Conflict-Induced Displacement and Food Insecurity: The Case Of Burkina Faso As Sahel’s Growing Epicenter of Conflict

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Abstract
This article discusses how the military conflict in Burkina Faso affects food insecurity and the welfare of its people. This issue poses a threat to its citizens' ability to achieve human security, which focuses on welfare and basic human rights, including the availability and access to adequate food. This article is qualitative research, and the analysis of this phenomenon comes from reference articles, books, news, reports, and official documents. The theoretical approach used is related to Conflict-Induced Displacement, Human Security, and the four main dimensions of Food Security, namely food availability, access, utilization, stability, and displacement of communities due to conflict. The results of the analysis show that the geographic location of the country of Burkina Faso, which is confined between the West African mainland, makes it vulnerable to military conflict affiliated with Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and is now the center of conflict in the Sahel region. The author also found out that the main reason for ongoing hunger and malnutrition in Burkina Faso is because its people were forced to be displaced due to armed conflict in the region.

Keywords: food insecurity, hunger, conflict-induced displacement, human security

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: kerawanan pangan, kelaparan, perpindahan akibat konflik, keamanan manusia
Introduction

Armed conflict has been one of the major global challenges, causing multiple security issues and humanitarian crises. It has affected most parts of the world, including Africa. The Sahel is a region in Africa currently facing armed conflicts that involve militaries, extremist groups, and insurgent groups. The tensions and the conflicts have worsened in the Sahel region, concentrated in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Burkina Faso is now the epicenter of conflict in the Sahel Region, replacing Mali as its birthplace. The Malian conflict spilled over into Burkina Faso and Niger.

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country that shares borders with Mali, Niger, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo, causing Burkina Faso to have no access to the ocean and most of its people rely on agricultural and pastoral livestock production. Many of them are also engaged in mining activity. Agriculture and cattle-raising are the main activities of over 80% of the population, and cotton and livestock are the most exported products, overtaken only by gold since 2009 (Bertrand et al., 2013).

Since 2018, violent clashes have internally displaced more than 1.8 million people—a 62 percent increase in the last year alone. Out of Burkina Faso’s 20 million citizens, one in five Burkinabès requires emergency assistance. At present, more than 2.8 million people are food insecure, and this number is expected to rise significantly over the coming months as the country braces for a longer dry season (Lamarche, 2021).

Both militaries and extremist groups force the Burkinabès to flee and leave their homes. The situation has been extremely difficult for Burkinabès, especially for children whose violent conflicts impact the most vulnerable group. Children are the most affected by conflict, insecurity, and limited access to services: 50 to 60 percent of the displaced population are children (Stroh, 2013). Covid-19, climate change and the Russia-Ukraine war have made the situation much worse for the people.

The Republic of Upper Volta was the name of Burkina Faso before Captain Thomas Sankara changed it. Burkina Faso means the Land of Upright People. The political instability in Burkina Faso has occurred since 1966. Burkina Faso has experienced 6 coups from 1966 until 2015. Military coups have long been part of Burkina Faso’s history. The country has taken its longest break since the coup d’état in 1987 (Abdouliie, 2017). Burkina Faso has a history of military mutinies, coups, and social unrest. However, it was seen as relatively stable under former authoritarian leader Blaise Compaoré, who came to power in a 1987 coup (Arieff, 2022). Blaise Compaoré was previously Sankara’s close aide, but then he and his allies overthrew Thomas Sankara and acquired his power through a coup d’etat.

Blaise Compaoré ruled Burkina Faso for 27 years. He was forced to step down in 2014 after mass protests and demonstrations arose, causing the death of a student during his detention by police officers. Soon after Compaoré’s demise in late 2014, Burkina Faso slid into violence, becoming a new battleground in the Sahel crisis that started in Mali in 2012 (Haavik et al., 2022). There were many administrative flaws and human rights violations of the Compaoré regime (Hagberg et al., 2018). Burkina Faso under Compaoré rule represents an interesting case because, for almost three decades, Burkina Faso showed substantial domestic stability and weathered a number of intrastate conflicts in its region (Haavik et al., 2022). After the fall of Compaoré, the turmoil began to happen in Burkina Faso, marked with the presence of extremist groups.

