young women with high quality seeds to plant, grow, produce and sell, the initiative is reported to have helped young women integrate into the market and generate income during conflict; evidence on sustained food security and income outcomes remains limited (Chideya, 2024).

Taken together, these findings suggest that access to employment and finances is a key enabling condition for young women's resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems. This holds true whether through wartime livelihood diversification, post-conflict recovery programmes, or women-led enterprises. In each of these cases, young women's economic agency has been associated with their broader psychological and household resilience during and after a conflict

4.7 Synthesis

This chapter focused on why particular conditions mattered within their respective conflict contexts, how they interacted with broader institutional, social, economic and political systems, and whether their effectiveness was shaped by the unique characteristics of the conflict and the circumstances of the young women affected. Across the case studies presented, it was found that resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems cannot be understood only through the individual capacities. Instead, resilience comes from the interaction between individual agency and an environment that provides access and control to productive resources, services, institutions, livelihood opportunities and social networks. These interactions operate across multiple scales, from individuals and households to communities, institutions and wider agrifood systems, and across economic, social, institutional and livelihood dimensions. Resilience at one scale is therefore shaped by conditions at others; individual agency, for example, may be constrained or enabled by household relations, community networks, institutional support and the functioning of the wider agrifood system.

Taken together, the analysis showcases that enabling conditions are interconnected rather than independent. For example, good governance can reduce structural barriers and expand women's access to rights, representation and essential services: social protection and humanitarian assistance can stabilize livelihoods and safeguard well-being when there are periods of acute crisis. Moreover, collective action can strengthen social capital, foster innovation and compensate for weakened institutions. Simultaneously, access to employment, financial resources and functioning infrastructure enables longer-term livelihood recovery and economic resilience. Together, these conditions reinforce one another, suggesting that resilience is most effectively supported through integrated approaches rather than isolated interventions. This finding is consistent with FAO's *The State of Food and Agriculture 2021*, which conceptualizes agrifood-system resilience across interconnected system components and highlights the importance of diversity, connectivity, livelihood support and social protection in strengthening capacities to absorb shocks and stresses (FAO, 2021).

A second key takeaway is that there is no universal pathway to strengthening resilience. This finding is also consistent with the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (2025) framework of equitably transformative resilience, which emphasizes moving beyond "bouncing back" towards strengthening the capacities and agency needed to address structural and systemic vulnerabilities and enable food systems to adapt and transform. Further, the conditions that enable young women to adapt and respond to conflict vary along with the individual's needs. For instance, strategies can be categorized between immediate needs and long-term strategies; some contexts require immediate humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs and prevent greater deterioration of livelihoods, while other cases provide opportunities to reinforce longer-term governance systems, social protection, collective action or livelihood diversification. Resilience-building should therefore not be understood as a linear process, but as one that evolves alongside changing conflict dynamics.

The last major takeaway based on the case studies is how many interventions overlooked the different experiences, priorities and aspirations of young women. To overcome this, and supporting the last statement, stakeholders must go beyond generic approaches towards interventions that recognize young women's diverse roles, address structural inequalities, and respond to the realities of the conflict context in which they live. Building resilience will depend on balancing current humanitarian needs with sustainable, longer-term investments that expand opportunities, remove institutional barriers and reinforce the enabling environment in which young women can transform agrifood systems.



Chapter 5.

Policy and programmatic recommendations

This report shows that young women are not only affected by conflict; they are also active in keeping agrifood systems alive. They farm, trade, care for families, prepare food, protect local knowledge, join groups, create small businesses and support community recovery. However, their resilience is submitted to high pressure and does not have enough support. It is also important to recognize that the capabilities for young women to exercise resilience are dependent on a myriad of factors, from government stability, presence of humanitarian agencies, political and community will of conflict-affected groups, and access to finances and productive resources. Conflict is contextual and young women's resilience cannot be guaranteed under a particular set of conditions, however it can be improved with better awareness and formalized support.

