

## ARTICLE

# Pathways to achieving food security, sustainable peace and gender equality: Evidence from three FAO interventions

Patricia Justino<sup>1</sup> | Katharine Hagerman<sup>2</sup> | Julius Jackson<sup>3</sup> |  
Indira Joshi<sup>4</sup> | Ilaria Sisto<sup>5</sup> | Asha Bradley<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK

<sup>2</sup>Independent consultant

<sup>3</sup>Agriculture Development Economics Division/Strategic Programme on Resilience, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, Italy

<sup>4</sup>Emergency and Rehabilitation Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, Italy

<sup>5</sup>Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, Italy

## Correspondence

Patricia Justino

Email: P.Justino@ids.ac.uk

## Abstract

There is increasing recognition that livelihood security, sustainable peace, conflict prevention and gender equality are complementary goals requiring integrated policy approaches, yet there is limited evidence on the links between these key development pillars.

**Motivation:** This article uses three case studies to illustrate how specific policy interventions can address the differentiated priorities of men and women with relation to food security, building sustainable peace processes and achieving gender equality.

**Purpose:** The article illustrates how five pathways have operated and interacted in three selected FAO interventions, and discusses data, research and policy challenges that emerged from this analysis.

**Approach and methods:** A conceptual framework grounded on five pathways is used, including changes in (a) behaviour, agency and aspirations; (b) social norms about gender roles and equality; (c) institutions and governance; (d) agriculture and employment markets; and (e) social cohesion and inclusive collective action.

**Findings:** The institutions that emerge from complex processes of interaction between state and non-state armed actors, other informal actors and different population groups shape how property rights, food distribution systems, employment programmes and social service provision support or fail to support the local populations.

**Policy implications:** More information is needed on local conflict dynamics. As such, better data collection is needed to support policy interventions.

## KEYWORDS

conflict, food security, gender equality, livelihoods, peace

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) have identified food security and gender equality as central to sustaining peace in conflict-affected contexts (UN, 2015). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

(FAO) (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2017) argue that recent increases in global hunger and food insecurity are strongly associated with violent conflicts, climate change impacts and social inequalities, including gender inequality. Food security interventions can contribute to building and strengthening resilience to conflict by assisting countries and people to better cope with and recover from crises. This is particularly true if policies and programmes are implemented in ways that reduce social inequalities and contribute to the prevention of conflict by supporting economic development more broadly (UN, 2015). However, despite these policy premises, there is to date limited evidence about the links between food security, gender equality, the onset, duration, mitigation and prevention of armed conflict, and processes of sustaining peace in post-conflict societies and those at risk of conflict and violence.<sup>1</sup>

The main objective of this article is to illustrate how addressing the specific priorities of men and women in food security interventions in conflict-affected contexts can contribute to shaping processes aimed at building sustainable peace and improving gender equality. This analysis is grounded on a conceptual framework proposed in Section 2, and insights from three selected case studies implemented by FAO (Section 3). Section 4 summarizes the main conclusions of this study and identifies future areas of research and policy.

## 2 | LITERATURE SURVEY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

What are the links between food security, peace building and gender equality? Three distinct bodies of literature offer some answers to this question. These focus on the relationship between armed conflict and food security; the relationship between gender equality and food security; and the relationship between gender roles, violent conflict and peacebuilding.

*Armed conflict and food security.* A growing number of studies have documented the causal effects of violent conflict on food security. Overall the evidence shows that exposure to armed violence results in adverse effects in terms of access to food, nutrition and livelihoods with lasting legacies throughout the lives of affected men and women of different ages (Bundervoet, Verwimp, & Akresh, 2009; Akresh, Bhalotra, Leone, & Osili, 2012). The mechanisms explaining both immediate and long-term effects are remarkably similar across the countries covered by these studies, and include the destructive impact of fighting and violence on the economy, markets, public services and infrastructure; the spreading of infectious diseases, particularly in displacement and refugee camps; and increases in food prices and food shortages during conflicts. The links between food security and conflict also run in the opposite direction, with food insecurity being sometimes linked to the onset and duration of conflict (Brinkman & Hendrix, 2011). This is due to the fact that increases in food prices and food insecurity can aggravate existing grievances, while the breakdown of agriculture (and employment) markets can reduce the opportunity costs of men and women participating in, joining or supporting armed factions—who in turn shape how institutions and markets operate in conflict zones. Taken together, these bodies of literature suggest that nutrition and food security interventions may improve the recovery of populations affected by armed conflict, as well as weakening some welfare-related motives that may sustain conflicts.