Amid the political instability in Burkina Faso, extremist groups emerged around 2015, causing more disruption. Jama’at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Group for Support to Islam and Muslims (GSIM) in English, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) are the main violent extremist groups currently operating in Burkina Faso (Institute for Peace and Security Studies Addis Ababa University, 2020). These groups are affiliated with Al Qaeda and Islamic State.

The country has been experiencing many violent extremist group attacks since 2015, with many conducted by Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) (Gormezano, 2022). Extremist groups will likely target critical infrastructure to weaken the government, and
insecurity from the insurgency will very likely continue to deteriorate Burkina Faso’s humanitarian crisis, almost certainly increasing the number of displaced persons and worsening food insecurity (Sahli et al., 2022). Jama’at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was formed in 2017 following the merger of Ansar Dine, Al Mourabitoun, the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and the Sahara branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Institute for Peace and Security Studies Addis Ababa University, 2020).

Literature Review

The literature being used as literature review materials here mainly discusses how conflict and violence forced people to displace and bring a disadvantage to the food supply system, which is a threat to human security. 

Alexandra Lamarche wrote some articles about violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises, especially in West and Central Africa. One of Lamarche’s articles is After the Coup: Burkina Faso’s Humanitarian and Displacement Crisis. In her article, Lamarche focused on how instability and armed conflicts have driven displacement and humanitarian crises in Burkina Faso. The number has begun to increase since 2018 after the presence of several extremist groups in Burkina Faso. Armed conflicts are not only associated with non-state actors but also with state actors. They tend to be violent and commit atrocities, targeting civilian populations. Both state forces and armed non-state actors have primarily attacked Fulani civilians. Fulani is a Muslim ethnic group considered a minority group in Burkina Faso. Extremist groups recruit Fulani men and are often accused of being responsible for some terror attacks in Burkina Faso.

According to Lamarche, armed groups have forced Burkinabès to flee their homes by destroying water points and necessary goods as vital resources for living. The groups also destroyed some prominent infrastructures such as health, education, and electricity infrastructures. Burkina Faso’s displacement trends are unique in that most Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) report having only fled when faced with immediate danger and not in anticipation of violence. Direct violence was the main reason for 91 percent of IDPs displacement in Burkina Faso (Lamarche, 2021).

Violent conflict also becomes the main driver of food insecurity. The price of food spikes as the violent conflict rises in Burkina Faso. The war between Russia and Ukraine worsened this condition, forcing Burkinabè to rely on imported supplies from these two countries.

Lamarche focused on several forms of direct violence performed by armed groups, causing mass displacement and food insecurity in Burkina Faso. Water points, necessary goods, and infrastructures like health, education, and electricity were destroyed by armed or insurgent groups by using explosive devices. Food insecurity has worsened in Burkina Faso in the midst of conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Wheat is one of the primary supplies for Burkinabè, and it is imported from Russia and Ukraine. The impact of the conflict is the disruption of the supply chain. This problem can be further elaborated by adding the conflict disruption on agricultural and pastoral livestock production in Burkina Faso. People who especially live in rural areas have lost their livelihoods as farmers and herders, resulting in the loss of their primary resources.

Another publication titled Food Systems in Conflict and Peacebuilding Settings: Pathways and Interconnections by Caroline Delgado, Vonjai Murugani, and Kristina Tschunkert 2021 found that violent conflict will affect food systems (Delgado et al., 2021). Violent conflict will specifically have significant impacts on human capital, market, and food production. Violent conflict affects human capital involved in production through the displacement, injury, maiming, or death of skilled farmers, farmworkers, and roving pastoralists (Delgado et al., 2021). Producers of food, such as farmers and herders, have lost access to their fields, livestock, and pastures, resulting in limited food resource availability. Since the number of human capital decreases, the distribution of food resources is also constrained.

Birgit Kemmerling, Conrad Schetter, and Lars Wirkus from Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) Germany also
mentioned how violent conflict affects human capital and the production of food in their article with the title The Logics of War and Food (In)Security published in 2022. According to Kemmerling’s writing, conflict-induced displacement not only leads to the collapse of agricultural production and the decay of infrastructure at the place of origin but also disrupts or interrupts local and regional supply chains and increases food prices at local markets. At the same time, displaced people have to give up their livelihoods as producers of food (farmers and pastoralists). They are thus exposed to food insecurity themselves, especially if they cannot restart agricultural activities (Kemmerling et al., 2022).

