

Applying an Anticipatory Action Mindset to Addressing Conflict and Food Insecurity in the Timbuktu Region, Mali

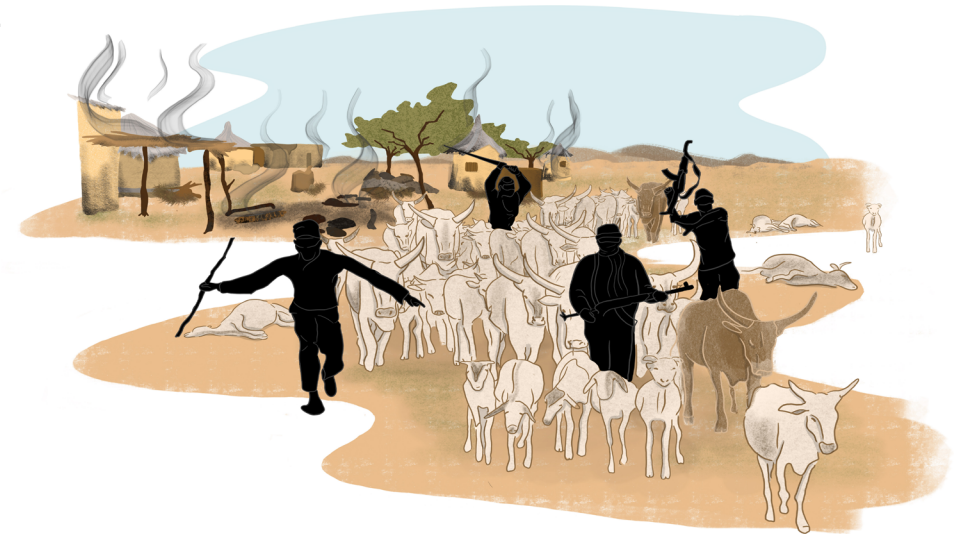
12 November 2024

Overview



Supporting anticipatory action and using an anticipatory mindset to prevent or reduce conflict-induced food insecurity in Mali's Timbuktu region

- Anticipatory action “saves lives and livelihoods before a humanitarian disaster has occurred, helps to preserve people’s dignity, provides value for money, and protects development gains. [It] can contribute to the efficiency of the [humanitarian aid] system, reducing humanitarian needs and thereby saving costs” (**Grand Bargain political caucus to scale up anticipatory action, 2024**).
- This briefing focuses specifically on conflict-related incidents undermining food security and the application of an anticipatory action mindset to help address this. It does not consider the impact on food insecurity of climate-related or other factors.
- The analysis is based on reported incidents of **food-related violence** in Mali’s Timbuktu region from 1 January 2023 to 25 October 2024. These incidents included the looting of livestock and violence at markets and directly affecting people travelling to and from markets. A blockade imposed on Timbuktu region by a non-state armed group in August 2023 also affected food accessibility during the analysed period.
- By considering the foreseeable consequences of violence for food security, the briefing discusses the knowledge that humanitarian actors and communities need in order to employ an anticipatory action mindset. This involves proactively monitoring violent events that pose risks for food security so that their worst foreseeable consequences can be mitigated or prevented through early conflict-sensitive actions

