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# To antagonize food insecurity through the advancement of gender equality

A case study of gender mainstreaming within the humanitarian assistance  
provided by FAO and the WFP during the ongoing conflict in northeastern  
Nigeria

# Abstract

While violent conflicts are perceived to be the primary driver of food insecurity globally, the degree to which people are affected by both violent conflicts and food crises vary greatly, mainly depending on gender, age and socio-economical position. With this as a background, the aim of this thesis is to investigate how FAO and the WFP address gender dimensions of food insecurity in their humanitarian response on the food crisis related to the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria. This is done through the objective of whether the organizations apply gender mainstreaming – a strategy recognized as desirable for all humanitarian operations conducted by the UN in the United Nations Economic and Social Council Agreed Conclusions 1997/2. The material consists of reports as well as strategic policy documents from both FAO and the WFP, which are analyzed through the methodology of a qualitative content analysis. Based on the analysis, it is possible to draw the conclusion that FAO and the WFP applies gender mainstreaming as a strategic tool. Furthermore, the analysis shows that both FAO and the WFP address gender dimensions of food insecurity through the empowerment of women and incentives attempting to promote gender equality in the long term.

*Keywords: ECOSOC 1997/2, FAO, food insecurity, gender inequality, gender mainstreaming, humanitarian assistance, Nigeria, the WFP*

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# 1 Introduction

Today, war and violent conflicts are the solely major driver of hunger and food crises on a global level, closely followed by economic shocks and extreme weather (FAO, 1996; FAO et al, 2020; FSIN, 2020). That said, to beat hunger on a global level, one has to consider the prominent relationship between violent conflicts and food insecurity. In a globalized and unequal world, however, one also have to consider other factors that contribute to that people within the same society are affected differently by crises, primarily depending on their social position, age and gender (Foran et al, 2012: p. 234-235; Holleman, 2017: p. 14; IAHE, 2020: p. 2). The gender dimensions of food insecurity is relevant, not only with regard to the fact that women are affected to a greater extent than men in numbers, but also considering what this fact implicates in practice for the advancement of long-term gender equality and, furtherly, sustainable peace. Even though gender dimensions, as well as the need for a gender mainstreamed approach, both within peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance in general, are recognized in theory (ECOSOC, 1997; World Bank, 2018), it is proved that this is far from always the case in practice (Foran et al, 2012: p. 235; UN General Assembly, 2010).

By the end of 2019, the estimated number of people suffering from severe or moderate food insecurity was counted to be nearly 2 billion (corresponding 25,9 percent of the world's total population). Considering the gender dimensions, food insecurity is more prevalent among women than men, both at a severe and moderate level (FAO et al, 2020: p. xix). In terms of undernourishment, Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be the worst affected region in the world, being home to more than half of the malnourished people in the world (Delgado et al, 2019; FAO et al, 2017; FAO et al, 2020; FSIN, 2020; Holleman, 2017). One reason for this seems to be the high number of ongoing violent conflicts and intrastate wars in the region. Moreover, this fact is also supported through data presented in the 2020 *Global Report on Food Crises* (FSIN), where all of the ten worst food crises in 2019 were in countries affected by intrastate wars or violent conflicts (FSIN, 2020: p. 2-3).

In this thesis, the link between violent conflicts and food insecurity will be addressed through an analysis of how two of the world's most influential humanitarian organisations in the field – *The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* and *The United Nations World Food Programme* (henceforth referred to as FAO respectively the WFP) consider gender dimensions of food insecurity. This will be done through a qualitative case study, examining the humanitarian response to the food crisis related to the ongoing conflict between the terrorist organisation Boko Haram and the Nigerian government in northeastern Nigeria.

## 1.1 Purpose and research question

The relevance of academic research analyzing empirical cases of humanitarian assistance and policy programmes of humanitarian organizations are high due to two major reasons. Firstly, this type of research is useful as conclusions drawn from it can be seen as a foundation of what type of humanitarian assistance that is more or less successful. Accordingly, these studies can help practitioners to come up with potential suggestions on ways to improve practical work in the field. Moreover, they also contribute to the development of empirical research within the research field. Furthermore, academic studies of this type could be seen as a more transparent complement to empirical data and research conducted by humanitarian organizations themselves. Due to limitations in space and time, this is not completely the aim of this study. Independently on the conclusion of this thesis, it is up to further research to come up with suggestions on how humanitarian assistance on food security, and more specifically FAO and the WFP, should work to incorporate gender dimensions in their work in attempt to be more effective and conducive to gender equality and, furthermore, positive peace.