Theoretical Framework
The author used Conflict-Induced Displacement to explain the correlation between current food insecurity in Burkina Faso and the conflict and violence happening there. Food security under human security would also help elaborate more on the issue.

Induced Conflict Displacement
The rising number of conflicts thus affects people’s lives in various aspects. A report on global trends in migration and displacement shows there are two main factors behind it: conflict-induced displacement caused by humans and disaster-caused displacement, which is caused by unpredictable natural phenomena and disasters (Migration Data Portal, 2019). The current phenomenon in Burkina Faso, where people are forced to leave because of conflict, violence, and human rights violations, is categorized as conflict-induced displacement. There are two main factors for this type of displacement: the cause of the displacement itself, which is violence, and the result arising because of the conflict itself (Lischer, 2007).

It is never an easy decision for the people to displace. The report shows that displacement is mostly caused because there is no safety net due to the violations for the people in the vulnerable area. Four types of conflict cause displacement involve interstate war, ethnic conflict, non-ethnic conflict, and flights from authoritarian and revolutionary regimes. Violations take the form of attacks against civilians, threats of murder, and unlawful and destructive destruction of civil property, fields, and livelihood stocks. The result of the conflict leads to a lack of access to basic services, malnutrition, lack of access to health services, loss of independence, economic consequences, and loss of independence (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2019). The data reported by UNHCR in 2020 recorded 82.4 million forced-displaced people in the world, the highest number ever reached in this category.

The causes of the conflict mostly are conflict and human rights violations. This situation is alarming since UNHCR is actively asking for much greater political will to address this issue. The list of countries with a high number of displaced persons includes the Syrian Arab Republic; Venezuela; Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which made up the Sahel region of Africa; the Democratic Republic of Congo; Afghanistan; Somalia; Ethiopia; Mozambique; Yemen; Ukraine; and hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021).

Human Security
Hans Van Ginkel, who is the Chancellor of the United Nations University, defines human security as an integrated, sustainable, and comprehensive security from fear, conflict, ignorance, poverty, hunger, deprivation of social and cultural aspects that are based on positive and negative freedoms (Ginkel & Newman, 2000). The concept of human security is also a concern of the United Nations Development Program, the agency tasked with providing technical and development assistance in the world under the auspices of the United Nations.

In a report released by the UNDP in 1994, security is a transformation of traditional security, which initially only focused on military capabilities, towards a broader concept of security that includes the idea of well-being and being free from threats such as hunger, diseases, and other forms of limitations so that humans will have freedom from fear and freedom from want. From these main elements, seven
dimensions of human security can be described, namely:

1. Economic security refers to a state of being free from poverty and guarantees for meeting basic needs through employment or social assistance. Threats in this realm can be a lack of jobs and the absence of social safety nets or social assistance.

2. Food security refers to easy access to food where the threat can be in the form of a lack of rights to obtain proper food, including access to jobs that provide a decent income.

3. Health security refers to the ease of obtaining access to health services and protecting individuals from disease. The threat can be in the form of infectious diseases and limited access to health services.

4. Environmental security refers to protection from air pollution and all forms of pollution of human habitation for access to clean water and air. Threats in this realm usually come in the form of pollution, land damage, inadequate water, and even natural disasters.

5. Personal security refers to protection from physical violence, especially against women and children, war, crime, illegal drugs, and narcotics. Threats can take the form of illegal human trafficking, violence against women and children, and illicit drug trafficking.

6. Community security refers to the protection of cultural values and traditions within the community. Real threats can be seen in the forms of genocide and inter-ethnic conflict.

7. Political security refers to the absence of pressure on rights. The forms of threats are examples of restraint on the right to express opinions and prohibition of political activity (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

In the report, UNDP sees that the current trend of conflict is not a conflict between countries but more conflict within countries. Because of its people-centered nature and general threats, all people in the world can see this as something relevant and even ignore national borders. Several examples of the threats mentioned are included in the issue of human security, according to UNDP, including high child mortality rates due to disease, inter-ethnic violence, long-term hunger, and climate damage to transnational crimes.

