



**ACTION  
AGAINST  
HUNGER**



**The human face of climate change:  
addressing the malnutrition crisis**

**Opportunities for action at COP29**



## Our key asks for COP29

1

Based on the historical responsibility of polluters, the New Collective Quantified Goal on Finance (NCQG) should set an ambitious core target of public finance of at least \$1 trillion per year in grants and grant-equivalent finance including by drawing on new climate-just sources of financing such as taxes and levies on the fossil fuel industry and other high polluting industries. This must be new and additional to existing aid flows, and the decision should include concrete steps to improve the quality and accessibility of climate finance for affected communities, particularly in fragile and conflict contexts.

2

COP29 must deliver action for communities facing hunger and malnutrition by re-orienting narratives towards achieving the right to adequate food for all. The Harmoniya Initiative by the Azerbaijani COP presidency and the Sharm-el-Sheikh Joint Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security have to reflect this rights-based approach and focus on gender-just food systems transformation, with agroecology at heart.

3

The indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation, selected as part of the UAE-Belem Work Programme, must include measures of food and nutrition security with a special focus on vulnerable groups, such as the cost of a healthy diet, access to multi-hazard early warning systems, access to healthcare and progress towards agroecology.

4

The gendered impacts of the climate crisis should be mainstreamed in negotiations, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. Parties must conclude the negotiations of the Gender Action Plan in Baku to implement strong climate gender transformative actions nationally with meaningful participation of women, their collectives, and other vulnerable groups at all levels, including the voices of grassroots feminist movements.



Action Against Hunger's Block Co-ordinator, Bhumika Limbachiya, talks to a mother who is a participant of 'Project Vrudhhi' in Gujarat, India, where caregivers receive nutritional information, antenatal checkups, and breastfeeding support. Photo by Rohit Jain for Power of Nutrition. Cover image: Gonzalo Hohr for Action Against Hunger.

# Introduction: how climate change is exacerbating the malnutrition crisis

**Climate change is fueling a global hunger and nutrition crisis that is exacerbating existing inequalities and has severe, compounding impacts on women and girls.** The climate crisis takes many forms: changing temperatures, more frequent and worsening droughts and floods, and rapidly degrading soil quality all impact people's ability to access sufficient healthy food. Staple crops, pastoral systems, and fruits and vegetables are already being affected by climate change, which is also increasing incidences of agricultural pests and diseases. All countries with a high prevalence of undernutrition are already among the third most climate vulnerable countries in the world. Almost three quarters of countries with the highest levels of undernutrition are also among the 25 most climate vulnerable<sup>1</sup>.

Without swift, effective action, these outcomes are only expected to worsen, putting up to an additional 183 million people at risk of hunger compared to a no-climate change scenario by 2050<sup>2</sup>. **This impact on crops and livelihoods in turn has a negative effect on nutrition security, and thus on lifelong health and child development.** For example, higher temperatures are associated with decreased diet diversity in children, and therefore increased rates of malnutrition<sup>3</sup>. Climate change also impacts the nutritional quality of crops themselves, lowering the amount of protein and essential minerals like zinc and iron in grain legumes<sup>4</sup>.

**These impacts are felt disproportionately by women and other marginalised groups.** Women often have less access to natural resources, yet are responsible for sourcing food, water, and fuel for their families. Many women and girls also depend on agriculture for employment, meaning that failed or difficult growing seasons caused by climate change are particularly devastating<sup>5</sup>. Finally, women are also often excluded from "safety nets" in climate emergencies, such as land, property, and other assets, meaning they are less equipped to survive and adapt<sup>6</sup>.