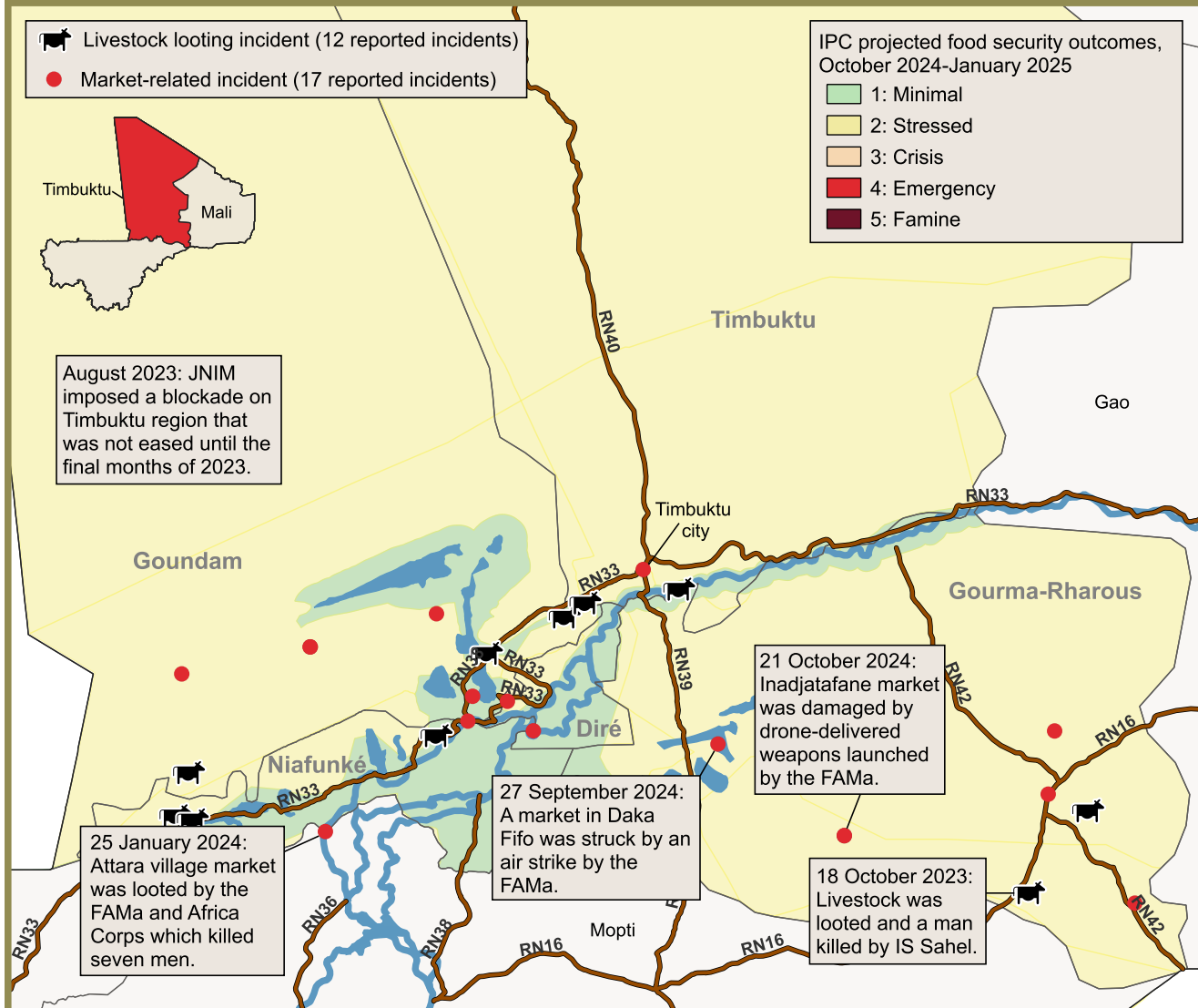


For further details on the assumptions and approach underlying this document, see the **Appendix**. For more information on conflict and hunger in Mali, data categorisations, and recommendations, see Insecurity Insight’s report, **Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity in Mali: Examining the Links between Conflict and Hunger**.

Conflict events leading to a likely impact on food security

Food-related violence in the Timbuktu region (1 January 2023-25 October 2024) and projected IPC outcomes (October 2024-January 2025)

In August 2023, a non-state armed group, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), imposed a strict blockade on transport routes into Timbuktu region that was not eased until the final months of the year. In September and October 2024, two markets in Gourma-Rharous cercle were reportedly struck by air or drone strikes launched by the Malian Armed Forces (Forces Armées Maliennes, or FAMA).