The recommendations in this chapter are grounded in the evidence reviewed in this report, but they also speak to existing global commitments. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), particularly General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (CEDAW, 2013); the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, anchored in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (2000); the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, anchored in UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015); and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS, 2015). Taken together, these frameworks show that supporting young women's resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems is not only a development priority, it is also a matter of rights, protection, participation, food security and accountable governance. The recommendations below therefore move away from asking young women to be resilient on their own. They call for institutions, governments, humanitarian actors, development partners and communities to create the conditions that allow young women to participate safely and meaningfully in agrifood systems before, during and after conflict. The recommendations draw on evidence of varying specificity: some findings relate directly to young women, while others are informed by evidence on women, youth or conflict-affected populations more broadly. Where evidence is not specific to young women, this is made explicit in the text rather than assumed to apply uniformly.

5.1 Collect intersectional gender- and age-disaggregated data

While some studies in the research examine the possibilities for young women to exercise resilience, and the conditions which facilitated their resilience, systematic collection of data in understanding young women's resilience and supporting factors remain scant. While research has shown differences between men and women, and across age groups in terms of exercising resilience, the intersections between age and gender, specifically in identifying young women's challenges, coping mechanisms, and institutional and informal support during protracted conflict remain poorly understood. Collecting intersectional data that captures young women's experiences and understandings of resilience is important to identifying the specific programmatic and policy interventions needed to safeguard their rights during and post-conflict, as well as to co-creating interventions with governments, humanitarian agencies and civil society organisations which then can centre young women's needs and understanding of the local context. While women and young women were often represented in the study population in research examining resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems, they are rarely analysed separately.

Additionally, while there is significant evidence on the ways in which conflict affects women adversely, and to a lesser extent, young women, examinations on responsive measures still remain limited. Interestingly, our research findings point to the relevance of collective action and informal organizing that supports young women's resilience. This reveals that there is high potential for understanding the conditions that enable their resilience if young women and community groups are integrated as part of the data collection process. Data collection should not only ask whether young women are present in agrifood systems. It should examine what roles they play, what resources they control, what risks they face, what informal work they perform, how much unpaid care work they carry, and what conditions allow them to adapt. This recommendation is consistent with guidance from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which identifies sex- and age-disaggregated data as a basic part of gender analysis in humanitarian action (IASC, 2018). It also aligns with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (CEDAW, 2013). Without evidence that captures young women's specific experiences, their rights, needs and forms of resilience risk remaining invisible in conflict and post-conflict monitoring systems.

5.2 Formalize support for young women and community organizations

In this research it was revealed how conflict pushes young women toward informal, lower-quality and lower-paid work. To address this, programmes should combine skills training with direct support for young women to formalize or upgrade informal livelihoods, rather than treating informal sector participation as a resilience outcome in itself. Throughout the research, collective action appeared as principal enabler of resilience, including through informal or self-organised mobilization. Governments, humanitarian organizations and development partners should therefore invest in community-based organizations and locally led collective action. To increase youth and women's resilience, there should be formalized support for young women-specific programmes and interventions during conflict. To exemplify, government initiatives on gender safeguards for young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems should be integrated into national action plans. Herein, these groups should not be treated as temporary project channels only. They are part of the social infrastructure that helps communities respond to conflict-related shocks. This recommendation is aligned with the YPS agenda, anchored in UNSC Resolution 2250, which recognizes young people as peacebuilding actors (UNSC, 2015). It is also aligned with the WPS agenda, anchored in UNSC Resolution 1325, which stresses women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes (UNSC, 2000).

Programmes should also recognize that young women's time is limited. Many young women carry unpaid care work alongside farming, trading or food preparation. External support for entrepreneurship, farming or collective action should therefore budget for childcare, labour-saving infrastructure, safe transport and flexible training schedules. Without this, programmes may increase young women's workload rather than strengthen their resilience.

5.3 Integrate young women in gender-responsive resilience building and monitoring

There is an emerging body of literature that points to the necessity of gender-responsive social protection in addressing food insecurity by strengthening young women's resilience before crises hit (Hidrobo and Roy, 2025). The evidence base is drawn mainly from climate-shock contexts; its application to conflict settings is plausible but not yet directly evidenced. Social protection can build this resilience through both preventative and reactive ways including linking cash transfers to early warning disaster risk reduction, supporting household preparation for crises, and Food Assistance for Assets programmes that provide cash and food transfers to support imminent needs while investing in community and land restoration (Hidrobo and Roy, 2025). Beyond livelihood security, social protection also reduces adverse coping mechanisms that largely affect women and girls, such as restricting food intake. By ensuring that food is accessible and by limiting unsustainable coping mechanisms, social protection has also been found to protect nutrition and shield women and girls from domestic violence, school withdrawal and child marriage (Hidrobo and Roy, 2025). However, in order to achieve this, collecting and understanding gender-disaggregated needs is critical, and governments, humanitarian agencies and communities must work with young women on the ground to identify gaps in social protection that they face, and what would best help overcome these gaps. Furthermore, in order to develop gender-responsive social protection that meets the specific needs of young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems, young women should be fully involved in the design of social protection programmes, from conceptualization through to execution and monitoring. This would ensure that the solutions and strategies for young women's resilience are being built from the ground up.