As a humanitarian and development organisation working to address both the causes and effects of hunger and malnutrition, we witness the role of **the climate crisis as a threat multiplier, exacerbating socio-economic and political tensions, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings where climate-related vulnerabilities overlap with factors such as displacement and lack of basic service provision to exacerbate food and nutrition insecurity.** By increasing conflict risks, the climate crisis amplifies the threat of gender-based violence and negative coping mechanisms such as early and forced marriage, sexual violence, and human trafficking<sup>7</sup>. Gender-based violence (GBV) in turn has been shown to have **negative impacts on women and girls' nutrition outcomes**, with girls subjected to GBV in childhood more likely to develop overweight/obesity, and girls subjected to early marriage significantly more likely to have anaemia<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, women and marginalised groups are not only more vulnerable to the impact of conflict and climate change, but are **excluded from the political and decision-making processes** which could lead to positive change<sup>9</sup>.

**COP29 therefore presents not just an opportunity to advance climate action, but also to help turn the tide on global hunger, malnutrition and gender inequality.** In this paper, we lay out opportunities for UNFCCC parties to strengthen community resilience to climate-related shocks and support climate resilience in fragile and conflict contexts, examining the role of accessible finance, locally-led adaptation and empowering the most vulnerable groups to create rights-based, just solutions for all.

## Strengthening community resilience to climate-related shocks

### Pay the climate debt

The climate crisis and its impacts disproportionately affect those communities that have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions - and climate finance has historically fallen short of their needs. To implement climate justice, compensate for climate-related loss and damage and enable effective mitigation and adaptation, Global North countries must pay their climate debt and continue to make adequate finance available.

**At COP29 the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) must set an ambitious core target of public finance of at least USD 1 trillion per year in grants and grant-equivalent finance**, including by drawing on new climate-just sources of financing such as taxes and levies on the fossil fuel industry<sup>10</sup>. The NCQG must also improve transparency and establish balanced subgoals for mitigation, adaptation, and responding to loss and damage. As needs will continue to increase and impacts continue to worsen, the NCQG will need to be reviewed under 5-year timeframes, to match the cycles of the Global Stocktake (GST).

**The quality of the climate finance delivered must be scrutinized, aligned with human rights frameworks and supportive of gender transformative approaches. Finance needs to be available as much as possible in the form of grants and not loans**, to avoid worsening the debt crisis of many countries, which prevents them from investing in climate-resilient essential services to fight malnutrition, such as healthcare and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

### Make finance work for the local level

At the forefront of the climate crisis stand small-scale food producers, especially women, youth, or gender diverse groups, who face intersectional forms of discrimination and compounding factors of inequalities. Making finance accessible to affected communities is paramount to make climate action a reality.

**Grassroots organizations, local communities and civil society organizations are best-fitted to define how to build resilience for themselves as agents of change for climate action. COP29 must be an opportunity to remove barriers to accessing climate finance for those most affected by climate impacts**, including hunger and malnutrition. Lengthy and costly accreditation processes to access climate finance, through the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for example, have been widely documented and reflect how inadequate the climate finance system is when it comes to reaching the local level.

Parties must put in place **appropriately resourced “community access windows” across all climate funds**, starting with global multilateral funds and including in the new fund for responding to loss and damage. Administrative procedures should be minimized to improve accessibility. The NCQG should include a **clear monitoring and accountability process for this improved quality of climate finance**, for instance by setting an increasing target for multilateral funding disbursed directly to local communities as well as local and national CSOs.

### Advance locally-led adaptation

Adaptation to climate change has been chronically under-financed despite the acute needs in the Global South, and repeated calls for climate justice. Massive adaptation funding is needed, in the form of grants rather than loans, to support early action with investment in food security and nutrition, WASH, and access to quality healthcare, including nutrition services, among others.

At COP29 the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) negotiations in the framework of the UAE-Belém work programme have to land on indicators that reflect community resilience and locally-led adaptation that works for vulnerable groups, with gender-disaggregated data<sup>11</sup>. Indicators should contribute to measuring progress towards agroecology, the realization of the right to adequate food and the right to water. For example, for the food and agriculture target of the GGA, indicators should include dietary diversity of children and women, the price of healthy diets, diversification of food systems, and the degree of inclusion of agroecology within Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and adaptation communications<sup>12</sup>.