Rather than suggesting which strategies and policies that are the best ones for gender mainstreaming, the purpose of this study is primarily to take the first step by describing current strategies and policies of FAO and the WFP. In a broader sense, this implies addressment of how FAO and the WFP has been working with

gender dimensions of food insecurity related to violent conflicts during the recent years. This will be done through an analysis of the two organizations current work in northeastern Nigeria. The case of Nigeria is primarily selected as it is assessed to be a critical one. In turn, a qualitative descriptive case study of this kind will hopefully contribute to a broader academic understanding of how gender mainstreaming is applied in practice.

The overall research question that will lay the foundation of this thesis is hence stated as follows: *How has FAO and the WFP addressed gender dimensions of food insecurity during the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria from 2017 and onwards?*

## 1.2 Demarcations

As there is a lot of data material available, especially on the work of FAO, and it is neither possible nor necessary, for the purpose of this study, to analyze all of them, the time period has been delimited. The reason for the demarcation in time to investigate the years from ‘2017 and onwards’ is mainly that this study intends to draw conclusions on the organizations current work and not if, and how, the work of the organizations has evolved over time. For the purpose of this study, it is therefore more interesting to look at the organization’s work during a time period which is as close to today as possible.

Additionally, there has been much more analysis and research highlighting the peak of the conflict (the time period between the years 2013-2015), than after the escalation and de-escalation period. Even though the conflict and conduction of direct violence has been less intense during the years after the de-escalation period, the situation has continued to be emergent for people living in the most affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe in northeastern Nigeria (FAO, 2020a; Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a hugely negative impact on the humanitarian situation, and in particular the food security conditions, in the whole country (FAO, 2020b; WFP, 2021b: p. 2-3).

## 2 Empirical background

The tensions between different groups in Nigeria is mainly rooted in issues related to rights regarding territorial land, natural resources and political power. However, the security conditions in the country deteriorated considerably in 2009, when Boko Haram launched their first formal violent attack towards the Nigerian state, followed by increased violence, primarily in the northeastern region. Simultaneously as the Nigerian government made attempts to push Boko Haram militias back in the mid of 2013, the situation escalated, with a greater number of attacks and a more grotesque form of violence, primarily targeting women and children in the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe in northeastern Nigeria, contributing to a humanitarian catastrophe with over 2 million internally displaced people (approximately 80 percent of those people are estimated to be women and children). Since then, direct violence against civilians has been conducted and the armed conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government has continued, but with a slow decrease in intensity (UCDP, 2021a; UCDP, 2021b; UNDP, 2017: p. 9).

The international community have been reporting on implications on the food security conditions in Nigeria as a consequence of Boko Haram's violence. Internal displacement of the population in the northeastern states, destruction of agriculture land and transport roads, and reduced access to food markets are supposed to be contributing factors to higher food prices and, thereby, decreased accessibility to nutritious food for many people living in poverty (Adelaja, 2019: p. 115-116; UNDP, 2017: p. 7-8). Even though there has been a subtle de-escalation trend in the conflict since the peak in 2013, the prevalence of undernourishment, as well as severe food insecurity in the total population has been on constant rise since Boko Haram became active back in 2009 (World Bank, 2021a; World Bank 2021b).

Although the current situation in northeastern Nigeria is classified as emergent (WFP, 2021a), and that the ongoing conflict, as one of the major contributors to

that situation, has been going on for more than a decade, it is not given much attention, neither in western academic research nor in media. This is remarkable, especially considering the fact that the food crisis in northeastern Nigeria was perceived to be one of the ten most serious ones in 2019 (FSIN, 2020: p. 2). Moreover, Nigeria received the sixth largest amount of humanitarian aid in the world in 2018, which is an increase in received aid from 2017 (DI, 2020: p. 40-41)<sup>1</sup>. Apart from these facts, there are several other arguments for investigating gender sensitivity in the work of FAO and the WFP in Nigeria during the last few years. These arguments will be outlined more in detail further on in this paper (see section 4.2 in this paper).

It is worthwhile to mention, as a small disclaimer, that there is no empirical evidence supporting that the deterioration in food insecurity in northeastern Nigeria is exclusively dependent on violence conducted by Boko Haram, or by insecurity caused by the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government. In general, such causal relationships are seemingly impossible to establish, as food security conditions are highly dependent on several other factors (Matthew, 2013: p. 270-271; McDonald, 2013: p. 237-240). This fact is furtherly emphasized in relation to the case of Nigeria, where climate change, rapid population growth, and economic shocks are seen as additional significant factors to the high prevalence of food insecurity in the region (FSIN, 2020: p. 147-148)

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, this counts for the total amount of humanitarian aid Nigeria received in 2018, and not exclusively humanitarian aid attempting to antagonize hunger exclusively. However, the data is still seemingly relevant as it proves that the current situation in the country is alarming.



## 3 Theoretical framework

In this section, it will be provided definitions as well as a theoretical background regarding the relationship between violent conflicts and food insecurity and, furthermore, how these two factors affect individuals differently depending on their gender. Moreover, a framework for analyzing how FAO and the WFP consider gender dimensions when working with food insecurity in northeastern Nigeria will be outlined.