An interesting finding in the research was that multistakeholder collaboration was fundamental in building and supporting resilience, particularly in times where institutions are fragile and under threat during conflict. In these circumstances, governments, humanitarian agencies, informal collectives and community action often work together or fill the gaps where institutions are lacking to support young women to better their livelihoods, secure good nutrition, protect themselves from gender-based violence and rebuild their agricultural lands. However, while this collaboration has yielded positive results, it has often omitted the presence of young women in coordinating and monitoring responses on-the-ground as a participatory process. Future policies and programmes should incorporate monitoring frameworks that assess not only the agricultural and economic resilience of young women, but broader levels of community participation, inclusive governance, cultural resilience and community empowerment. Integrating young women in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages will strengthen the resilience-building of young women and support the development of context-specific policies and interventions that directly affect young women in the region.

5.4 Improve young women's access to land and resources, protection, education and employment

Resilience-building strategies should address the structural inequalities that limit young women's participation in agrifood systems. This requires secure land and resource rights, access to finance, education, agricultural extension, digital technologies, social protection, safe mobility and recognition of unpaid care work. It also requires young women's leadership in governance, resource management, local peacebuilding and community decision-making. This recommendation is strongly linked to CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (CEDAW, 2013). It is also aligned with UNSCR 1325 on WPS, which calls for women's participation and protection in peace and security efforts (UNSC, 2000), and with UNSCR 2250 on YPS, which recognizes young people's role in peacebuilding and recovery (UNSC, 2015). These frameworks support a basic point: young women should not only be protected in conflict, they should also be recognized as actors in recovery and peace.

Land and resource programming are also important. Conflict often disrupts the social pathways through which young women access land, including marriage, inheritance, household membership and community recognition. When men are killed, displaced, recruited or absent, young women may lose access to land, livestock, water or productive assets. Post-conflict recovery should not assume that pre-conflict tenure systems will simply return to normal. In many cases, returning to "normal" would mean returning to systems where young women worked on land without controlling it.

Governments and partners should therefore strengthen alternative access routes for young women who have lost land or productive resource control and access during conflict. This may include joint land registration, recognition of young women's inheritance rights, support for female-headed households, land-dispute resolution, access to communal land, support for displaced women and opportunities in non-land-based parts of the value chain such as processing, packaging, food services, seed systems, extension, digital services and marketing.

Protection from GBV should also be built into agrifood recovery. Programs that increase young women's participation in farming, markets, water collection, training or cash assistance may also expose them to new risks if protection is not considered. GBV risk mitigation should include safe access to farms, markets, water points, distribution sites and training centres; confidential referral pathways; protection from exploitation; and engagement with men, boys and community leaders.

5.5 Promote gender-transformative governance, conflict-sensitive programming and contributions to sustaining peace

In contexts where conflict is ongoing, technical agrifood solutions cannot substitute for peace and accountable governance. For example, hydroponic farming in Gaza can help households produce food under severe land and water constraints, but it cannot secure sustainable food systems while occupation, blockade, restricted mobility and continuing violence persist. In Palestine and other protracted crises, food security requires not only innovation, but also peacebuilding, protection of civilians, functioning institutions, safe access to land and water, open supply chains and respect for rights. Thus, it is necessary for peacebuilding strategies in agrifood systems to integrate gendered safeguards given that young women often bear a disproportionate share of household food provisioning and unpaid care responsibilities, reflecting prevailing gender norms.

Post-conflict policies should therefore adopt integrated and locally led approaches. These should support livelihood diversification, psychosocial care, Indigenous and local knowledge, traditional food systems, education, market access and women's leadership. Enshrining these priorities in policy is important because the evidence reviewed in this report shows that young women often exercise resilience through exactly these means.