Other much needed aspects to monitor are the portion of agricultural support received by smallholders and women, the portion of agricultural subsidies aligned with climate and health positive objectives, or the proportion of land controlled by small-holders and women. Monitoring of climate resilient health systems under the GGA should consider universal access to healthcare and the inclusion of nutrition interventions and policies in NAPs. On water and sanitation, adaptation indicators should include the proportion of households with access to resilient, safe water supply and sanitation under locally-led community management.

### **Avoid false solutions**

Finally, for COP29 to deliver action for communities facing hunger and malnutrition, parties must prioritise achieving the right to adequate food for all, by supporting rights-based and gender-just food systems transformation, with agroecology at heart<sup>13</sup>, instead of incremental technological solutions that tend not to challenge the status quo. A disproportionate focus on technological solutions promoted by the agricultural industry to reduce and offset agricultural emissions will only exacerbate dependencies on external inputs, leading to increased poverty for smallholder farmers. Too many partnerships involving agro-industrial actors overly rely on technological approaches, the benefits of which remain unproven for smallholder food producers<sup>14</sup>. COP29 must be a chance for a people-centred transformation of food systems, which has to be reflected in the **Harmoniya Initiative by the Azerbaijani COP presidency and the Sharm-el-Sheikh Joint Work on the Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security**.

## **Supporting climate action in fragile and conflict contexts**

### **Address double vulnerabilities**

The past years have not only broken temperature records, they also saw rising numbers of violent conflicts<sup>15</sup>. Climate impacts and armed conflict form an increasingly common double threat for many communities: 13 of the 20 countries most vulnerable to the consequences of the climate crisis according to the ND-GAIN Index are affected by armed conflict<sup>16</sup>. The combination of extreme weather and conflict-related events leads to a vicious circle of decreasing resilience of the affected people, rising food prices and few alternative sources of income, resulting in displacement, food insecurity and constantly high humanitarian needs. Under these conditions, adaptation to changing climatic conditions, for example in agricultural production, becomes impossible (see box).

### **Increase finance to fragile and conflict-affected states**

These challenges are compounded by the lack of access to climate finance in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, including in complex crisis contexts: per-capita multilateral climate finance received in climate-vulnerable countries experiencing protracted crises amounts to only a fifth of that received in climate-vulnerable countries without long-term crises (USD 1 compared to USD 4.88 for the period 2003-2022)<sup>17</sup>.

**The risk aversion of mitigation and adaptation funding prevents the implementation of crucial measures to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations** to future climate impacts, leading to further loss of life, economic productivity and food production, and thereby deepening existing



crises. In addition to increasing the amount and quality of climate finance, specific measures are needed to enhance its accessibility in fragile contexts, including the prioritisation of grants instead of loans, and direct accessibility for communities, grassroots and local civil society organisations with access to hard-to-reach areas. **Climate finance, including compensation for climate-induced loss and damage, must be additional** to existing development and humanitarian funding flows.

### **Enable early warning - anticipatory humanitarian action systems**

Delayed funding and action in crisis contexts represents a key barrier to resilience of affected communities, especially in the case of protracted and multicausal crises with successive shocks. **Flexible and forecast-based financing** is needed to prevent or reduce rising humanitarian needs and support communities in their recovery and resilience strategies. In addition to making such finance available, donors should support the **development of accessible early warning systems in co-creation with affected communities**, including local and indigenous knowledge.

In the implementation of the UNSG's Early Warning for All initiative, a special focus must be placed on **multi-hazard early warning systems** to account for multiple and overlapping drivers of fragility, and on the accessibility of such systems for vulnerable communities. These dimensions must also be considered for the development of indicators for the GGA in the framework of the UAE-Belém work programme (with reference to Art. 10a of Decision 2/CMA.5).