### 3.1 Definitions

#### *Food (in)security*

In accordance with FAO's definition of food insecurity, the concept is here defined as “[a] situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2017: p. 107). The concept could also be defined through defining what food security implies, which is that “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, 2020: p. 254). Food insecurity is then when people do not have either physical, social or economic access (or a combination of these factors) to meet their dietary needs in a safe, sufficient and nutritious way.

The reason for using the later privative definition of what food insecurity implies is that it is then feasible to crystallize the four dimensions that impact the presence and levels of food (in)security. These dimensions are; *availability* of food, *access* to food with regard to economical and physical considerations, *utilization* of food, and lastly, *stability* of the three prior dimensions over time (FAO, 2017: p. 107; FAO, 2020: p. 254). The crystallization of these four dimensions enables for a more

structured and systematic approach for professionals in the field, both at a theoretical and practical level, to work with improving food security conditions.

As this thesis does not strive to measure food insecurity in itself, there is no need to conceptualize or operationalize the term furtherly. However, it is helpful to define what food (in)security implies in an attempt to facilitate the operationalization of gender mainstreaming as a measurement on whether FAO and the WFP consider gender dimensions of food insecurity in their work in Nigeria.

### *Gender mainstreaming*

The concept of gender mainstreaming as a process was firstly defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 as:

[...] the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (ECOSOC, 1997).

Furthermore, gender mainstreaming could be understood as a political strategy used to advance gender equality (Bendl & Schmidit, 2013: p. 365). Accordingly, gender mainstreaming should not be seen as a single act. Rather, it is a process which implies recognition of that structural gender inequalities exist and reflection of what these inequalities mean in practice, as well as how they are constituted and reproduced. Moreover, this is necessary to do in an attempt to come up with a strategy to change unequal structures with the aim to improve gender equality in the long-term.

### *Humanitarian aid/assistance*

Humanitarian aid and humanitarian assistance will henceforth be used simultaneously, referring to the same thing. The meaning of these terms can vary greatly depending on context, but it often implicates several things, contributing to a blurred definition. Hence, it is valid to define the term broadly. This is done by Michael VanRooyen, who describes humanitarian assistance as “aimed at providing rapid, life-saving support in settings of high population vulnerability, such as times

of war, disaster, or displacement” (VanRooyen, 2013: p. 12). For the purpose of this study, this definition will be used in a broader sense, also involving supportive measures that intend to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable people affected by a crisis in the form of war, displacement or a disaster of some kind.

## 3.2 Previous research

### 3.2.1 Food insecurity and violent conflicts

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, violent conflicts and insecurity are constituting the primary driver of hunger and food crises around the globe (Adams et al, 2020; Delgado et al, 2019). This is also emphasized by qualitative studies, focusing on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, not only explaining violent conflict as a driving factor behind food security but also linking the problem to poverty, climate related disasters and social and political inequalities (Akadiri et al, 2019: p. 381-382; Holleman, 2017: p. 1; Cohen & Messer, 2007: p. 301-303; Okoyeuzu et al, 2019: p. 185; Oyefara, 2012: p. 627-628).

Notably, it is worth mentioning that there is research emphasizing that the relationship between food insecurity and violent conflicts goes the other way around as well, mainly focusing on grievances on resources as a catalyzing factor to violent conflicts. Generally, this theoretical approach highlights how poverty, economic inequality and food insecurity are related to political marginalization. Taking this perspective one step further (or backward depending on how one look at it), bad governance and lack of political rights could be seen as contributors to poverty, economic inequality and food insecurity for particular groups within a society (Bagozzi & Koren, 2016: p. 1007; Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2018: p. 157-158; Okoyeuzu et al, 2019: p. 186-187).

Notably, it is the fact that there is a constituted relationship between the variables food insecurity and conflict that is of relevance for the purpose of this study, not the specific way this relationship looks. The issue of interest is rather how

humanitarian aid programmes, and more specifically those conducted by FAO and WFP, deal with the dynamic relationship between food insecurity and violent conflicts, with special emphasis on so-called gender dimensions.

### 3.2.2 Gender dimensions of food insecurity and violent conflicts

The way men and women are affected differently by various crises, including violent conflicts, has been noticed by both scholars and international organisations. For instance, women are victims of sexual abuse and other forms of gender based violence (GBV) to a greater extent than men, contributing to a stigma which put them in an even more vulnerable position (Buvinic et al, 2013: p. 119-120; IASC, 2017: p. 22). It is also proved that females are affected by poverty and other forms of collateral damage existing from violent conflicts to a greater extent than men. This, of course, includes food insecurity, by which women seems to be more affected because of their role as responsible for housework, including taking care of agricultural and rural livelihoods and bringing food to the table while the men work or engage in conflict (FAO, 2016: p. 3-4; Holleman, 2017: p. 40).

