

# Securing a Better Future for Communities in Fragile and Conflict- Affected States

Priorities for the UN General Assembly  
and Summit of the Future



## INTRODUCTION

This year's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is centered on enhancing global systems for current and future generations through the Summit of the Future. As cycles of violence and suffering become protracted without international mediation, the multilateral systems built in the aftermath of World War II are struggling to ensure a hopeful future for millions of people trapped in conflict and crisis. In fact, many multilateral institutions supporting financing, development and diplomacy can make it harder, not easier, for crisis-affected communities to resolve conflict, meet basic needs and secure pathways to resilience and prosperity.

This year's inaugural Summit of the Future boasts an ambitious agenda "to mend eroded trust and demonstrate that international cooperation can effectively achieve agreed goals and tackle emerging threats and opportunities," and rightfully acknowledges that decades of benefits and progress have been spread unevenly. In particular, fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) and communities have been largely excluded from progress. As highlighted in the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) [\*\*2024 Emergency Watchlist\*\*](#), an assessment of the 20 countries at greatest risk of new humanitarian emergencies, extreme poverty has surged over 42% in Watchlist countries in the past three decades while the rest of the world has slashed poverty by over 64% during the same period. We cannot achieve zero poverty, Goal One of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), without taking actions that target the specific challenges facing FCAS, particularly Watchlist countries.

This persistent concentration of extreme poverty makes clear that the business-as-usual approaches to financing and delivering development and climate assistance do not meet crisis- and conflict-affected communities where they are. Needs and vulnerabilities are high and progress toward the SDGs is slow because conflict has eroded public services, constraining governments and inhibiting development and resilience. The humanitarian crises currently unfolding in Sudan and Gaza, for instance, reveal the impact of conflict on civilian infrastructure and basic service delivery. Humanitarians alone cannot sustain the delivery of services to civilians caught in conflict over the medium and long term.

That is why the international community, the U.N. and member states should use the Summit of the Future to reveal how the current systems are not working for communities in crisis, and ensure the systems of the future are more equitable. If these challenges remain unaddressed, the world will continue to cleave into two camps—not between great rivals or democratic vs. authoritarian powers, but between stable communities and crisis-affected communities. An international system that offers a promising future and reliable solutions for communities in crisis is the only system whose legitimacy will survive. The success of the Summit should be measured in clear commitments to address the challenges facing FCAS through greater financial investments in proven solutions, particularly in climate resilience and child health and well-being, along with reformed humanitarian and development funding.

For these communities, a better tomorrow never seems guaranteed, or even likely. To create a future that works for all, it is critical to remember that a system built for the future cannot have the same blind spots as those in the status quo. But there is a way forward with the right focus: The Summit of the Future must commit to a set of proven solutions that have shown that even in the hardest-to-reach areas of the world, where conflict and other crises abound, there are ways to build resilience and preserve the livelihoods and well-being of those most vulnerable and to create a more hopeful future.

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**Cover Image:** Hamaziya Moussa Yaya, 23, stands with her seven-month-old daughter Sabrine Izadine outside the IRC health center in eastern Chad, where Sabrine is being treated for acute malnutrition. With support from the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the IRC provides health services to local families and refugees fleeing violence in Sudan.

## ENSURE PROSPERITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS BY PROTECTING CHILD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

A future that works for all will be determined by how we take care of children today. Children growing up in the shadows of conflict can become the generation that rebuilds their communities if we support their basic health, nutrition and educational needs.

Current multilateral systems that neglect communities in crisis are not equipped to support young people in these communities toward a brighter future.

### Simplify the current system of treatment for malnutrition

The compounding crises of conflict, climate change and extreme poverty contribute to the rise of acute child malnutrition, and only one in five children is able to access lifesaving malnutrition treatment. But even in the most hard-to-reach areas, there are **solutions** to promote child survival, such as providing one food product, ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), at one point of service for children with both severe and moderate acute malnutrition. Community health workers are a key part of the solution to simplify treatment, especially in climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected countries, so that families do not have to travel long distances to reach formal health facilities. Given the harmful long-term impacts of acute child malnutrition, including weakened immune systems and increased susceptibility to infectious disease, a swift and simplified treatment of malnutrition is the way to ensure lasting health for today's children. The Summit of the Future must commit to expanding treatment for acute malnutrition to reach **80% of children** in FCAS.



10-month-old Shams Ullah eats ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), a nutritious, peanut-based paste proven to be over 90% effective in treating acute malnutrition. Shams Ullah and his family live in a remote, drought-stricken province of Afghanistan that is facing severe food shortages.

“ With climate change and conflict exacerbating the global hunger crisis, it is more important than ever that we scale up simplified approaches to tackle acute malnutrition.