### **Contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable groups**

Intersecting vulnerabilities and specific needs have to be taken into consideration in order to implement a rights-based transformation and climate action agenda. Due to historic marginalization, discrimination and limited access to resources such as land and other assets, **women and girls are disproportionately impacted by changes in climatic conditions, just as they are disproportionately impacted by hunger and malnutrition and a lack of quality healthcare.**

Furthermore, crisis situations such as extreme weather events expose women to an increased risk of GBV and negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage<sup>18</sup>. Mitigation and adaptation measures must not only respond to their needs by including gender-sensitive elements, but also contribute to their empowerment and the realisation of their rights through gender-transformative financing. To that end, parties should implement strong climate gender action plans and **enable meaningful participation of women** (and representatives of other vulnerable groups, depending on the context) **in decision-making at all levels**, including in the UNFCCC negotiations.



Feroza is a mother of three whose house was badly damaged during heavy rains in Pakistan in 2022. She received wheat and vegetable seeds from Action Against Hunger which she planted in a neighbour's home, that have helped her to provide for her family. Photo by Khaula Jamil / Disasters Emergency Committee.

# Lived experiences of the hunger-climate-conflict nexus - drawing lessons from protracted crises in Mali, South Sudan and Somalia

In 2023-2024, Action Against Hunger, in cooperation with the Overseas Development Institute, conducted two studies on climate-induced hunger in conflict contexts with the aim of collecting lessons and best practices for policymakers and practitioners.

As the combined occurrence of climate-related extreme weather events and armed conflict becomes more frequent, communities are faced with a vicious cycle of loss of assets, ongoing food and nutrition insecurity and decreasing resilience to future shocks. Based on more than **130 interviews and 50 focus group discussions**, conducted at three sites per country, the assessments collected the following learning points based on lived experiences:

- **Livelihood insecurity, as an outcome of fragility, conflict and losses due to climate and non-climate shocks, is resulting in households spending more in purchasing food, despite lacking the financial means to do so.** The layered impacts of climate and non-climate shocks affect not only agricultural livelihoods but also businesses, as the reliability of alternative income-generating activities depends on the state of the local economy. Households reported spending most or all of their income on food and being unable to afford a varied diet
- **Communities are having to make livelihood decisions in the absence of information that could help both their short-term and long-term decision-making.** In South Sudan, interviewees suggested there is a lack of weather-based information informing decision-making around planting and cultivation. While interviewees in Somalia are not faced with a lack of weather or early warning information, they have such reduced coping capacity that they cannot take action in response to the information they have
- **Gender-specific risks are driving vulnerability** as women across the case study sites are having to undertake **both primary carer and provider roles**. Structural conditions, such as the transfer of assets to husbands, dropping out of school due to entering marriage and the exclusion from community-based decision-making, create further vulnerabilities. Women also face a heightened risk of **gender-based violence both in IDP camps and when undertaking livelihood activities, such as travelling to and from farmland**



Fear of attack if they go outside the village affects every aspect of women's daily lives and reduces their ability to earn income from traditional crafts (weaving straw mats) and petty trade. However, their primary concern is the combined effects of conflict and climate shocks on food production and market prices.

- The complexities of humanitarian response as experienced in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan illuminate a connection between conflict dynamics, climate hazards, fragile systems and funding gaps. All three countries are experiencing ongoing conflict and are grappling with environmental uncertainties. **Sudden changes in conflict dynamics and rapid-onset climate hazards mean that early warning systems can struggle to keep pace with changing situations. Furthermore, sudden events such as flooding can expose the lack of adaptive capacity to a new set of challenges which may not have been originally envisaged during programme design**

The situation is further compounded by a **lack of adequate infrastructure**, which is exposed during periods of flooding. This complicates the response, making areas difficult to access and increasing strain on limited resources. A recurring impediment to sustainable progress in these regions is the consistent funding shortfall, with a lack of long-term development and climate finance and volatile humanitarian funding levels

- To respond more effectively and adequately to the layered vulnerabilities created by climate and conflict impacts, the assessments identified several pathways and good practices: combining short- and long-term programming to meet acute needs while building resilience (collaboration across the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus**); **community co-creation of anticipatory action systems** to include local knowledge and facilitate acceptance; engaging in **state capacity-building** to enhance access to basic services in protracted crises; and improving the accessibility and disbursement of climate finance in fragile contexts.