Additionally, females' access to humanitarian assistance in form food supplies or other entitlements necessary for utilization of food resources are often limited due to the same reasons as noted priorly. Females often become 'new' heads of the household heads as a consequence of changes in social structures enforced by conflicts and other crises. At the same time, women are still holding their traditional role as caregivers with a responsibility for children. Holding these two positions at the same time contributes to difficulties for women to leave their home due to lack of childcare, reducing their access to humanitarian aid which is not delivered directly to them (Holleman, 2017: p. 65; IASC, 2017: p. 22; Olsson, 2000: p. 6).

In relation to peace and security, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) could be seen as a landmark constituting an international consensual realization regarding the unequal impact violent conflicts and insecurity has on individuals depending on their gender. Furthermore, S/RES/1325 calls for a recognition of this and stresses the importance of "equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and

security”. Hence, the UN, among other institutions, humanitarian organisations and professionals in the field, calls for gender-sensitive approaches in an attempt to establish conditions for sustainable peace and, furthermore, food security (Holleman, 2017: p. 64). One way of doing this is through gender mainstreaming of humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding.

### 3.3 Framework for analysis

As mentioned previously, the framework that will be used to analyze the material will be built on a feminist approach, focusing on what gender mainstreaming means both in theory and in practice. Based on the definitions provided in section 3.1, gender mainstreaming will be operationalized and used as measurement of how FAO and the WFP address gender dimensions of food insecurity in their humanitarian response to the food crisis related to the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria. Moreover, the four dimensions constituting the definition of food security will be considered in the analysis on the extent of gender mainstreaming within strategies and work of FAO and the WFP.

To measure whether and how FAO and the WFP recognizes the gender dimensions of food insecurity in their work, gender mainstreaming will be operationalized through reflection on the following questions:

- 1) Is gender analysis<sup>2</sup> explicitly integrated in the work done by FAO and the WFP in Nigeria?
- 2) Furtherly, is the special vulnerable position of females related to food insecurity recognized?
- 3) Are there particular measures taken to promote long-term gender equality in Nigeria through the improvement of food security?

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<sup>2</sup> A gender analysis implies that the nature of the relationship between males and females is considered in the humanitarian response to a particular situation. For instance, gender roles, economic in/dependence, self-determination and access to or control over resources could be included in a gender analysis (IASC, 2017: p. 380).

If FAO and the WFP's humanitarian responses on the food crisis in northeastern Nigeria are to be perceived as gender mainstreamed, it is expected...

- ... that gender analyses are conducted and moreover, explicitly formulated in the documents, analyzing the situations with regard to the prevalence of gender inequalities. Moreover, it should be articulated how these inequalities are manifested and affects the food (in)security conditions for individuals, taking all four dimensions of food security in consideration.
- ... that the humanitarian assistance provided meets the needs of the most vulnerable, considering their *access* to, *availability* and *utilization* of food. Regarding these aspects, the form of humanitarian assistance provided is seemingly relevant to consider, both in terms of its content and how it is delivered. For instance, it could mean that humanitarian assistance on food supplies are delivered directly to women, as this reduces exposures to potential risks or factors hindering them from utilization of.
- ... that there are explicit formulated measures taken to advance gender equality in the long-term through a gender sensitive response to the food crisis. Put differently, this means improvement in *stability* of the three dimensions of food security mentioned above, advancing food security in general over time.

## 4 Methodology

Below the research design and method, in the form of a case study using qualitative content analysis as methodology, is described and discussed. Moreover, the case selections, as well as the material used in this study, will be discussed.

### 4.1 Research design

As the aim is to bring awareness about gender dimensions of food insecurity related to violent conflicts and, furthermore, describe how these aspects are addressed by international humanitarian actors, a qualitative approach in the form of a single-N case study, using a qualitative content analysis approach will be conducted. Accordingly, the humanitarian response by FAO and the WFP in northeastern Nigeria will be deeply investigated considering how the organizations address gender dimensions of food insecurity in the context of a protracted intrastate war. This will be done through a qualitative content analysis of documents, published by FAO and the WFP.

This approach will hopefully contribute to that this study holds strong internal validity (Halperin & Heath, 2017: p. 154, 214). Even though the external validity could be questionable due to the case study approach, it is likely that at least some conclusions could be generalized as Nigeria constitutes a critical case (Halperin & Heath, 2017: p. 214-215), which will be elaborated on in more detail furtherly. The external validity would probably get strengthened if the study had been more comparative in character, comparing a few cases. Nevertheless, a comparative approach would possibly reduce the depth of the study and its internal validity even though this would be in a very limited manner. A comparative approach would, however, implicate other difficulties, related to the selection of just a few relevant cases (Halperin & Heath, 2017: p. 218).