Background

In August 2023, JNIM militants announced a **strict blockade** on transport routes into Timbuktu region, including for essential food items from Mauritania and Algeria. Some people attempted to overcome road blockages by **using river transport instead**. However, in September 2023, at least **49 people were reportedly killed** while travelling on a boat about 50 km from Timbuktu city, and residents **reported being scared to travel** a year after this event. As of June 2024, key informants suggested roads into Timbuktu were more accessible and roadblocks less stringent following **intermittent easings of the blockade in the final months of 2023**. Nonetheless, authorities in Timbuktu have continued to impose **night-time curfews** in order to address the security situation.

For the main staple foods of millet and rice, the Timbuktu region **depends on supplies from Mopti, Ségou, and Sikasso**. This underscores the importance of functioning transport routes for the region's food security.

With the start of the main harvest season in October and the end of the lean season, much of Timbuktu (see Map 1) is **projected** to experience IPC Phase 2 ("Stressed") for the period October 2024 to January 2025. As Map 1 shows, many of the areas in southern Timbuktu that are expected to experience the lowest levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) are situated close to rivers and other sources of water.

Map sources: Insecurity Insight and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET)

Mitigating the consequences of conflict events that impact food security and identifying opportunities to intervene




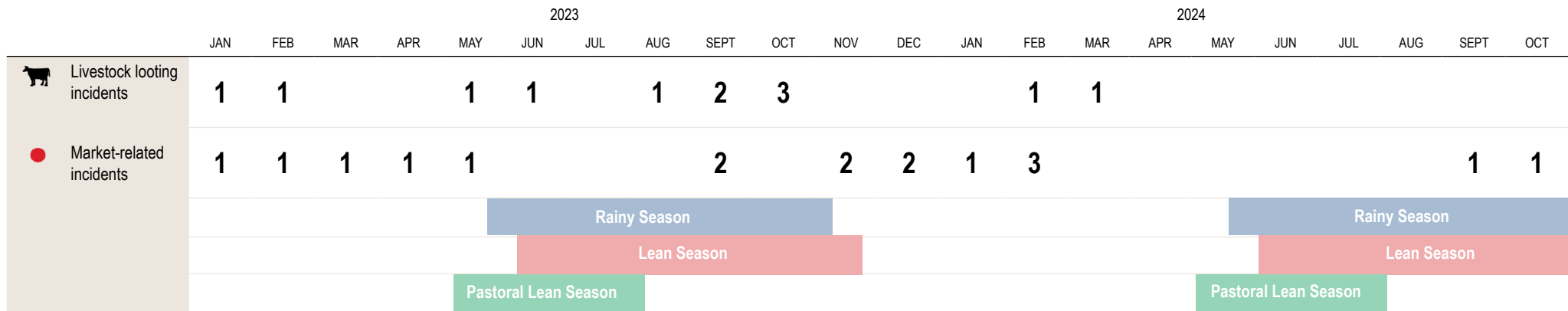
	Incident analysis 1 January 2023-25 October 2024 Download data on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).	Foreseeable consequences for food security	Opportunities
	<p>Non-state and state actors were reported to have looted livestock in at least 12 incidents between January 2023 and March 2024. They were most frequent in the south-western half of the region. Five incidents were attributed to the FAMA and/or the Africa Corps (formerly the Wagner Group) and at least six to non-state actors. In the majority of the six incidents attributed to Islamic State (IS) Sahel or JNIM militants, the looting occurred during wider attacks in which these armed groups killed or abducted people. Some incidents in which the FAMA and Africa Corps looted livestock also involved livestock being killed and other property being damaged and looted.</p>	<p>Livestock looting: By removing communities' livelihood sources, large-scale livestock looting could produce forced displacement, especially among vulnerable communities. This could increase pressures for access to essential resources in communities hosting displaced people. Negative coping strategies such as the selling of livestock and other productive assets may also result.</p>	<p>Identify ways to prevent cattle looting and address its illicit transnational trade, including through engagement with relevant authorities in neighbouring countries.</p> <p>Conduct focus groups to understand how families and communities adapt to the loss of their livestock, the possibilities and potential impacts of diversifying their income sources, and how to support them to avoid displacement or malnutrition.</p>
	<p>At least 17 violent incidents were reported at markets or directly affected people travelling to or from markets. According to an RFI report, at midday on 21 October 2024, a weekly market in Gourma-Rharous cercle was “seriously damaged” by drone-delivered weapons launched by the FAMA. Five people were killed and about 20 were injured. Other incidents involved markets being looted by FAMA and Africa Corps members during their operations; a person being abducted by JNIM militants while travelling to a market by pinasse boat; and a market being struck by mortar shells.</p> <p>Under-reporting due to limited internet availability and access restrictions makes it likely that the documented incidents only partially reflect the actual situation.</p>	<p>Market-related violence: The opportunity costs to market stallholders increase when there is a risk that violence will disrupt markets. Additionally, people may visit markets less frequently due to security concerns following repeated incidents of violence at these locations in the region. This could disrupt food supply chains. The incident in which the market in Inadjatafane was “seriously damaged” in late October 2024 may also have destroyed staple foods and reduced food availability in the locality.</p>	<p>Engage with security forces to ensure people's safety at and access to markets at all times, but especially during peak market activity periods.</p> <p>Conduct focus group discussions with market stallholders, suppliers, and shoppers to understand how to improve their safety and the functioning of markets.</p>
	<p>Blockades: As detailed in the background section to this document (on page 2), the Timbuktu region has been heavily affected by blockades, especially during the latter half of 2023.</p>	<p>Blockades: Extorted charges imposed by armed groups on transport routes are likely to continue, resulting in higher prices for staple goods and the undermining of economic (i.e. affordable) access to food among vulnerable communities. In September 2024, FEWSNET reported that the average price of staple goods in the Timbuktu region had increased by 34% compared with average prices in Mali. The reimposition of a strict blockade could also affect food availability on markets. According to a November 2023 REACH assessment, after a blockade was imposed on Timbuktu region in August 2023, 49% of traders at the four main markets in Timbuktu city reported having been forced to stop trading activities.</p>	<p>Engage in humanitarian dialogue and diplomacy to address blockades.</p> <p>Maintain contact with communities affected by blockades to understand their needs, and supply items that are particularly needed as soon as an opportunity to do so arises.</p>