In summary, young women's resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems is real, but it should not be treated as an unlimited resource. The evidence reviewed in this report shows that young women already farm, trade, care, organize, innovate and protect food knowledge under very difficult conditions. The purpose of policy and programming should not be to demand more resilience from them, but to change the conditions around them. This means strengthening rights, safety, social protection, land access, education, finance, collective action, mental health support, peacebuilding and meaningful participation. It also means recognizing that resilience is context specific. What works in a post-conflict rural area may not work in an occupied territory, a refugee settlement, an urban displacement setting or an Indigenous community. Programmes should therefore begin with local realities, listen to young women and support the systems that allow them to live, work and lead with dignity.



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Box 5.1 Operationalizing the policy and programmatic recommendations**Table 3** Suggested actors, programme phases, minimum actions, safeguards and indicators for implementation

Recommendation	Main responsible actors	Programme phase	Minimum actions	Key safeguards	Suggested indicators
Intersectional gender- and age-disaggregated data	Governments, FAO and other United Nations agencies, research institutions, humanitarian actors, local civil society organizations, women and youth organizations	Assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation	Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data; analyse young women separately where possible; involve young women in identifying relevant indicators and interpreting findings	Informed consent; confidentiality; do-no-harm principles; avoid collecting sensitive information or GBV without appropriate referral mechanisms	Percentage of assessments reporting sex- and age-disaggregated results; percentage of programmes analysing young women as a distinct group; number/proportion of young women participating in assessment and monitoring processes
Support young women and community organizations	Governments, FAO, non-governmental organizations, producer organisations, local civil society organizations, women's and youth groups	Design, implementation and transition/exit	Map existing community organizations; strengthen rather than replace them; provide organizational, technical and financial support; address childcare, transport and time constraints	Avoid elite capture and token participation; ensure young women can influence decisions; avoid increasing unpaid workloads	Percentage of supported organizations with young women in decision-making roles; share of programme resources reaching women- or youth-led organizations; retention of young women in programme activities
Gender-responsive resilience building and monitoring	Governments, FAO, WFP, humanitarian agencies, social protection authorities, communities	Preparedness, anticipatory action, emergency response, recovery and monitoring and evaluation	Consult young women in programme design; link social protection with early warning and anticipatory action; establish pathways from emergency assistance toward livelihood recovery	Transparent targeting; protection and GBV risk mitigation; accessible complaint mechanisms; avoid premature withdrawal of assistance	Percentage of programmes involving young women in design, monitoring and evaluation; percentage of eligible young women receiving timely assistance; changes in negative coping strategies, food security or livelihood recovery

Land, resources, protection, education and employment	Governments, FAO, land institutions, extension services, financial institutions, education and training providers, local organizations	Recovery and longer-term development	Assess gendered land and access and control over productive resources; strengthen tenure security; provide extension, skills, finance and market opportunities; include GBV risk mitigation and alternative value-chain opportunities	Avoid creating land disputes; prevent exploitation and over-indebtedness; ensure safe access to programme sites; avoid increasing care burdens	Percentage of young women with improved access to productive resources; percentage accessing extension, finance or training; percentage of programme sites with functioning protection/referral arrangements
Gender-transformative, conflict-sensitive agrifood governance that contributes to sustaining peace	Governments, local authorities, FAO, peacebuilding actors, community institutions, women's and youth organizations	All phases, particularly recovery and reconstruction	Include young women in land, water and food-system governance; apply gender and conflict analysis; support locally led peacebuilding in agrifood systems and resource management	Conflict sensitivity; do no harm; avoid exposing women leaders to retaliation; ensure representation translates into influence	Percentage of recovery plans incorporating gender and conflict analysis; proportion of young women participating in relevant governance bodies; percentage of young women reporting influence over decisions

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the evidence reviewed in this report and relevant policy and programmatic frameworks cited in Chapter 5, including CEDAW (2013), UNSC (2000, 2015), CFS (2015), IASC (2018), and Hidrobo and Roy (2025)

Box 5.1 Translates the recommendations above into practical considerations for implementation. Table 3 identifies indicative responsible actors, relevant programme phases, minimum actions, key safeguards and suggested indicators. These are intended as a flexible guide rather than a prescriptive framework, as appropriate actions and indicators will depend on the nature, duration and stage of conflict and on the local context.