## 4.2 Case selections

### 4.2.1 Nigeria

Nigeria can be considered as a critical and relevant case to investigate profoundly for various reasons. Firstly, the country has suffered from violent conflict for a long time. Secondly, hunger is a persistent and emergent problem in the country, especially in the northeastern region, making it the seventh worst food crisis in 2019 (FSIN, 2020: p. 21; WFP, 2020). Thirdly, Nigeria is a country where gender inequalities are present and very prominent. Regarding the gender dimension on food insecurity in Nigeria, specifically, previous research states that female-headed households are exposed to food insecurity to a greater extent than man-headed households (Akadiri et al, 2019: p. 381, 397). Lastly, with consideration of the fact that the high prevalence of malnutrition and food insecurity Africa, with the number of affected people growing faster than everywhere else in the world, it is seemingly relevant to do more research food insecurity in this region (FAO et al, 2020: p. 3; FSIN, 2020: p. 8-9). As Nigeria as one it could be argued that the amount of research on the subject is limited.

### 4.2.2 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations & the United Nations World Food Programme

Due to the situation in Nigeria, especially in the northeastern region, there are lots of humanitarian organisations operating in the country. The choice to investigate how FAO and the WFP works with food security with regard to gender inequalities relates to three things in particular. The first of those arguments are that FAO and the WFP, evidently, works with food insecurity, and operates globally in several conflict affected countries. Accordingly, the WFP, in particular, has also emphasized the relation between conflicts and food insecurity and, moreover, the need to beat hunger to encourage and attain peace. Furtherly, the WFP received the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for this reason.



The second reason for the choice of FAO and the WFP is that they are international organisations operating under mandate of the UN. Hence, it could be assumed that they both represent and reproduce values of universal human rights and gender equality that the UN is recognized for and express in their statutes and resolutions, like S/RES/1325, to mention one of the most prominent. It is therefore interesting to investigate if the UN, as an institution, actually practice what they preach and is recognized for. The third notable reason is that there is relatively much material available on the work FAO and the WFP do, which could be a challenge in other cases.

### 4.3 Material

With regard to the nature of this study and limits in resources regarding both time and funding, the material will consist of secondary data in form of reports, strategies and policy documents from FAO and the WFP. Notably, it would be preferable to complement the secondary data with primary data in form of interviews with field workers or effected civilians to get a more holistic perspective and, furthermore, contribute to better construct validity (Brounéus, 2011: p. 131; Höglund & Öberg, 2011: p. 7). Due to the previously mentioned reasons considering the exclusive use of secondary data collected and written primarily by FAO and the WFP themselves, this is not possible to do in this study.

Accordingly, it is worthwhile to consider potential bias in the data, and moreover if the material used are objective in character. All documents assessed in the analysis are published by FAO and the WFP themselves, or jointly with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UN women, and sited through the organizations. Hence, the objectivity and, particularly, the transparency could be questionable (Sollenberg & Öberg, 2011: p. 52). However, a majority of these documents acknowledge that the views expressed belong to the authors, and not necessarily to the organizations. This does not count for all of the documents assessed in the analysis, in particular not the situation reports or response plans.

## 5 Analysis

In this section the theoretical framework presented previously in this paper (see section 3.3 in this paper) will be applied to analyze reports, strategies and policy documents on the humanitarian response of FAO and the WFP on the Nigerian food crisis from 2017 and onwards. The analysis will be structured around three major themes, which together constitutes the operationalization of what gender mainstreaming means when it is applied on humanitarian assistance on food insecurity in practice. These three themes are: 1) the use of a gender analysis on the situation, 2) the degree to which the needs of the most vulnerable people affected by the food crisis are met, and lastly, 3) measures taken to advance long-term gender equality in northeastern Nigeria through the improvement of food security. A brief summary of the findings will be formulated at the end of this section.

### 5.1 Recognizing gender dimensions of food security

As stated priorly in this paper, recognition of the prevalence of gender inequalities and the need for gender mainstreaming within humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, provided both by the UN and non-governmental actors, has been recognized and manifested for more than two decades (ECOSOC, 1997; S/RES/1325). This fact is also articulated explicitly by FAO and the WFP in their own documents on general policies and strategies for their operations in general, but also specifically on the situation in Nigeria (FAO et al, 2018; FAO & ECOWAS, 2018; WFP, 2017a; WFP, 2019).

Recognizing gender dimensions are essential for the conduction of a more gender sensitive humanitarian response and, furthermore, for advancing gender equality. Nevertheless, it is probably the most facile phase of a gender mainstreaming process, as it only obligates acknowledgement of unequal gender structures on a

theoretical level. The more complicated are the practical phases, which desires that consolidated gender structures are being challenged. Whether, and how, this is done by FAO and the WFP in their humanitarian response on the food crisis, related to the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria, will be considered furtherly in the following sections.