*Gender equality and food security.* A well-established body of literature in development economics has shown that improving gender equality has positive effects on nutrition and food security, particularly for children (Qian, 2008; Duflo, 2003). One of the key channels is through education

<sup>1</sup>In this study, peacebuilding is defined as “action[s] to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict” (UN, 1994). These actions can be at local, regional, national and international levels. Peacebuilding includes a range of formal and informal actions—including food security interventions—that may prevent and mitigate conflict, promote social cohesion and stability, and contribute to peacebuilding processes (UN, 2017).

(Fafchamps & Shilpi, 2011), which underlines the FAO-funded Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS), we will analyse below. Another channel is through the increased involvement of women in local decision-making processes (Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2011), a mechanism that shaped the FAO Dimitra Clubs, also discussed below. Conversely, food insecurity is associated with increased gender inequalities that limit women's access to income, agricultural technology, education, credit, inputs and land. According to FAO (2014), between 2012 and 2014 over 60% of individuals affected by chronic and severe malnourishment were women and girls. The disproportionate number of women and girls affected by food insecurity is largely due to entrenched gender inequalities that limit their access to income, agricultural technology, education, credit, inputs and land (Agarwal, 2013).

*Gender roles, violent conflict and peacebuilding.* Several studies have revealed that violent conflicts have specific gender-differentiated effects. Notably, armed violence typically results in changes in how families are structured and the role of individuals within them, the economic roles of women and men, and how they participate in society and in political life (Justino, 2018a). At the same time, gender equality may also affect the likelihood of conflicts and the sustainability of peace processes in their aftermath. Some evidence suggests that although women often take on new responsibilities during the conflict—many as peace builders—traditional patriarchal values tend to restrict these opportunities once the conflict ends (Date-Bah, 2003). Other studies have found that women's increased civic and political engagement in conflict-affected areas positively affect the quality of local institutions, thereby contributing to more stable peace outcomes (Caprioli, 2005). At the same time, increases in the labour participation of women in conflict-affected areas can result in increases in overall household and community welfare when they were employed in better-paid jobs (Justino, Cardona, Mitchell, & Muller, 2012).

Taken together, these bodies of literature suggest important links between food security, gender equality and peace. How, then, can food security interventions support and encourage the dual processes of peacebuilding and gender equality? The literature suggests a number of pathways through which these effects may take place:<sup>2</sup> (a) behaviour, agency and aspirations; (b) social norms about gender roles and equality; (c) institutions and governance; (d) agriculture and employment markets; and (e) local collective action and equal representation. These five mechanisms offer important theoretical hypotheses about key pathways through which food security interventions may shape peacebuilding processes and gender equality in post-conflict societies. They also provide potential entry points for the design, implementation, measurement and evaluation of food policy in conflict-affected contexts that test these hypotheses on the ground. We discuss below the five pathways and return to the issue of policy interventions in the remainder of the article.

*Behaviour, agency and aspirations.* One key lesson from the literature is the fact that individual and household behaviour shapes how food security may affect the dual goals of sustainable peace and gender equality. Two important examples of these processes include women's agency and the role of aspirations among conflict-affected populations (Justino et al., 2012). Changes in gender roles during violent conflicts—even if often temporary—have important implications for how individuals, households and communities cope with and recover from violent conflict, with implications for both peacebuilding and gender equality objectives. For instance, Justino, Poeschl, Salardi, and Tranchant (2015) showed how gender equality programming in food-for-work (FFW) programmes has played a crucial role in ensuring gender equality in humanitarian interventions. It is also possible that enhanced confidence among intervention participants could allow the space for further female participation in peacebuilding activities, as we discuss below in the case of both the Dimitra Clubs and the JFFLS. In addition, issues in relation to confidence, hope and dignity shape people's aspirations about their

<sup>2</sup>This framework is based on Justino (2017).

future lives and relations with others—including perceptions and attitudes towards social co-operation and social cohesion, arguably key to sustaining peace (Bernard, Dercon, & Taffesse, 2011).

*Social norms about gender roles and equality.* A second pathway through which improved food security can affect gender equality and peacebuilding processes is through strengthening social norms within households and in the wider community that support gender equality. Some of the evidence reviewed above suggested that (a) gender equality can have important positive effects on food security outcomes, and (b) gender equality can improve—albeit temporarily—during conflicts. These insights suggest that interventions that foster changes in social norms that improve female empowerment and women's bargaining power within the household can have positive impacts for peacebuilding processes, reduce the likelihood of conflict reigniting and improve gender equality. In support of this assertion, some studies indicate that rises in women's civil engagement during and after violent conflict may influence important social attitudes (Kumar, 2000), while evidence accumulated in the context of India has further demonstrated that, when opportunities are available, cultural norms in relation to gender roles will change (Beaman et al., 2011).