Food Security

The urgency of the right to food for livelihood has been taken into account by the United Nations, marked by the recognition of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and continued by the commencement of the World Food Summit in 1996, which highlighted the aspect of food security. The definition of food security, according to the Food Agricultural Organization, is the situation that occurs when all people are granted physical and economic access to proper and nutritious food for their well-being and healthy lives. There are four main dimensions of food security: food availability, food access, food utilization, and food stability (Food Agricultural Organization, 2006).

1. Food availability refers to the situation where food is available in sufficient numbers and food aid is available. This situation could be achieved by giving food aid to the vulnerable sector and giving financial support to increase domestic production or import in the livestock sector.

2. Food access refers to the ability to access food supplies to everyone in order to meet their nutritional needs. This dimension also includes adequate and robust access to the labor market (land, people, financial).

3. The food utilization dimension focuses on the effort to take care of human beings’ condition, increase healthy eating, and implement malnutrition prevention programs.

4. Food stability focuses on the process of creating a stable food circulation and making sure the quantity is ready for any unexpected situation, such as an economic crisis, conflict, or climate change. The involvement of displaced people and refugees in the process, identifying the structural causes of food insecurity in order
to create a safety net for the vulnerable aligned with the peacebuilding process.

**Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach, which aims to explore and understand the meaning that some individuals or groups of people think comes from social or human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is used in order to provide a descriptive narrative explanation of how conflict forced people to displace and affect their food security, which is part of their rights as human beings.

In this study, the authors used secondary data from books, journals, reports, documents, and official portals/websites of state institutions, as well as articles and newspapers relevant to the research topic.

**Result and Discussion**

**Burkina Faso: The Growing Conflict Epicenter in Sahel Region**

![Maps of Burkina Faso](https://www.britannica.com/place/Burkina-Faso)

Burkina Faso was once known for its peaceful coexistence of religious groups. However, the ousting of former President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 brought the country into a power vacuum and ended up in an unstable situation. The election was held in 2015, and President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was democratically elected, but this became the start of the uncertainty faced by the country until today (Lamarche, 2021). The situation used by the extremist group under the support of the Islamic State of Greater Sahara spread into the country and marked the beginning of widespread displacement. Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) is an extremist group that was established in 2017 and is believed to be the merger of the four big Salafi-jihadist groups in the Sahel: Ansar Dine, Katibat Macina, al-Mourabitoun, and the Sahara branch of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Thompson, 2021).

Although it first formed in Mali in 2017, this non-state armed group has been eyeing its expansion in the Sahel region. The geographical position of Burkina Faso—landlocked with no direct access to the sea and located between Mali and Niger, is seen by JNIM as the potential for their income source. JNIM's main source of income is from illicit activities, including smuggling, human trafficking, gold mining, and ransom.

There are five centers of conflict in the Sahel region such as Central Mali, Western Niger, the Tri-Border, North Central Burkina Faso, Southeast and Southwest Burkina Faso (African Centre For Strategic Studies, 2022); the last three are part of Burkina Faso due to the landlocked geographical position. The Tri-Border, also known as Liptako-Gourma, is projected to have the highest concentration of violence in the Sahel. North Central Burkina Faso recorded the highest number of displacements among the three due to the never-ending conflict between civilians and the militant Macina Liberation Front, which is part of JNIM as well for full access and control to the gold mining. Meanwhile, the last is the Southwest Burkina Faso which has the most strategic position for illicit commercial hubs for smuggling access to Niger, Benin, and Togo. The latest attack by JNIM-affiliated militants was recorded in Southeast Burkina Faso and killed an estimated 188 civilians. This situation then made Burkina Faso the fastest-growing conflict epicentrum in the Sahel region, and it was listed among the five countries with the highest number of displaced persons in 2021. Burkina Faso is registered with 682,000 persons
and makes up 80% of the newest displacement caused by conflict and violence in sub-Saharan Africa.