### 5.1.1 Applying a gender analysis on the situation

When conducting gender mainstreaming in practice, the first step is to do a gender analysis on the situation where the humanitarian response is supposed to take place. This could possibly imply assessment of the occurrence of particular gender roles and, furthermore, how these roles affect the economic independence, access and control over resources, freedom and political rights, as well as self-determination in general for individuals. In the analysis that follows, the major focus will obviously be on whether the application of a gender analysis on the context of the conflict-affected northeastern Nigeria considers gender dimensions of food insecurity.

The WFP acknowledges their use of a gender analysis on the situation in northeastern Nigeria in all of their documents assessed in this analysis. For instance, this is done in the report on a food market project that intends to empower women living in the rural state of Borno in northeastern Nigeria. In this report, the relationship between established patriarchal socio-cultural gender roles and the particular vulnerability of females, in relation to food insecurity, is recognized (WFP, 2017b: p. 7-8). Furtherly, it is emphasized that the vulnerable position of women has deteriorated, both through environmental pressure and the ongoing conflict in the region. The reason for this is mainly that these two factors contribute to disruption of usable agriculture land and productive resources, as well as access to urban trade markets and opportunities to meet retailers, resulting in increased food insecurity (WFP, 2017b: p. 10-11).

Moreover, in the general strategic plan for Nigeria for the operational years 2019-2022, the WFP explicitly recognizes how gender inequalities are constituted (WFP,

2019). This is done through highlighting that gender inequalities are persistent in the country at a national level, and that the conflict in northeastern Nigeria, thereby, affects the lives of individuals differently depending on gender and age (WFP, 2019: p. 1-2). For instance, it is stated that a majority (60 percent) of the ten million school-age children that do not go to school are girls and that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is higher among women than men. In relation to the conflict, girls and women are exposed to GBV in form of sexual abuse, trafficking and forced marriage to a greater extent than men and boys, while men and boys are more likely to be involuntary recruited to armed forces. Moreover, it is stated that “the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society hinders the participation of women in formal and informal decision making”, and that “women and girls face additional barriers that affect their food security” (WFP, 2019: p. 4-5).

FAO’s country programming framework for Nigeria during the operational years 2018-2022 (FAO, 2021a) could be assessed to be corresponding to the strategic plan of the WFP. Notably, the document from FAO is not as detailed as the strategic plan provided by WFP. Neither the ways individuals are affected differently by the conflict nor the food crisis, depending on their gender, are explicitly addressed in the programming framework of FAO. However, the special vulnerable position of women is addressed in FAO’s response plans from 2019 and onwards (FAO, 2019; FAO, 2020a; FAO, 2020b).

Furthermore, FAO has published another document jointly with ECOWAS. This is called *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods* (2018), and applies a rigorous gender analysis on the situation in Nigeria, both at a national and at a regional level. In this document, it is described how the prevalence of gender inequalities in Nigeria are manifested through the gap between land ownership and food production, especially in rural areas<sup>3</sup>. Even though women produce between 60 and 80 percent of all the food in these areas, less than 10 percent of Nigerian

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<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that 48,8 of Nigeria’s total population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2021c).

women in total<sup>4</sup> are landowners. In turn, this results in greater food insecurity for women because of lack of access and control over food production. Furthermore, this reduces the profits for women (FAO & ECOWAS, 2018: p. 28, 33-35).

A gender analysis is applied in a similar manner in a report for a joint project by FAO, the WFP and UN women. The purpose of this project is to restore and promote sustainable agriculture-based livelihoods and, thereby, food security for the population living in the conflict-affected Borno state. In the contextual background to this incentive, the three organization's draw the same conclusions as emphasized in the documents mentioned above (FAO et al, 2018: 32-35, 38-39).

### 5.1.2 Meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people

Considering the broadened definition of humanitarian assistance provided in the introduction of this thesis, it could be argued that the main objective of humanitarian assistance during crises is to assist the most vulnerable individuals with appropriate and sufficient aid. This perception is formulated recurrently in the strategic documents of FAO and the WFP, as well as those published jointly with ECOWAS and UN women. Through the conduction of a gender analysis on the situation in northeastern Nigeria, females are among those to be considered as the most vulnerable of food insecurity due to several reasons (see the previous section). Furtherly, this means that humanitarian assistance provided on food security should be focused on this group, attempting to meet their dietary needs. In particular, this means advancing availability and utilization of food, as well as economic, social and physical access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. The WFP does this in different ways, and states that:

WFP will provide unconditional food assistance, using CBTs where appropriate, to the most food-insecure, crisis-affected populations. WFP's life-saving assistance will be complemented by income-generating and vocational training, including the use of cash grants, targeting women and adolescent girls

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<sup>4</sup> According to data from the World Bank, the total population of Nigeria in 2019 consisted of 49,3 percent women and 50,7 percent males (World Bank, 2021d; World Bank, 2021e).

and boys who have been identified as particularly vulnerable to protection risks and food insecurity in order to increase their self-reliance. (WFP, 2019: 12).