*Role of institutions and governance.* Institutions play a central role in how food security interventions can affect gender equality and peacebuilding. Notably, armed conflicts are to a large extent a contestation of the role of incumbent state institutions. As a result, state structures tend to be absent, do not work or are illegitimate in the eyes of some population groups. In the presence of weak and fragile state institutions, non-state armed actors and other informal structures emerge to provide security, food and basic services, and govern access to land and markets (Justino, 2018b). Existing models of food delivery and food security interventions often implicitly assume that there is some form of state authority that can support programmes, particularly large-scale programmes implemented at the national level. This is not the case with conflict-affected countries—or post-conflict situations—where state institutions and authority are weak and fragmented. In the following section, we will discuss how a programme established by FAO in the Abyei Administrative Area between Sudan and South Sudan has addressed some of these important institutional challenges.

*Agriculture and employment markets.* Empirical evidence on how markets operate during armed conflict is to date scarce and contradictory. Available evidence suggests that if households are unable to switch activities or cannot access credit, insurance or alternative employment, then economic shocks and violence exposure during armed conflict can result in significant reductions in household welfare, including food insecurity. These households typically resort to subsistence activities, which can protect them against severe destitution and insecurity, but can hinder their long-term welfare and reduce their levels of resilience to future economic and political shocks (Verpoorten, 2009). Market recovery can therefore be an important way in which food interventions support conflict-affected populations. The JFFLS and the intervention in Abyei we discuss below are important examples of these key mechanisms.

*Local collective action and equal representation within.* A large body of literature has argued that social cohesion and strong local institutions are fundamental for the establishment of economic stability in conflict-affected contexts (Justino, 2009, 2012), and are critical elements in the state's ability to mediate between competing groups within society (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011). Local collective organizations, in particular, are important institutions in areas where public goods provision is limited and state institutions are weak (or non-existent), shaping key development outcomes—including nutrition and food security. In these settings, local collective action may solve co-ordination problems and provide networks of support (Ostrom, 1990). The importance of local collective organizations in conflict-affected countries has been emphasized by the growing number of community-driven development (CDD) programmes implemented in post-conflict settings (World Bank, 2006). However, we should not forget that social cohesion is also an important element in the viability of many armed

conflicts (Wood, 2003). Forms of collective organization, such as women's groups and farmers' organizations, appear to have more positive outcomes both in terms of gender equality and positive local peace outcomes (World Bank, 2006). One interesting example is that of FAO-funded Dimitra Clubs, which we will discuss below. These initiatives provide potential entry points as to how food security interventions may strengthen collective action in ways that promote community cohesion and gender equality.

### 3 | THREE CASE STUDIES

Three case studies were selected to illustrate the ways in which food security (and livelihood more broadly) interventions implemented by FAO and partners may be able to support dual processes of sustaining peace and promoting gender equality across different contexts. The programmes selected for analysis were chosen based on a desk review of relevant past experiences and lessons learned. This analysis was largely qualitative as only limited quantitative data has been collected on the three case studies. The identification of the three case studies was a result of discussions and interviews with FAO technical staff, who guided the authors to identify programmes that might illustrate the ways in which interventions implemented by FAO and partners to support food security and livelihoods could also be able to support dual processes of sustaining peace and promoting gender equality across different contexts. Two of the case studies—the Dimitra Clubs and JFFLS—are long-standing and well-established FAO programmatic approaches that have been deployed in a variety of contexts. Both these approaches are representative of people-centred, community-driven strategies used by a variety of stakeholders in diverse contexts to improve vulnerable rural people's livelihoods and food security, and to trigger social, economic and political transformations in rural areas (World Bank, 2006). The third case study is an intervention implemented by FAO to improve livelihoods, social cohesion and stability in the Abyei Administrative Area between Sudan and South Sudan. FAO supported the delivery of community-based veterinary services, embedded in an agricultural livelihood support strategy, in an effort to improve inter-community relations and contribute to sustaining peace objectives. The issues addressed in this project reflect broader concerns to be found in protracted crises and fragile contexts globally, in terms of managing competing groups' access to and use of increasingly scarce natural resources to support their livelihoods (World Bank, 2006).

#### 3.1 | The Dimitra Clubs

FAO's Dimitra Clubs are community-based groups, often established in remote or post-conflict areas. They get together on a voluntary basis to discuss common challenges and organize forms of collective action to improve livelihoods and food security (FAO, 2011c). The clubs facilitate dialogue that involves the equal and active participation of a diversity of community members, including men, women, youth and marginalized people. There are over 2,000 Dimitra Clubs in sub-Saharan Africa (Burundi, DR Congo, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal) comprising more than 60,000 members (of which women comprise 64%) (FAO, 2011c).