**People Displacement: The Aftermath of the Conflict**

The latest data published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showed that Burkina Faso is currently on the list of countries with the fastest-growing displacement crises in the world. With a total number of 1.76 million registered internally displaced people, the majority being women and children, the situation is worsened by poverty and hunger (Gnon-Konde, 2022). This finding resulted in the increasing rate of food insecurity, which doubled in 2022 compared to previous years, recorded 600,000 people in extreme hunger in Burkina Faso. This situation happened because Burkinabes had to flee and leave their ready-to-harvest fields and livestock (Bouda, 2022).

**Figure 2. Displacement Associated with Conflict and Violence**


The number of violent incidents and displacements in Burkina Faso has increased exponentially since early 2019, as shown in the table above. This trend could be seen as more attacks towards civilians, resulting in a situation where civilians felt unsafe even in their territory. On January 1, 2019, an attack occurred in Yirgou village in the northern center, and then Koglouweogo’s Self-Defense Forces attacked members of the Fulani community in retaliation. Since then, the northern center has displaced more than 68,000 people. Violence in the same area also happened in 2018, forcing over 11,000 people to be displaced, followed by a state of emergency declaration in 7 out of 13 regions: Hauts Bassins, Boucle du Mouhoun, Cascades, Center-Est, Est, Nord, and Sahel in December 2018.

**The Effect of Conflict and People Displacement in Burkina Faso’s Food Security**

At present, there are an estimated 323,000 people in Burkina Faso who are in IPC Phase 4 (critical), one phase below famine on the Famine Early Warning Systems Integrated Phase Classification. By the summer of 2022, this total is expected to double, with more than 628,000 people in IPC Phase 4 (Lamarche, 2021). It is predicted that several areas in Burkina Faso will be in phases of crisis and emergency by May 2023.

**December 2022 - January 2023**

**February - May 2023**
Access to agricultural inputs, markets, and humanitarian aid, especially in northern and eastern regions, will remain constrained and negatively affect food availability and access (World Food Programme, 2022). The majority of people in Burkina Faso relied on agriculture as their main source of income and for their daily consumption. The current conflict happening in Burkina Faso as the result of military conflict affiliated with JNIM forced the people to leave their homes and seek a safer place to live. The data shown by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) shows that countries in the Sahel region produce fewer harvests compared to several years ago.

Burkina Faso is one of the countries most affected by the conflict, as shown by decreasing numbers to 10% of the harvest production, resulting in the rising number of deaths due to malnutrition and famine. The conflict exploded and forced people to flee, leaving their home and their crops. The limited access to water worsened the situation, especially in Mansila, Pama, Madjoari, Djibo, and Mansila, where they had to wait more than a day for water (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2019).

Adequate access to food has been the main concern being mentioned by almost 98% of the displaced households, especially in Soum province, where 98% and at least 86% of the households have had to reduce their consumption of food because of the limited availability of livestock (ACAPS, 2019). This situation was also worsened by the limited access to clean water, where it took 30 minutes of walking to reach and put the vulnerable, especially women and children, at higher risk of attacks by the militants.

The violence itself impacts the farm, herders, and livestock migration because it damages the soil condition and water quality. The lives of people who rely on livestock and cereals as their main source of livelihood will be affected as well. This situation might bring a bigger number of people in IPC Phase 4 in the regions affected by the conflict, which is already at an emergency level or even worse at Phase 5 (Catastrophe).

**Conclusion**

The massive number of conflicts in a short period in Burkina Faso resulted in a higher number of displaced populations. As the growing epicentrum of conflict in the Sahel region, the land-locked geographical position put Burkina Faso as the coveted territory for the militants to spread their influence and aim for easier access to illicit trading activities.

The conflict-induced displacement due to the rising attack of Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) on civilians is a major threat to human security. The existence of fear, uncertainty, and limited access to food is within the food security dimension. Extreme hunger due to forced displacement is the current state of food insecurity in Burkina Faso, as seen from the non-fulfillment of the four dimensions of food security. Displaced households had to leave their home due to fear of attacks, so they had limited access and availability because they relied on food aid from the United Nations and food donors. Living together with other displaced persons, they had to reduce their food consumption, so there was no fulfillment in the dimension of food utilization and food stability.
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