Figure 1: Timeline of Mali's agricultural calendar and reported incidents of food-related violence



- Attacks affecting food security have been a feature of the Timbuktu region for some time. The reduction in reported incidents in recent months may result from limited telecommunications access and physical access restrictions imposed on aid agencies and other outsiders that reduce the number of reports that become available. Given the likelihood of continued violence and blockades in the Timbuktu region, it is crucial to evaluate the cumulative effects of these attacks and blockades to fully understand their broader implications for food security.
- To reduce the impact of recurring violence on food security, a comprehensive strategy to prevent and mitigate the consequences of such violence should be developed. However, analysis of past violent events related to food security has not provided sufficient data to build predictive models for when and where specific types of conflict-related events will arise.
- Despite this limitation, reported incidents can serve as early indicators, prompting timely interventions to prevent disruptions from spreading throughout the food production and distribution system.

Figure 2: Sankey diagrams showing the conflict parties to which incidents of food-related violence in the Timbuktu region were attributed (1 January 2023-25 October 2024)

Figure 2 illustrates reported incidents involving conflict parties committing violence at markets, or directly affecting people travelling to or from markets, or looting livestock.

Constructive engagement through humanitarian diplomacy and dialogue with conflict parties can help to break the cycle of conflict-related food insecurity by encouraging conflict parties to put precautionary measures in place to reduce the impact of their actions on food security, in line with international humanitarian law. For further details regarding tangible measures that conflict parties can take to mitigate the impact of their actions on food security, see InterAction's **Practical Measures to Prevent and Mitigate Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity**.