To set up the Dimitra Clubs, FAO and its partners work with local organizations to engage participants in identifying and addressing common challenges (FAO, 2011c). Traditional and religious authorities also take part in meetings and in the participatory training workshops held for the clubs. Common topics include gender equality, self-development, collective action and priority technical issues, including nutrition, food security and agricultural innovation. Local community radio stations play an important additional role in raising broader community interest in the clubs, as well as



providing access to information and facilitating communication within and between clubs from different villages (FAO, 2011b, 2011c). The community radios enable remote communities to obtain access to information, and serve as a medium for other Dimitra Clubs and communities to share ideas and lessons about food security, agricultural innovations, markets and any other matters of interest to the community. As most participants in the clubs are non-literate (FAO, 2011b), radios address important education gaps in connecting and providing communities with up-to-date information to address local concerns.

The Dimitra Clubs illustrate how a holistic intervention to improve livelihoods and food security can contribute to gender equality (and social equality more broadly). We discuss below how the pathways outlined in the previous section—in particular, changes in behaviour, agency and aspirations, the transformation of social norms, better access to agriculture markets and improved capacity for inclusive collective action—may explain how the Dimitra Clubs have improved gender equality, as well as the ability of communities to resolve local conflicts. Unfortunately, available information on the operation of the Dimitra Clubs (even when implemented in conflict-affected contexts) provide only limited evidence on whether these processes have led to actual reductions in local conflicts and violence. Nevertheless, improved social cohesion and dialogue, and reduction of conflicts at household and community levels, are often mentioned as resulting from the operation of the Dimitra Clubs, as we discuss in more detail below. We base the analysis on detailed review of available documents on the Dimitra Clubs, a number of (qualitative) evaluations of the clubs and interviews with staff members conducted for the purpose of this article.

*Behaviour, agency and aspirations.* One of the objectives of the Dimitra Clubs is to improve individual and collective sense of self-efficacy, as members work together to devise strategies to deal with community concerns, and build trust and confidence in their ability to bridge social, political and gender-based divides to address collective issues. The clubs also enhance the ability of community members to articulate and work towards addressing personal and collective aspirations. In conflict-affected contexts, these enhanced capacities have led to improved management of social conflict. For instance, in Niger, the Dimitra Clubs have created the space for women to develop leadership, exercise agency and improve empowerment skills, which have contributed to building their self-confidence in dealing with household and community tensions (FAO, 2011c). Similar results have also been reported in an evaluation of the clubs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (IFAD, 2014). Tools such as inclusive participation and reflection used in the clubs have also been shown to be essential instruments for strengthening dialogue and community governance to facilitate reconciliation between opposing social factions (IFAD, 2014).

*Transforming social norms about gender roles and equality.* The structure, content and processes of the Dimitra Clubs make it possible to challenge social norms about gender roles in a participatory and transformative way (FAO, IFAD, WFP, and UN Women, 2016). The opportunity for women to share their voices and opinions in public, and to be heard and recognized by men in the community, has contributed to improving their empowerment (IFAD, 2014; FAO et al., 2016). The process has in particular changed how men perceive women in terms of their contributions to decision-making about household and community issues. Notably, some communities have experienced changes in the gendered division of labour and food taboos after the introduction of the clubs. Some men, following their membership of the Dimitra Clubs, perform household tasks previously ascribed only to women (such as fetching water, washing children and preparing food), while women perform tasks previously forbidden to them (such as planting crops during menstruation and engaging in income-generating activities). For example, in the village of Isangi in the Tshopo Province of the DRC, fishing is a key economic activity traditionally controlled by men. The Dimitra Clubs facilitated the gradual transformation of norms and behaviours, allowing women to play a proactive role in fishing (IFAD,

2014). The redefinition of women's roles has also increased households' incomes and food security. In Yalosuna, another village of the north-eastern part of the DRC, the majority of the population faces serious nutritional problems. Before the creation of the Dimitra Clubs, social norms prevented women from eating catfish, a protein-rich fish easily available in this region. Awareness-raising activities and discussions within the Dimitra Clubs resulted in changes in this social norm and in women adding a new and valuable source of protein to their diets (FAO, 2011b, 2011c; IFAD, 2014). These changes in social norms have, in addition, resulted in the improvement of women's status and leadership in the community, leading to positive effects in terms of maintaining peaceful relations in their communities (FAO, 2011c). For instance, the clubs in Niger and the DRC have been associated with improvements in women's leadership and self-esteem (FAO, 2012). These changes in social norms and relations have in turn contributed to reducing gender-based violence within households, as the dialogue between women and men has notably improved (FAO, 2012, 2011c).