The recommendations above can largely be integrated into existing FAO programming rather than requiring separate interventions for young women. For example, Farmer Field Schools and climate-smart agriculture programmes can incorporate gender- and conflict-sensitive participation, flexible training arrangements, and attention to young women's access to land, technologies and information. Youth employment and women's economic empowerment programmes can combine skills development with finance, market access, mentoring and measures that reduce unpaid care constraints. Producer organizations can provide stronger pathways for young women's leadership and collective action, while financial inclusion programmes can improve access to savings, grants and credit with appropriate safeguards. Social cohesion initiatives, including community groups and natural resource management platforms, can also be used to strengthen dialogue, trust and young women's participation in local decision-making.

Across these areas, the key implication for FAO is to systematically assess whether existing programmes recognize young women's specific constraints, protect them from additional risks, and strengthen their access and control to productive resources, opportunities and decision-making in conflict-affected agrifood systems.



Chapter 6.

Conclusion

Gaps in women's and young women's participation in agrifood systems persist and widen during times of conflict due to reduced income-generating activities and unpaid care, social and educational constraints, and resulting reductions in food security and nutritional health. These disparities are further exacerbated during conflict by heightened risks that limit young women's mobility, not only physically limiting access to schools and markets, but also economic opportunities. Conflict also reduces the number of available working hours, making employment opportunities and productivity unpredictable. Resulting financial instability, paired with heightened social pressures, are associated with impacts on physical and mental well-being, further impacting young women's involvement in agrifood systems. This report found that young women experience multiple reinforcing pressures during times of conflict that further constrain participation in agrifood systems. As a result, considering the number of varying impacts conflict has on a young women's participation in agrifood systems, these impacts cannot be examined in isolation but rather require a holistic, multidisciplinary approach when recognizing how resilience can be best achieved during conflict.

At the same time, conflict does not only constrain young women's participation in agrifood systems. Across the contexts reviewed, young women exercise resilience by drawing on a diverse range of individual, community and economic strategies to absorb, adapt and in some cases transform their livelihoods and circumstances. In Yemen, young women have taken on roles as water mediators; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they have become bean entrepreneurs; and in Gaza, they have undertaken hydroponic farming. These are all examples of how young women are drawing on existing capacities and resources to sustain livelihoods, respond to disruption and contribute to community recovery. Several strategies recur across the evidence collected. Livelihood diversification reduces dependence on a single crop, activity or source of income, while agriculture can serve as a livelihood refuge, providing food and income when markets, businesses and formal employment opportunities are disrupted. Psychological resources, including confidence, agency and a belief in one's ability to create a better future, strengthen their ability to cope and recover. Social support, community networks, cooperatives, savings associations and other forms of collective action facilitate resource sharing, strengthen social capital and expand adaptive capacity. These strategies are interconnected and often overlap, with young women relying on multiple sources of resilience that interact with and reinforce one another. In some cases, collective structures transform survival strategies into sustained agency, allowing young women not only to absorb and adapt to shocks and stresses, but also to transform their circumstances.

This report has suggested that young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems are not passive victims of crisis; they are active members of their communities in keeping agrifood systems alive and sustaining them during conditions and periods of extreme pressure. Yet their ability to exercise resilience should not be taken for granted, nor should the responsibility for resilience be placed on young women themselves. Their ability to absorb, adapt and transform is shaped by the structural, institutional and social conditions surrounding them. Strengthening resilience therefore requires moving beyond approaches that focus solely on individual coping strategies towards approaches that address the conditions that enable young women to exercise agency safely and sustainably.

That said, the evidence base reported in this report remains insufficient to fully capture the diversity and dynamics of young women's experiences in conflict-affected agrifood systems. Young women are still frequently grouped within broader categories of "women" or "youth", while intersectional gender-

and age-disaggregated data remain limited. This constrains understanding of how experiences and outcomes differ among young women according to characteristics such as displacement history, marital status, disability, age, or geographic location. It also limits the ability to identify which forms of support are most relevant to different groups and contexts. As highlighted throughout the report, the evidence is strongest for labour-market participation and food security, while considerably less is known about young women's participation across agrifood value chains, particularly in processing, marketing, trading and other higher-value activities beyond primary production.