Although in practice constructive engagement with many of these groups is difficult to achieve, this option should be considered if security conditions permit.

Blockades are not shown in Figure 2 due to the difficulty of quantifying them as “numerical events”. However, the blockade of Timbuktu region has been **publicly attributed to JNIM militants**.

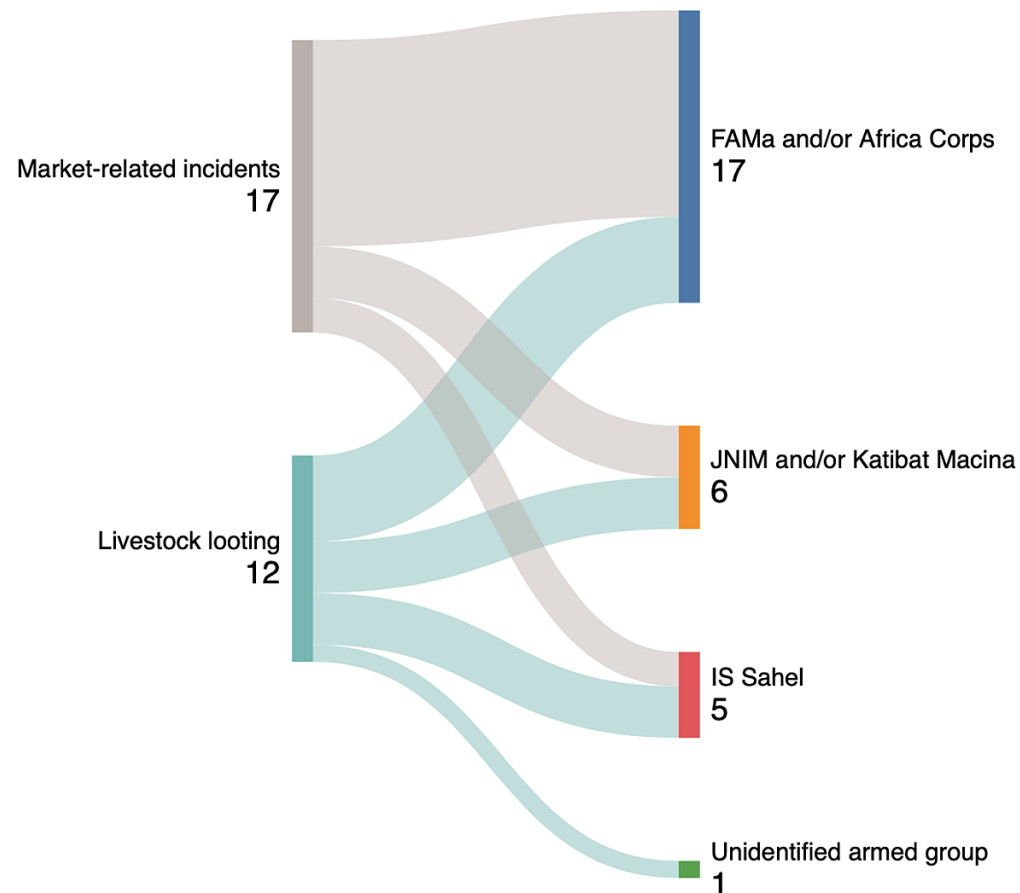
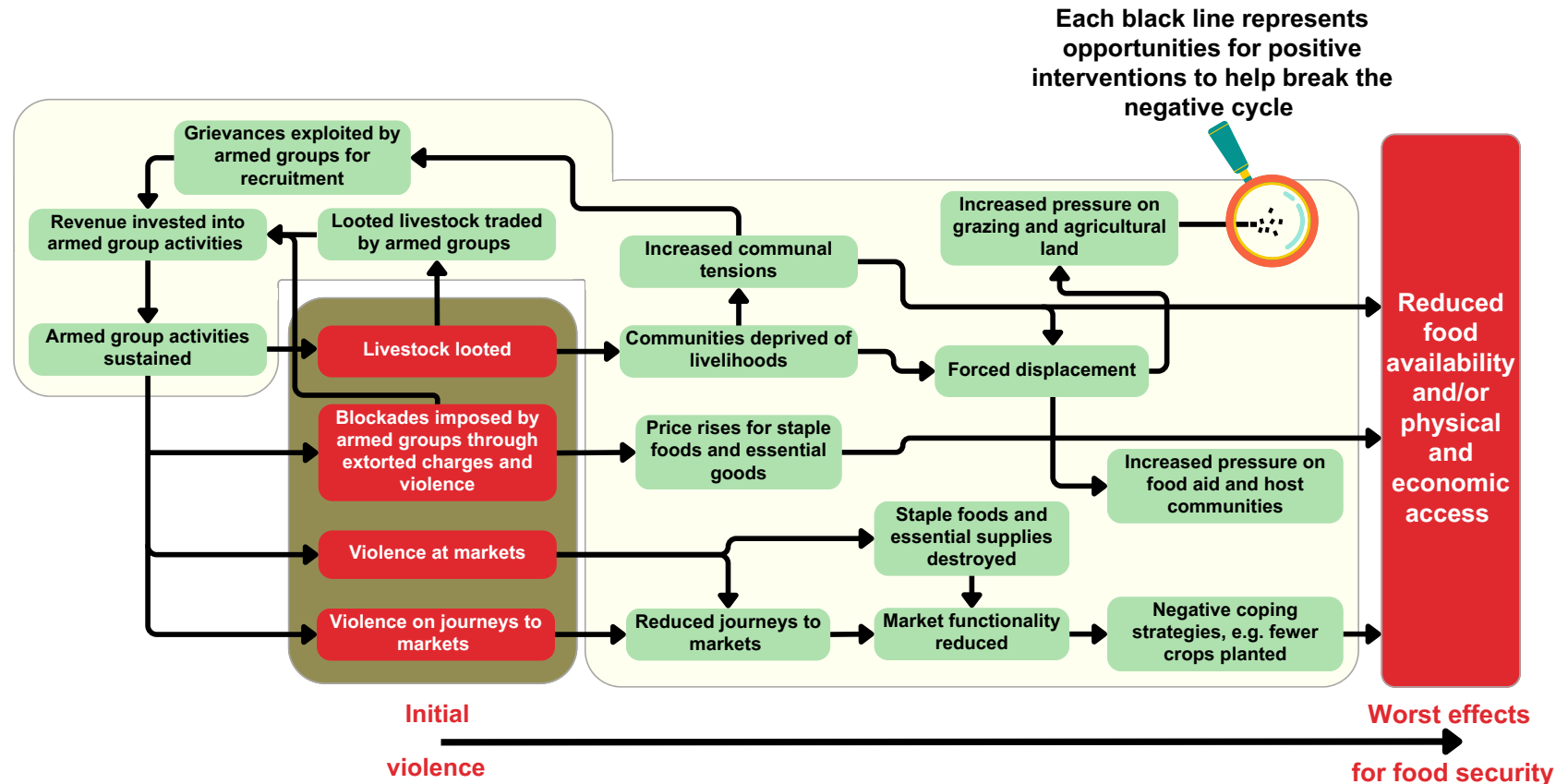


Figure 3: The negative cycle of conflict and food insecurity in the Timbuktu region: opportunities for communities and humanitarian actors to intervene with anticipatory actions

- Incidents of food-related violence in the Timbuktu region produce negative outcomes (shown in the green boxes in Figure 3) that undermine food availability and physical and economic (i.e. affordable) access to food.
- These negative outcomes are foreseeable and interlinked. One negative outcome triggers more negative outcomes to form a cascade. In some cases, this also produces further violence in a negative feedback cycle that causes conflict and the resulting food insecurity to continue.
- However, periods of time occur between when the initial violent incidents happen and when their worst effects are felt on the affected communities' food security. These time periods provide opportunities for communities and humanitarian actors to intervene with anticipatory actions that mitigate the worst effects of the violence on food insecurity before these effects fully materialise. In turn, this could help break the negative feedback cycle of conflict and food insecurity.