*Agriculture and employment markets.* As the Dimitra Clubs are primarily located in remote rural areas, improving the access to natural resources and means of agricultural production are key components to achieving sustainable food security. The clubs aim at building both individual and collective capacity in leadership, expression, analysis and collective problem solving, which have been used to increase access to land, markets and agricultural production and promote collective management strategies (FAO, 2011b, 2011c). Notably, by connecting group members to information via radio broadcasts and networking with other clubs, the Dimitra Clubs have enabled the introduction of innovative agricultural methods into local production and enhanced the capacity of participants, particularly women, to engage with broader markets and entrepreneurial activities (FAO et al., 2016). Some club members have also joined larger and more formal farmers' organizations and co-operatives. Increased agency and self-confidence, in conjunction with connecting community producers to relevant markets and information, have led to new entrepreneurial behaviour among both groups and individuals, such as the use of savings and credit, and a reduction of grievances (FAO, 2016).

*Local collective action and equal representation.* The Dimitra Clubs have specifically aimed to promote social mobilization and strengthen community capacity for collective action, and networking with other clubs, communities and development actors (IFAD, 2014; FAO et al., 2016). In particular, the clubs have made use of close bonds among small producers in grassroots and self-help groups, local associations and co-operatives to develop strong and gender-equitable rural organizations. This in turn has empowered club participants to connect to larger organizations like federations and networks, which give them greater negotiating power and influence in decision-making processes (FAO, 2012). For instance, in DRC, new social dynamics created as a result of the clubs have encouraged collaboration between the Dimitra Clubs and unions of producers' organizations, resulting in a credit co-operative. This has increased the availability of agricultural innovations to clubs and villages, and provided support to collective fields set up by the clubs to multiply seeds of improved varieties of rice, maize, groundnuts, cowpeas and soya (FAO, 2016). These collective efforts have reinforced the positive individual psychological and behavioural changes discussed above, with important implications for community perceptions about their ability to reconcile and collectively address local conflicts, as well as matters of collective interest and needs. By participating in reflective dialogue together, the clubs have therefore improved social cohesion in many areas and enabled reconciliation of social tensions in conflict contexts, such as DRC (FAO, 2009).

### 3.2 | Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS)

The JFFLS is a programme developed by FAO, initially in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners, to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS and achieve long-term food security in countries most affected by this pandemic. Since its establishment, the programme

has undergone some transformations to tackle a multitude of issues mainly related to youth employment, and has been implemented in various countries, including some affected by armed conflicts such as Burundi, DRC, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs) (FAO, 2010). The programme includes a strong gender equality component (FAO, 2008, 2017a).

In JFFLS, children and youth from 12 to 18 or 24 years old (depending on location) are either exposed to and taught about agriculture with a strong life skills component (if they are between the ages of 12 and 14–15), or are fully trained in agricultural techniques (when over 16 years old) to increase their employment opportunities in this sector. Participants work in groups and learn life and job skills by using participatory methodologies such as experimentation, drama, singing and dancing (FAO, 2008). The main objective of JFFLS is to empower and enhance the capacities of vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to improve their livelihoods in the agricultural sector or elsewhere (FAO, 2008, 2013). The JFFLS provides vocational training tailored to rural settings, combined with employment promotion and access to markets, which supports additional linkages between rural employment, poverty reduction, food security and nutrition (FAO, 2008, 2013). In conflict-affected contexts, it is expected that these skills will contribute to reducing social tensions and conflicts. One key example is the JFFLS programme implemented in the WBGs in 2008 (FAO, 2010). This programme involved 540 youths who faced serious challenges related to conflict, poverty, food insecurity and lack of education. The programme benefited from extensive community support whereby teachers from local schools received training to become facilitators for JFFLS activities, and local women's co-operatives prepared meals for the students. The JFFLS in WBGs enhanced also the partnership of students with local youth clubs and the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Youth Development Association (FAO, 2010). This programme is an example of a policy intervention where food security, gender equality and sustaining peace objectives operate in tandem. Below, we discuss how the pathways outlined in the previous section have shaped such outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

*Behaviour, agency and aspirations.* The JFFLS in the WBGs work with boys and girls who have been exposed to or involved in traumatic violence (FAO, 2008, 2017a). The objective of the programme is to provide participants with agricultural and entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to enable successful farming initiatives in a way that offers positive support for psycho-social needs, and increases confidence, agency and decision-making skills. This is done using participatory teaching methodologies, whereby students learn to conduct field research and to draw their own conclusions regarding various farming methods. The use of theatre and other participatory techniques helps in addressing difficult issues such as gender-based roles, psycho-social trauma, conflict-related experiences and children's rights (FAO, 2008). By supporting participants in the development of their self-confidence, agency and resilience, positive behavioural changes have been observed at the individual and community levels. A programme evaluation of the JFFLS in the WBGs found that, after the eight-month JFFLS cycle, participants obtained better exam results than other youth not enrolled (FAO, 2010). Pre- and post-programme evaluations also found that the JFFLS programme had improved participants' self-esteem, entrepreneurial and agricultural skills, and overall potential to become healthy and successful adults. Participants also showed an improvement in their attitudes, including more confidence and hope for the future (FAO, 2010). These are arguably important factors in ensuring more economic and social opportunities outside the conflict.