— Mesfin Teklu Tessema,  
Senior Director of Health  
at the IRC

### Serve zero-dose children in hard-to-reach areas

Global immunization coverage has increased dramatically in the past two decades, driven largely by gains in stable contexts. Children in FCAS face a completely different reality, as crumbling health infrastructure and limited humanitarian access deprive children of the basic health service of immunizations. But a concerted effort toward innovative interventions with global and local partners can ensure that children who live in areas beyond government reach can still access lifesaving vaccines. This will help to achieve SDG Goal Three of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being, which specifically notes the gap in routine immunizations for millions of children. For instance, the IRC's partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has been able to administer **one million vaccine doses** to children living in crisis settings in the Horn of Africa through mapping and identifying mobile vaccination sites and establishing last-mile supply chain processes.



## Ensure that access to education remains uninterrupted

Access to formal education is one of the first resources children lose in crisis contexts. Even in the face of unspeakable tragedy and displacement due to conflict, the international community should prioritize creating sustainable systems to ensure that every child's education remains continuous. In order to meet SDG Goal Four of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, donors and other multilateral actors must work with local and national partners to embed high-quality programs in conflict settings, such as the IRC and Sesame Workshop's groundbreaking **Ahlan Simsim** initiative that supports millions of children across the Middle East affected by conflict and crisis. Investment in artificial intelligence for humanitarian action will also help ensure that children who are displaced or who no longer have access to physical schooling can still learn remotely through messaging platforms.



In Baghdad, Iraq, six-year-old Siraj and his classmates engage in a sensory activity as part of a school readiness program co-developed by the IRC's Ahlan Simsim team and the Iraq Ministry of Education.

## BUILD CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

A multilateral system for the future must ensure that the presence of conflict and fragility does not disqualify communities from adapting to and protecting themselves from the impacts of climate change. All communities should have the financial resources to sustain themselves and their families, resources to grow or access enough food, and early warnings of climate shocks and disasters to best protect themselves. People in FCAS need access to the resources and tools to withstand the unjust impacts of climate change.

The climate crisis is forming a toxic mix with conflict, leading to greater impacts in FCAS than in stable settings. Because climate vulnerability exacerbates other fragilities, namely conflict, heavy dependence on agriculture and political instability, communities often resort to negative coping strategies that harm long-term resilience and livelihoods. Food insecurity and hunger as a result of the climate crisis are much more acutely felt in FCAS than in stable settings. Countries at the intersection of climate vulnerability and conflict also account for **43%** of all people affected by natural disasters over the past three years. But the international system's current approach to climate financing, with rigid partnership models, high risk aversion and neglect of adaptation and resilience needs, leaves these most impacted communities unsupported. However, there are ways to achieve the climate resilient future that communities in FCAS deserve.

## Get ahead of crisis and food insecurity by investing in adaptation

The global approach to climate investments is heavily skewed toward long-term mitigation and emissions reduction. While these are critical investments, mitigation alone will not meet the needs of conflict-affected communities, which face immediate impacts from the climate crisis despite having contributed so little to its causes. Investing in innovative adaptation and resilience to climate impacts is essential for insulating people in conflict settings from the most devastating consequences of climate change. One important area of focus is partnering with affected community members to improve resilience, particularly around food security. For example, in order to build a food system that is resilient to climate shocks in Syria, Pakistan, South Sudan and Niger, the IRC is **working directly with farmers** to test and identify the seeds most suited to a changing climate, multiplying and scaling these higher-yielding and climate-resilient seeds, and enhancing women's participation in the agricultural sector. Climate finance contributors should commit and deliver **50% of all public climate funding to adaptation by 2025**, with a particular focus on adaptation finance for small-scale agriculture in FCAS.



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## Bolster anticipatory action by leveraging technology

Secretary-General Guterres' call for "Early Warnings for All" is an ambitious, necessary mechanism to protect livelihoods against the impacts of climate change, and it is all the more critical for FCAS that are already highly vulnerable to climate change. Harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) to help build climate resilience in FCAS is a way to utilize developing technologies to achieve humanitarian goals. For instance, the IRC is launching a program to leverage AI and machine learning to establish early warning systems that will trigger cash assistance to **7,500 people in advance of severe floods** in the Kogi and Adamawa states of Nigeria. This will give households the financial flexibility to ensure they can meet basic needs in advance of a climate shock, ensuring longer-term resilience. **IRC analysis** shows that anticipatory cash can build climate resilience, improve food security and protect economic livelihoods in the face of climate shocks. Donors should commit a minimum of **5% of humanitarian budgets to anticipatory action**, delivered flexibly and in advance of crises, with a strategy for further expansion by 2030.



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In the town of Dansina-Hausa, Nigeria, Shaibu Mohammed, 51, started utilizing the IRC's early warning messages to safeguard his farm before flooding hits. Mohammed also received anticipatory cash to purchase a generator-driven water pump, which allows him to farm during droughts.