Anticipatory approach to reduce food insecurity

- In the face of growing food insecurity and limited resources for direct food aid, the anticipatory approach provides a way of intervening early by promoting resilience, independence, and positive coping mechanisms among affected communities to prevent the further deterioration of food security and future dependency on direct aid.
- An anticipatory mindset requires the undertaking of needs assessments and focusing on factors that enable communities and families to cope with adverse events that could potentially have a devastating impact on food security.
- The successful implementation of this approach requires humanitarians to make use of best practices in their communications with conflict-affected communities, adopt acceptance-based security risk management methods, and take steps to develop strong community support.

Conflict sensitivity in anticipatory action programmes

- Anticipatory action programmes are increasingly recognising the importance of being sensitive to and aware of the different types of conflict that can occur in a particular environment and how they can have specific humanitarian impacts. Attacks on civilians and infrastructure in particular disrupt complex systems, significantly affecting sectors such as food security, health care, and protection. Conflict-sensitive approaches should take into account how these events impact both affected populations and the societal structures they rely on for their well-being.

Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity in Mali

This [report](#) forms part of a series examining the links between conflict and hunger. It focuses on reported conflict incidents of food-related violence in Mali between 1 January 2019 and 15 June 2024. These incidents included the looting of livestock; the burning of granaries and markets; and the killings, abductions and physical assaults of people at and travelling to and from markets. Other factors undermining food security included blockades by armed groups on transportation routes and access restrictions on agricultural and pastoral land due to insecurity, improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance. The report demonstrates clear links between recurrent and specific forms of food-related violence and negative consequences for food access and availability among affected communities. By considering the foreseeable consequences of specific conflict actions for food security and actions to mitigate these consequences before their worse effects fully materialise, the report aims to support anticipatory action. The analysis is based on the Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict (FIVC)-Mali dataset, an event-based dataset compiled by Insecurity Insight from open sources and partner contributions, and available for download on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange](#) (HDX). It is supported by desk research and key informant interviews. In **English** and **French**

Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity
in Mali:
Examining the Links between
Conflict and Hunger

August 2024



Appendix: Food security in conflict and anticipatory action: assumptions and approach

Assumptions	Approach
<p>Conflict violence is varied and takes different forms, each with distinct humanitarian impacts on access to food, health care, education or protection needs.</p>	<p>This document discusses a distinct form of conflict events that directly affect food security. The focus is not on military engagements, but on conflict actions with foreseeable impacts on food security. Download dataset.</p>
<p>Predicting conflict is complex and context-specific. Anticipatory action to deal with human-made hazards should not rely on forecasting specific conflict events.</p>	<p>This document does not predict conflict. It indicates that, unlike natural hazards, there is no clear, predictable connection between seasons and conflict-related events affecting the food supply system in the Timbuktu region.</p>
<p>Conflict events that impact humanitarian needs highlight the need for early interventions to prevent or mitigate further harm.</p>	<p>This document proposes conflict events with humanitarian impact as the trigger indicator for intervention.</p>
<p>The anticipatory approach can aim to prevent violent events through humanitarian dialogue.</p>	<p>This document identifies conflict actors and their actions that are likely to have directly impacted the food supply system. It encourages considering the feasibility and potential focus of humanitarian dialogue.</p>
<p>The anticipatory approach can seek to mitigate the humanitarian impacts of violence.</p>	<p>This document outlines opportunities to intervene in reducing food insecurity risks arising from conflict events.</p>
<p>The anticipatory approach aims to break the chain of events that lead from shocks to food insecurity.</p>	<p>This document concludes with key insights on adopting an anticipatory mindset to address food security and strengthen conflict sensitivity in anticipatory action programmes designed to prevent or mitigate the consequences for the food supply system of natural hazards and conflict-related events.</p>