<sup>3</sup>As with the Dimitra Clubs, there is not enough information available on the effect of the JFFLS on actual conflict dynamics. However, the JFFLS attempt to address explicitly stress factors that tend to shape individuals' engagement in fighting and violence by providing alternative economic and social opportunities to young people, as well as strengthening their self-confidence and ability to make independent positive choices.



Positive behaviours, youth agency and improved aspirations among young people who participated in the JFFLS programmes were also enhanced through better access to land and changes around ownership norms (FAO, 2008, 2010). In many countries across the world, young people's access to land is often limited for a variety of normative, socioeconomic and legal reasons. Notably, inheritance laws and customs often make the transfer of land to young women and orphaned children problematic (FAO, IFAD, & CTA, 2014). The JFFLS programmes have addressed some of these constraints in several countries, by granting youth access to plots of land for agricultural activities, following negotiations with local community leaders or government representatives (FAO, 2008). Enabling access to land has been a critical first step in supporting participants to leverage the positive behavioural and aspirational impacts of the programme, while applying the technical agricultural knowledge and skills gained to take greater control over determinants of their own food security. In the case of the WBGs, this has had positive implications in the way young people become engaged in local civil and political life and local conflict dynamics (FAO, 2010).

*Transforming social norms about gender roles and equality.* Through its methodology and module content, the JFFLS programme aims to strengthen social norms within households and communities to support gender equality and challenge discriminatory norms against women (FAO, 2008, 2011c). Notably, the JFFLS programme promotes gender-equal attitudes through the analysis of roles and responsibilities of boys and girls, and by enhancing the capacity of young people to critically assess relationships and understand risks and resources within the community, thereby also improving their capacity and skills to resolve disputes among them and in their communities (FAO, 2008). In addition to improving awareness about gender equality, the JFFLS programme ensures that young women gain access to agricultural and employment sectors that may have been otherwise unattainable. Conversely, the programme also supports the involvement of young men in occupations that were traditionally the domain of women. For instance, in the case of Namibia, land preparation work was traditionally undertaken only by women. With the encouragement of the JFFLS team, a village meeting was held using the Khuta, an all-male traditional local authority. As a result, women gained the support of leaders to increase men's involvement in land preparation, with the effect of enhancing women's voice in the Khuta structure (FAO, 2008). In addition, the JFFLS ensure that both young women and young men can share ideas, and take up new roles, such as group leader. As a result, young men end up viewing young women as potential leaders alongside themselves, advancing gender equality with benefits also to local agriculture (FAO et al., 2014).

*Agriculture and employment markets.* The JFFLS programmes aim to facilitate youth inclusion in producers' organizations, markets, federations and unions, in collaboration with regional authorities (FAO et al., 2014; FAO, 2008). The strengthening of market relations has in turn led to an improved capacity of young participants to adapt to economic and conflict challenges. In the WBGs case, the JFFLS provided an opportunity to link youth to organizations and markets to secure the sustained impact of their agricultural initiatives. In the Hebron district, participants were integrated into local youth clubs or youth components of farmers' co-operatives, such as the youth wing of the Al-Shiva Hive Cooperative Society. At the end of the JFFLS intervention in the area, participants were fully integrated within the local society, which it is hoped will enable them to access a share of future profits (FAO, 2010). This is a clear example where improving youth skills in agriculture and entrepreneurship, while also linking them to markets, may offer a way to address the challenge of youth unemployment—a strong stressor in processes of sustaining peace.

*Local collective action and equal representation.* The JFFLS programmes facilitate a broader community management process based on discussion, action and shared decision-making. Opportunities to involve community members include negotiations with local authorities about resources (including access to land and water for irrigation), the participation of stakeholders during early development

stages (which creates a strong sense of teamwork and solidarity in the management committee), building guardian commitments, creating JFFLS committees with women members, and engaging men in land preparation for agricultural activities. This community management structure has provided a space for collective critical reflection among different community members on the most inclusive and effective ways to provide support to vulnerable youth without stigmatizing them, a key element in ensuring successful economic engagement, and improving their ability to resolve conflicts and tensions. In some post-conflict settings, the JFFLS programme, by following this pathway, has directly contributed to sustaining peace by supporting social cohesion and collective action (FAO, 2012).