Moreover, the targeting and empowering of women in market-based approaches through the use of cash-based transfers (CBT) or provision of entitlements, increases their possibilities to utilize resources. For instance, this is exemplified in the project focusing on street food vendors in the rural state of Borno in northeastern Nigeria, where the implications of delivering aid in form of entitlements directly towards women are reported as mainly positive (WFP, 2017b: p. 63, 68). This kind of gender sensitive humanitarian assistance is furtherly prescribed in the WFP's strategic plan for Nigeria during 2019-2022 (WFP, 2019: p. 12-13, 16-17, 21). In the strategic plan, the particular targeting of females is also transparently expressed through a beneficiary analysis, ascribing a greater amount of money for girls and women in all major activities (WFP, 2019: p. 21-22).

Women as a group are furtherly targeted in two out of five prioritization areas in FAO's programming framework for Nigeria during the operational years 2018-2022. Both initiatives are collaborative with the government of Nigeria, and some national organisations in the field. The first one intends to empower women (and youths) in the agriculture sector through financial support and technical assistance and training, with a major focus on rural populations (FAO, 2021: p. 6). The second prioritization of relevance, regarding food security, attempts to enhance the capacity of vulnerable communities during protracted crises, reducing risks and strengthening their resilience. Furthermore, it is stated that "[t]his will be achieved through innovative approaches such as cash based transfer mechanisms like cash plus, protection sensitive livelihoods, etc." (FAO, 2021: p. 8).

In the response plans on the food crisis in northeastern Nigeria, FAO also articulates that training on aquaculture as well as distribution of aquacultural kits will be particularly targeted towards women (FAO, 2020a; FAO, 2020b). This, in turn, promotes utilization of food through the advancement of hygiene and the availability of resources necessary for food utilization. Furthermore, FAO supports animal restocking targeting females, intending to create income generation and

improved nutrition (FAO, 2020b). These activities contribute to the advancement of access, availability and utilization of food, improving food security.

Additionally, attempts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people affected by food insecurity and the conflict in northeastern Nigeria are exemplified through the joint project by FAO, the WFP and UN women in the state of Borno. However, there is a lack of transparency on how this is done more specifically than “through the creation of employment and the promotion of environment- and climate-friendly livelihood opportunities (with a special focus on women, youth, and vulnerable households)”, and through the providing “basic services for local populations (particularly the most vulnerable and including refugees and displaced people) related to food and nutrition security, health, education, social protection, and environmental sustainability” (FAO et al, 2018: p. 33-34).

### 5.1.3 Promoting gender equality in the long-term

If gender mainstreaming is to be perceived as completely implemented, there is a need to promote long-term gender equality through the humanitarian response to a crisis. Notably, it is recognized that this could be very complicated in a situation when humanitarian assistance is a matter of life and death. However, it is seemingly not impossible, and there are several examples of how this could be done in the reports and documents assessed in this analysis.

In the report of the project focused on food vendors at street food markets in Borno state, it is reported that the particular targeting of women as aid receivers seems to strengthen their social status and, furtherly, their decision making-power in general. In turn, this contributes to a shift in the dynamic relationship between the gender roles of men and women, advancing gender equality (WFP, 2017b: p. 63; WFP, 2019: p. 14). Nevertheless, such shifts can also imply obstacles as the patriarchal socio-cultural structure manifested in the traditional gender roles of men and women are being challenged. This can contribute to jealousy and anger among men, contributing to decreased security for women within households through increased risk of GBV targeting women (WFP, 2017b: p. 64). To take it one step further, this exemplifies the paradoxical complexity in attempts to advance gender equality.

Hence, other initiatives supported by the WFP, engaging males in activities intending to change destructive ideals and norms of masculinity are crucial for the transformation of gender roles (WFP, 2017b: p. 61-62; WFP, 2019: p. 11).

Furthermore, the WFP articulates particular measures taken to support vocational training and income-generating activities for women, promoting gender equality in the long-term. Moreover, they state that:

Training will focus on a range of skills linked to food security, including food processing, the production of fuel-efficient stoves, tailoring, gardening and information technology. Where possible, training will be linked to future public reconstruction works and local nutritious food production and fortification. These and other activities seek to mainstream gender equality and environmental and climate change concerns (WFP, 2019: p. 13).