Important gaps also remain in understanding the dynamics of conflict and resilience over time. Much of the available evidence provides snapshots of young women's experiences, making it difficult to assess how impacts and resilience strategies evolve across different stages of conflict, from anticipation and escalation to protracted crisis and recovery. In particular, there is limited evidence on whether and how young women anticipate conflict or its escalation, what actions they take in advance, and how these anticipatory strategies shape their ability to absorb, adapt and recover from subsequent shocks. This is particularly relevant given the report's conceptualization of resilience as a dynamic capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt and transform in response to shocks and stresses.

Furthermore, the geographical coverage of the evidence remains uneven. The reviewed literature is concentrated in a relatively small number of conflict-affected contexts, including Uganda, Yemen, Gaza, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Ukraine. By contrast, South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Latin America remain substantially underrepresented, with only limited evidence from contexts such as Colombia and Peru. This uneven coverage limits the extent to which findings can be considered transferable across different agrifood systems, conflict trajectories and institutional settings.

Taken together, these gaps point to the need for research that is more consistently intersectional, longitudinal and context-sensitive, and that examines young women's participation across the full range of agrifood-system activities rather than predominantly focusing on primary production.

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Appendix

Methodology

A. Qualitative Methodology

The findings synthesized in Chapters 3 and 4 drew from a scoping review conducted following the principles outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) 20182 framework. The objective of the review was to map and synthesize existing evidence on how young women exercise resilience in conflict-affected agrifood systems, with particular attention to the strategies they employ, as well as the enabling factors shaping their capacity to cope, adapt, and transform their livelihoods and roles.

The review was guided by the framework presented in the FAO's report, *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (FAO, 2025) which highlights the multiple dimensions through which young people engage with and respond to challenges within agrifood systems. This framework informed the development of the search strategy and the synthesis of findings.

The scoping review followed the steps outlined below:

1. Search strategy

To define the parameters of the literature search, the review adapted the Population, Intervention/Exposure, Context, Outcome framework. The search string adapted to each database is presented in Table 1.

Searches were conducted on 3 June, 2026 across selected electronic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science. Grey literature was also searched through the first ten pages of Google Scholar to capture evidence not available in peer-reviewed publications. In addition, targeted searches were conducted on the websites and publication repositories of relevant international organizations, including FAO and WFP. During the synthesis of findings, additional grey literature was searched to complement the case studies reported in the review, documenting localized experiences and resilience strategies among young women in conflict-affected settings.

The following filters were applied:

- Year of publication: last ten years (2016–2026)
- Language: English only

Table 1. Adopted search strings by database

Database	Search string (final adopted query)
Scopus (title-abstract-keywords)	TITLE-ABS-KEY(((woman OR women OR girl* OR female* OR gender*) AND (young OR youth OR "young adult*")) AND ("protracted crisis" OR "fragile setting*" OR "war-affected" OR "armed conflict*" OR "protracted conflict*" OR war OR "lasting conflict") AND (agrifood OR "agri-food" OR "food system*" OR farm* OR "value chain*" OR agricultur* OR livelihood* OR livestock OR "food security" OR food* OR crop* OR fish* OR forest*) AND (resilien* OR adapt* OR coping OR strateg* OR participat* OR recover* OR respon* OR transform* OR absorpt* OR "bounce back" OR diversification OR income OR "income generation" OR asset* OR entrepreneur* OR "market access" OR "informal work" OR "precarious work" OR "unpaid work" OR credit OR "land access" OR "land right*" OR labor OR labour OR resourc* OR financ* OR "decision-making" OR empowerment OR right* OR represent* OR governance OR "role change" OR "gender role*" OR agency OR "social capital" OR "safety net*" OR "social protection" OR "community support" OR "social network*" OR "psychological attribute*" OR "soft attribute*" OR "soft skill*" OR confidence OR efficac* OR "well-being" OR wellbeing OR "mental health" OR migrat* OR technolog* OR "human capital" OR mobility OR education OR "school enrolment" OR training OR skill*)) <i>Filters: publication year 2016–2026; English only.</i>
Web of Science (topic: title / abstract / author keywords)	(TI/AB/AK = (woman OR women OR girl* OR female* OR gender*)) AND (TI/AB/AK = (young OR youth OR "young adult*")) AND (TI/AB/AK = ("protracted crisis" OR "fragile setting*" OR "war-affected" OR "armed conflict*" OR "protracted conflict*" OR war OR "lasting conflict")) AND (TI/AB/AK = (agrifood OR "agri-food" OR "food system*" OR farm* OR "value chain*" OR agricultur* OR livelihood* OR livestock OR "food security" OR food* OR crop* OR fish* OR forest*)) AND (TI/AB/AK = (resilien* OR adapt* OR coping OR strateg* OR participat* OR recover* OR respon* OR transform* OR absorpt* OR "bounce back" OR diversification OR income OR asset* OR entrepreneur* OR "market access" OR "informal work" OR "precarious work" OR "unpaid work" OR credit OR "land access" OR "land right*" OR labor OR labour OR resourc* OR financ* OR "decision-making" OR empowerment OR right* OR represent* OR governance OR "gender role*" OR agency OR "social capital" OR "safety net*" OR "social protection" OR "social network*" OR confidence OR efficac* OR "well-being" OR wellbeing OR "mental health" OR migrat* OR technolog* OR "human capital" OR mobility OR education OR training OR skill*)) <i>Filters: publication year 2016–2026; English only.</i>