Further resources


Gao Region

Conflict, Food Insecurity and Anticipatory Action in Gao Region, Mali
31 October 2024

Overview

Supporting anticipatory action to prevent or reduce conflict-induced food insecurity in Mali's Gao region

- Anticipatory action involves "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold" (**Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership 2022**). It includes actions taken by humanitarian actors to release pre-agreed financing when an expected crisis trigger point is reached, as well as more informal mitigation measures, including those taken by affected communities.
- To support anticipatory action, this briefing provides analysis of reported incidents of **food-related violence** in Mali's Gao region from 1 January 2023 to 11 October 2024. These incidents included the looting of livestock, violence at markets and directly affecting people travelling to and from markets; and, in at least one incident each, the killing of fathers and the looting of staple foods from granaries. Blockades imposed by armed groups have also disrupted transport along key roads and undermined access to food.
- By considering the foreseeable consequences of violence for food security, the briefing discusses the knowledge that humanitarian actors and communities need in order to employ an anticipatory action mindset and take action to mitigate the worst effects of the violence on food security.



For further information on conflict and hunger in Mali, data categorisations and recommendations, see Insecurity Insight's report, **Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity in Mali: Examining the Links between Conflict and Hunger**.


Ménaka Region

Conflict, Food Insecurity and Anticipatory Action in Ménaka Region, Mali
16 October 2024

Overview

Supporting anticipatory action to prevent or reduce conflict-induced food insecurity in Mali's Ménaka region

- Anticipatory action involves "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold" (**Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership 2022**). It includes actions taken by humanitarian actors to release pre-agreed financing when an expected crisis trigger point is reached, as well as more informal mitigation measures, including those taken by affected communities.
- To support anticipatory action, this briefing provides analysis of reported incidents of **food-related violence** in Mali's Ménaka region from 1 January 2023 to 30 September 2024. These incidents included the looting of livestock, and violence at markets and directly affecting people travelling to and from markets. Blockades and access restrictions due to armed group activity have also seriously affected access to food.
- By considering the foreseeable consequences of violence for a community's/population's food security, the briefing discusses the knowledge that humanitarian actors and communities need in order to employ an anticipatory action mindset and take action to mitigate the worst effects of the violence on food security.



For further information on conflict and hunger in Mali, data categorisations and recommendations, see Insecurity Insight's report, **Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity in Mali: Examining the Links between Conflict and Hunger**.


Mopti Region

Conflict, Food Insecurity and Anticipatory Action in Mopti Region, Mali
02 October 2024

Overview

Supporting anticipatory action to prevent or reduce conflict-induced food insecurity in Mali's Mopti region

- Anticipatory action involves "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold" (**Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership 2022**). It includes actions taken by humanitarian actors to release pre-agreed financing when an expected crisis trigger point is reached, as well as more informal mitigation measures, including those taken by affected communities.
- To support anticipatory action, this briefing provides analysis of reported incidents of **food-related violence** in Mali's Mopti region from 1 January 2023 to 23 August 2024. The incidents included the looting of livestock, violence at markets and directly affecting people travelling to and from them, and the burning of granaries by conflict parties.
- By considering the foreseeable consequences of violence for a community's/population's food security, the briefing discusses the knowledge that humanitarian actors and communities need in order to employ an anticipatory action mindset and take action to mitigate the worst effects of the violence on food security.



For further information on conflict and hunger in Mali, data categorisations and recommendations, see Insecurity Insight's report, **Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity in Mali: Examining the Links between Conflict and Hunger**.

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