The same kind of projects, focusing on activities that generate financial profits, are supported by FAO in their programming framework for Nigeria during the years 2018-2019. Besides empowering through advancing economic independence of women, long-term gender equality is also promoted in other ways by the two prioritization areas mentioned priorly in this analysis (FAO, 2021: p. 6, 8). Moreover, FAO articulates that they “will ensure that the multi-sectoral plans, policies and strategies are based on sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis” (FAO, 2021: p. 8). It is also recognized that this acknowledgment is essential for the continuing advancement of gender equality in the country, as such improvement is reliant on that humanitarian assistance provided by the organizations operating in the country are gender sensitive in character (FAO & ECOWAS, 2018: p. 26-27).

Another, nonetheless, significant manner to advance gender equality is through supporting and collaborating with other actors, both at a local, national and regional level. This is done by FAO as well as the WFP, and furtherly formulated in several of their documents (FAO & ECOWAS, 2018: p. 4-5; FAO, 2021; WFP, 2019: p. 12, 15-18). In a country where patriarchal and discriminating structures are manifested through socio-cultural norms and values, it is impossible to long-term gender equality in the long-term without a multisectoral approach that includes stakeholders of power.



## 5.2 Summary of findings

In summary, both FAO and the WFP articulates the conduction of gender mainstreaming in reports, strategies and policy documents considering the humanitarian response to the food crisis in Nigeria, at least to some extent.

Some kind of gender analysis is applied in all of the projects and prioritization areas that are reported on addressing. However this is not always explicitly articulated, depending on the length and form of the document. For example, the use of gender analysis is neither articulated in the response plans of FAO, nor their programming framework for Nigeria (see FAO, 2019; FAO, 2020a; FAO, 2020b; FAO, 2021). Nevertheless, the gender dimensions of food insecurity are addressed through the particular targeting of women by some of the projects that are reported on. Hence, it could be assumed that a gender analysis is applied in the research phase priorly to the planning of the projects and activities that are described in these documents.

When a gender analysis is applied explicitly (see WFP, 2017b; WFP, 2019; FAO & ECOWAS, 2018; FAO et al, 2018), it contributes to a sense of how the conflict in northeastern Nigeria, together with the overall patriarchal socio-cultural structure persistent in the country, leads to that female are more vulnerable for food insecurity. In turn, this legitimizes the humanitarian response and has a positive impact on the transparency of the documents.

Regarding the practical work for improving food security through a gender sensitive response, there are several reasonable measures taken, addressing all four dimensions of food security. Advancement of access, availability and utilization of food are done by the empowerment of women by targeting them as aid receivers; through financial support in the form of CBTs, as well as training in income-generating activities, and training in nutrition and aquaculture. The fourth dimension of food security, considering stability of the three priorly mentioned dimensions over time, is mainly improved through two forms of activities. Firstly, activities attempting to improve resilience to protracted crises advance the aspect of stability. The second, seemingly important activity, is incentives attempting to

engage males in the transformation of gender roles through changing their destructive ideals and norms of what masculinity means (see FAO et al, 2018; WFP, 2017b; WFP, 2019).

## 6 Conclusion

Considering the prominent relationship between violent conflicts, food insecurity and gender inequality, it is relevant to investigate humanitarian assistance addressing these issues simultaneously. Such investigation has been done in this study, with an intention to address how FAO and the WFP works with gender dimensions of food insecurity through their humanitarian assistance in the food crisis related to the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria from 2017 onwards. The concept of gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for improving long term gender equality, has been used and operationalized, attempting to investigate the work of FAO and the WFP in a systematic manner.

The findings show that both FAO and the WFP address gender dimensions of food insecurity in several ways. For instance, gender analysis is used to assess the situation (namely, which groups that are most vulnerable and should be prioritized, which form of aid that is most appropriate considering the situation and the requirements of the people most in need of aid, etcetera). Furtherly, a gender sensitive approach is applied on the practical response to improve food security. This is mainly done by targeting females as a group of particular vulnerability, by empowering women and by incentives attempting to change destructive gender roles that are manifested in patriarchal socio-cultural structures.

Notably, one could argue that it is necessary to analyze more material than has been done in this study to draw a more valid conclusion. Furtherly, it is worth recognizing that this study is conducted through a qualitative content analysis, which could be assumed as a too narrow methodology to give a nuanced answer to the specified research question. In turn, the general comprehension of what gender mainstreaming could mean in practice when it is used as a strategic tool of humanitarian organisations also becomes very limited if one only takes this analysis in consideration. Hence, the field would arguably benefit more if further research has more of a multi-method approach, not only relying on analysis of text

documents, but also interviews and field work. However, it should be noted that the academic research on how gender mainstreaming is used within humanitarian assistance is still very limited. Considering the logistical limitations of this study, it should rather be seen as a contribution attempting to put light on the significance of more research investigating gender mainstreaming aid as a strategy for improving gender equality.

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