## REIMAGINE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE FINANCE AND DELIVERY

In line with the Summit of the Future’s “Pact for the Future,” sustainable development and multilateral development financing is in critical need of reform. A world of growing needs, shrinking public sector budgets and skyrocketing debt demands that every dollar spent on the overlapping challenges of humanitarian response, development and climate action be as cost-effective, impactful and sustainable as possible. Humanitarian and development financing should be reimagined so that this aid helps cure the disease rather than only treating the symptoms, in order to build a future capable of tackling challenges like child survival and the climate crisis. The stovepiping of climate, humanitarian and development finance is becoming less appropriate and less fiscally responsible in a world of concentrated crises sparked by interconnected triggers.

As we approach the 2030 target date for fulfilling the SDGs, **up to two-thirds** of the global population in extreme poverty will be living in FCAS. Today, just 16 countries that are both climate vulnerable and conflict affected are home to **43%** of all people living in extreme poverty and **79%** of all people in humanitarian need—highlighting the necessity of financial flows in development, humanitarian and climate to work closely together. The response requires creative thinking about the role of the multilateral system, including multilateral institutions and international financial institutions, and the types of interventions and reforms that will work. It also requires a well-resourced International Development Association (IDA), one of the few sources of grants and highly concessional loans for these countries. The replenishment being negotiated this year (IDA21) should exceed IDA20 and set IDA on track for a tripling of funds by 2030 with increased attention to FCAS.



Khan Agha, 35, holds his daughter, Zarmina, 7, as they stand outside their damaged home in Laghman province, Afghanistan. In 2024, heavy rains and flash flooding destroyed homes, farmlands and roads across Afghanistan, where climate shocks have become more frequent.

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### Prioritize equitable climate finance

Currently, **90% of climate finance is focused on middle-income, high-emission-producing countries**. **The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP)** estimates that for the remaining 10%, the more fragile and conflict-affected a country is, the less climate financing it will receive. Unless swift action is taken internationally to fund and support FCAS to withstand the impacts of climate change, the future for these countries will look bleak and the lack of community-level resilience will drive greater humanitarian needs after climate shocks. To break this cycle, climate financing systems must work to close the adaptation finance gap—conflict-affected communities currently receive just **one-**

**third** of the adaptation funding of those in non-conflict settings—and ensure that the Loss and Damage Fund develops mechanisms to deliver funds where they are needed most. The **new global climate finance target** should formally recognize the adaptation finance gap for conflict-affected countries, setting a 50-50 sub-target for mitigation and adaptation finance within the goal, and setting a target for **conflict-affected countries to receive 18% of all adaptation finance for developing countries**, based on the current best available estimate of needs.

### Resource communities, not just governments

While increasing the overall pie of development and climate financing for FCAS is critical, it is not enough. Unless the World Bank and other development actors can ensure that resources are reaching target communities affected by conflict and are beyond the reach of the government, societal and economic inequities will persist in these communities. A people-first strategy is required to crowd in more partners and delivery models to respond to the unique needs and challenges in these contexts. This includes enhancing collaboration with and providing direct financing for non-government partnerships at scale where needed, and supporting hybrid operating models to finance both government and non-government actors in development programming. These **partnerships** have demonstrated their added value in navigating fragility and insecurity while safeguarding access to vital services for target communities.

### Drive inclusion through local and women-led partnerships

The World Bank must ensure that its programs can sustain any progress and remain engaged in conflict settings. This will require real, not rhetorical, localization: shifting power to local responders in affected populations, particularly within marginalized communities, and building trust so that they can lead and deliver aid efforts. To achieve SDG Goal One of zero poverty, multilateral and bilateral development actors must adequately resource and support those beyond governments' reach in already-excluded FCAS contexts. Global financing actors should invest in women-led programs and organizations, as well as prioritize programs that address gender-based barriers to services through increased use of gender analysis and gender markers of program success. In the context of climate finance, **88% of marked climate bilateral finance should be gender-sensitive**, meaning specific actions and programs must be implemented to reduce gender inequalities. To help direct financing to communities otherwise left behind, IDA, as an essential source of climate and development finance for FCAS, should set a target to deliver funds directly to civil society organizations.



In Logar province, Afghanistan, Aisha, 9, raises her hand to answer IRC teacher Hajera's questions. With support from the European Union, the IRC has established Community-Based Education programs in Afghanistan, with a focus on reaching children living in remote areas with limited access to formal schooling.

## CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the goals set out for the future, inaction from the international community is not an option, and neither is continuing on a business-as-usual path. Communities in FCAS have been left out of global action and resources for too long, but the U.N. and its member states now have an opportunity to change the course of multilateral action to create a more promising future. Through dedicated support of climate resilience, child health and well-being, and sustainable development financing for FCAS, the international community can finally work toward a multilateral system that truly works for all.