Google Scholar
(grey literature, first 10 pages)

((woman OR women OR girl* OR female*) AND (young OR youth OR "young adult*"))

AND ("protracted crisis" OR "fragile setting*" OR "war-affected" OR "armed conflict*" OR "protracted conflict*" OR war OR conflict*)

AND (agrifood OR "agri-food" OR "food system*" OR farm* OR "value chain*" OR agricultur* OR livelihood* OR livestock OR "food security" OR food* OR crop* OR fish* OR forest*)

AND (resilien* OR adapt* OR coping OR strateg* OR participat* OR recover* OR respon* OR transform* OR absorpt* OR "bounce back" OR diversification OR income OR "income generation" OR asset* OR entrepreneur* OR "market access" OR "informal work" OR "precarious work" OR "unpaid work" OR credit OR "land access" OR "land right*" OR labor OR labour OR resourc* OR financ* OR "decision-making" OR empowerment OR right* OR represent* OR governance OR "role change" OR "gender role*" OR agency OR "social capital" OR "safety net*" OR "social protection" OR "community support" OR "social network*" OR "psychological attribute*" OR "soft attribute*" OR "soft skill*" OR confidence OR efficac* OR "well-being" OR wellbeing OR "mental health" OR migrat* OR technolog* OR "human capital" OR mobility OR education OR "school enrolment" OR training OR skill*)

Filters: publication year 2016–2026; English only.