### 3.3 | Improving livelihoods, social peace and stability in Abyei

In July 2015, FAO started implementing a project in the Abyei region, a contested area on the central border between South Sudan and Sudan. The intervention was entitled “Improving Livelihoods, Social Peace and Stability” and was designed to strengthen conflict mitigation, food and nutrition security and livelihoods resilience in the region. This intervention was built on four main pillars: (a) increased community stability, through the promotion of reconciliatory and peacebuilding dialogue; (b) enhanced, equitable and sustainable access to natural resources by different communities; (c) increased livelihood opportunities for women and youth to contribute to household welfare; and (d) improved agricultural production capacity (FAO, 2017a). This programme offers important insights into the challenges to achieving food security, gender equality and peace in the context of a volatile conflict-affected context.

The status of the oil-rich Abyei Administrative Area (AAA) has remained unresolved after South Sudan seceded from Sudan in 2011, as governments have failed to agree on the border division. The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has since had an active presence in the area, an overlapping zone wherein both the South Sudanese Dinka Ngok and the Sudanese Missiriya live, where tribal communities share natural resources such as grazing land, pasture and water. Resource access has been historically regulated by customary laws, which maintained and strengthened peaceful relations between the two groups. However, in recent years, regional conflict, ethnic tensions and increased contestation in access to natural resources have resulted in frequent confrontations and outbreaks of violence. The ongoing power struggle at the national level between and within the ruling parties of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) and the National Congress Party (NCP) of Sudan have exacerbated these local tensions, further undermining livelihoods and potential for co-operation between groups in the AAA. The remote area has also been chronically underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and poor economic development investment for several decades (FAO, 2017b).

In response to the complex and protracted nature of the conflict in the AAA region, the FAO project was developed based on a livelihoods analysis approach, which focused on facilitating social dialogue between parties to promote equitable access to land and sustainable natural resource management. Key aspects of the approach include building trust among different actors, strengthening social cohesion within the territory in which all actors face environmental threats and growing competition over limited natural resources, and reinforcing the role of traditional institutions (FAO, 2017b). The approach used in this project to achieve food security and sustainable peace has followed three of the five pathways outlined in the previous section, namely behaviour, agency and aspirations; institutions of governance; and local collective action and equal representation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Even though the project had a gender equality component, this has not featured prominently in available evaluations or documents about the project (FAO, 2017b).

*Behaviour, agency and aspirations.* One of the ways in which this project worked to achieve positive impacts in terms of food security and sustainable peace was by supporting the agency and decision-making capacity of local traditional leaders involved in peace initiatives. In particular, the FAO initiated a dialogue and negotiation process separately with traditional leaders and local authorities of both communities, together with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UN-RCO) (FAO, 2017a). This included workshops held in each community, along with a joint workshop involving key leaders, to facilitate reflections on how to address the main conflict drivers related to access to and management of natural resources. The workshops were designed to strengthen participants' dialogue, agency and negotiation skills, and to raise awareness of equitable sharing of the main natural resources in the area (FAO, 2017a). This ongoing focus on developing skills and experience in social dialogue aimed specifically to encourage active agency among participants and their broader communities in the social processes needed to sustain peace and strengthen livelihoods and food security.

*Institutions of governance.* Although this pathway has not featured prominently in the other two case studies, it was key to achieving more sustainable peace in this project. This is because the unresolved status of the Abyei Area has resulted in a lack of strong and effective local governance and administrative institutions, government security forces (whether from the government of Sudan or South Sudan) and a consistent local police presence (Mussa, 2016). Given the importance of livestock for the livelihoods of the two communities, the project implemented a vaccination campaign as a technical intervention in support of ongoing processes of social dialogue and an entry point to strengthen the foundations of local institutions and governance mechanisms in the area. To that purpose, the project was embedded within a multi-sector strategy (including agricultural, fisheries and livestock activities) and activities implemented with local actors (FAO, 2017a). The resulting peace agreement, negotiated among local leaders, led to a number of positive impacts on strengthening governance mechanisms and increasing access to land for livestock grazing, which improved food security locally. For instance, as a result of the peace agreement, land access was expanded for Missiriya pastoralists, enabling them to cross the buffer zone and access grazing areas in the southern AAA controlled by Dinka Ngok community, thus benefitting animal health and milk production (FAO, 2017a). These institutional changes in territorial access and freedom of movement of people have in turn contributed to build trust and confidence between the two ethnic groups, with a positive impact on the livelihoods of both communities (FAO, 2017a).