2. Screening and selection

2.1 Title and abstract screening

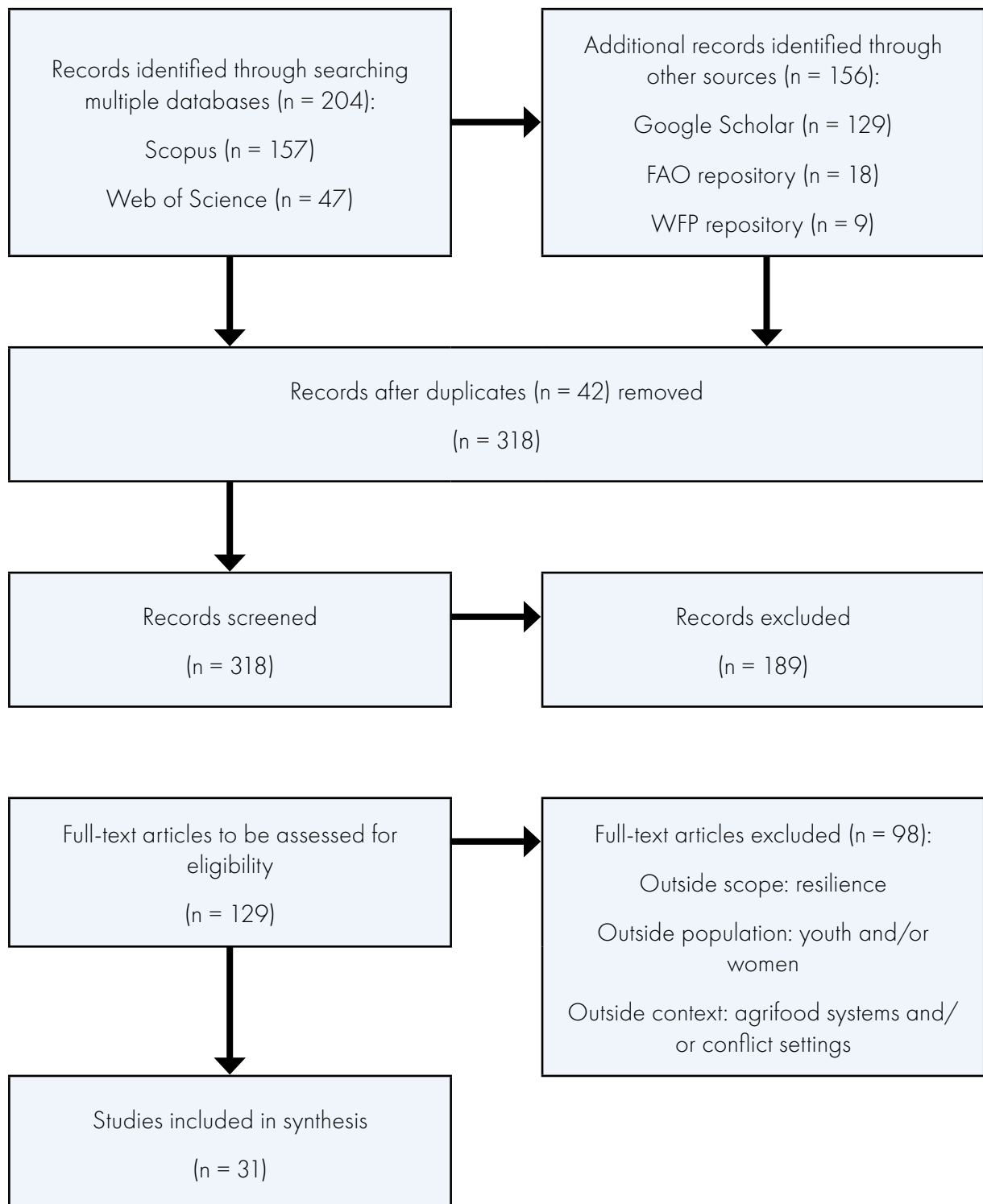
Initial screening was based on titles and abstracts. Studies were eligible for full-text screening if they focused on resilience and included a combination of the key search terms related to young women, conflict contexts, and agrifood systems.

2.2 Full-text screening

Full-text screening was conducted only on the literature retrieved from the initial screening and determined the final list of papers included in the review, according to the following inclusion criteria:

- Studies focused on conflict-affected or protracted crisis contexts;
- Studies that included young women aged 15–24 years were prioritized; evidence for the broader 25–34 age group was considered separately only when it represented the best or only available evidence and was clearly identified as such;
- Studies that explored resilience within agrifood systems and related elements, such as nutrition, food security, and health.

The number of records retrieved and retained at each stage of identification, de-duplication and screening is summarized in the PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1).

Figure A.1 Flow chart of the overall literature review process.

3. Data extraction and synthesis

An extraction data sheet was developed, and information was extracted according to the resilience types identified through the literature review, as well as the enablers of resilience and potential case studies for further illustration.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this review. First, the search was restricted to publications in English, which may have excluded relevant evidence documented in other languages, particularly from conflict-affected regions where much of the primary literature is produced locally. Second, the search window was limited to the last ten years (2016–2026), meaning that earlier foundational studies may not be reflected. Third, grey literature was captured through the first ten pages of Google Scholar and the repositories of selected international organizations; while this broadened coverage beyond peer-reviewed sources, it does not constitute an exhaustive search of all grey literature, considering that this report is explicitly an English-language evidence synthesis. Finally, consistent with the nature of a scoping review, the objective was to map the breadth of available evidence rather than to appraise study quality or quantify effects, so no formal risk-of-bias assessment was undertaken. The relatively small body of evidence focusing specifically on young women in conflict-affected agrifood systems also constrained the depth of synthesis in some thematic areas.

We also conducted a supplementary manual search, including backward and forward citation tracking and targeted searches to identify relevant studies that were not captured by the PRISMA-guided database search, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of the review.

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