*Local collective action and equal representation.* By identifying a window of opportunity through the provision of technical veterinary services, the project was able to improve inter-community relations and contribute to building sustainable peace locally. This is because for the vaccination campaign to succeed, the project had to focus on building dialogue and social cohesion at grassroots level, enhancing the willingness of local communities to work together, and building partnerships with government institutions (FAO, 2017a). As the project staff in the area gained trust and credibility among the two groups, the Secretariat of Agriculture, Animal Resources and Fishery (SAARF) supported the provision of veterinary services by FAO South Sudan to the Missiriya community, which enabled staff to engage both communities in dialogue and collective action over issues of common concern. Following the attainment of the peace agreement, a training and vaccination campaign was implemented, resulting not only in improved livestock health, but also in greater social cohesion between the two communities and improved collaboration between government agencies (SAARF) and the Missiriya communities (FAO, 2017a). Through these sustained efforts to promote dialogue and build social cohesion in the area, mutual trust and social inclusion between the Missiriya and Ngok Dinka communities was strengthened, providing in turn the basic stability needed for sustainable economic recovery (Mussa, 2016).

## 4 | CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article has discussed how joint objectives of food security, peace and gender equality promoted in several initiatives of the UN, in support of the implementation of the 2030 agenda, have been put in place in three policy interventions implemented by FAO. The case studies illustrate different dimensions of the relationship between food security, peace and gender equality under different policy interventions. The Dimitra Clubs show that a gender-sensitive community-driven approach may lead to the social and economic empowerment of women and men in remote and fragile contexts by improving their access to information and their organizational and decision-making capacities. This has been achieved through the effect of the clubs on the aspirations of local communities, changes in social norms about gender roles, the strengthening of local agriculture and employment markets, and improvements in social cohesion and inclusive collective action. The JFFLS illustrate how impacts on these same four pathways have supported changes in gender norms and livelihood access and security, with important implications for peace outcomes in the WBGS. The “Improving Livelihoods, Social Peace and Stability” project implemented in Abyei, South Sudan, is a food security and livelihood intervention with the explicit aim of improving peace outcomes in the region thanks to relevant changes in the behaviour and agency of local leaders and community members, the strengthening of local institutions and governance and substantial improvements in social cohesion and inclusive collective action by those involved in different sides of the conflict.

The analysis also identified two key challenges in implementing food security (or livelihood) programmes to improve gender equality and peace outcomes. First, even though the programmes analysed in the article were implemented in conflict areas, little information was available about the conflict dynamics which might contribute to a better understanding of the context and the impacts on the affected population. This is reflected in the fact that the pathway related to changes in institutions and governance was relevant only to the third case study, where conflict is ongoing. In the other case studies, even when implemented in conflict areas, limited attention was paid to local conflict dynamics, how community members (involved in the Dimitra Clubs or in the JFFLS) may interact with different political actors that operate in the region, including state and non-state armed groups, and how levels of violence may affect how the different programmes may operate in areas affected by conflict in relation to peaceful areas. This is an important limitation. In moving forward, we need more information from project evaluations about specific aspects of how they interact with local conflict dynamics including levels and types of violence and the behaviour of local state and non-state political actors (Gáfaró, Ibáñez, & Justino, 2014). In particular, the institutions that emerge from complex processes of interaction between state and non-state armed actors, other informal actors and different population groups are important for the success of food and livelihood interventions because they shape how property rights, food distribution systems, employment programmes and social service provision may support or fail to support the local populations.

Second, while we have been able to access a number of qualitative localized analyses of the three interventions, we found no quantitative evidence to support those analyses. There is also a remarkable lack of data on the impact of the various programmes separately for men and women, different age groups and different social groups. Improving available data requires humanitarian and development agencies and governments alike to build the capacity of their statistical apparatus to compile this data and make it available at all administrative levels. In the more immediate term, large gains can be made by adapting existing survey data collection in countries of interest. For instance, Justino, Brück, and Verwimp (2013) propose ways of integrating in ongoing socioeconomic surveys, as well as in programme evaluation baseline or end-line surveys. Alternatively, ongoing surveys can be combined

or merged with external information on localized conflict event data, which often provides reliable information on conflict exposure. Another easy solution is the incorporation of behavioural experiments that test for mechanisms regarding social co-operation, trust and aspirations within these ongoing data-collection efforts in order to test more rigorously some of the behavioural and normative pathways suggested above. Better and more systematic data collection is urgently needed to support the rigorous design and implementation of policy interventions, as well as to establish the boundaries of what food interventions can do in terms of promoting specific and realistic outcomes in relation to gender equality and sustainable peace.

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