### Further information:

- [Lived experiences relating to food and nutrition security in Mali, South Sudan and Somalia](#)
- [Analysis of existing practitioner and organisational experience in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan](#)
- [Synthesis report](#)

**South Sudan: Multiple roles are demanded of females within households**

Women often have multiple roles in the household, including primary carer to children, elderly family members and those with disabilities. At the same time, they're expected to ensure that the household has enough to eat. In one example, due to the death of her mother, these responsibilities have fallen on a 14-year-old girl. Her elder sisters have married and have their own families.

*"I am now responsible for all the household chores, cooking yet sometimes, I do not know how to cook it but there is no one I can ask. My elder sisters just shout at me and leave me with a lot of work. At least, if my mother was still there, I would not do heavy work."*

The family were able to cultivate some crops, but the amount was reduced by flooding. The household was able to sell some crops, but they only have a small plot of land which doesn't allow them to produce enough. They rely on selling what little cattle they have left to buy enough food for the family to eat.

*"My biggest concern is once we sell all the cattle to buy food, what else will we do? How can we survive?"*

Flood waters also led to the damage of their huts.

*"Since our mother died, there are many gaps. As a young girl, I cannot go out to cut grass to thatch our huts and that is the reason our two huts are falling apart."*

Whilst they live with her stepfather, he is disabled and is unable to walk far. The young woman has expressed concern that if her step father were to remarry, his focus would be his new family, and the responsibility to look after the family will be her responsibility.

*"I am worried because even the current 'father' is not our biological father but inherited our mother. If he decides to marry and starts his own family, who will be responsible for us or take care of the family. I can't even go to school and leave my siblings home, who will take care of them?"*








# Integrating Mental Health and Social Equity into Climate Action: A Holistic Approach for a Sustainable Future

- Climate change extends beyond environmental concerns to mental health challenges, as disruptions may cause a loss of livelihood or even homes, causing **depression, anxiety and a deep sense of loss**. Marginalized communities are especially impacted, as women and the elderly often bear the brunt of **increased responsibilities and stress with fewer resources to cope, affecting their capacity to seek and access adequate nutrition**. Integrating mental health and social equity into climate action is crucial for community support and resilience
- From an adaptation perspective, climate-induced disasters cause widespread mental health issues such as anxiety, trauma, and bereavement, necessitating psychological support in disaster response and climate policies. Empowering local communities through adequately funded, community-led initiatives enhances **social cohesion** and tailors solutions to local needs. An **intersectional approach** addressing age, race, gender, and socio-economic vulnerabilities is essential for equitable solutions and effective social protection
- Inner transformation, including consciousness practices and emotional resilience, can also drive meaningful climate change mitigation. Holistic climate action that considers psychological; and social dimensions is vital for a sustainable and just future. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives are crucial to foster sustainable behavioral changes and regenerative mindsets.

Global and inclusive action is needed to prioritize mental health and well-being in international climate efforts for:

- Better psychological support for climate-induced mental health issues
- Enhanced community empowerment
- Development of intersectional approaches
- Increased awareness around mental health and inner transformation in climate resilience

Those approaches are essential for addressing social and climate justice, making visible the power dynamics in our connections with ourselves, others, and the Earth - key psychological drivers of the climate crisis.



Loko and her baby at their destroyed maize fields. Their crops are continuously failing due to climate change. Photo by Peter Caton for Action Against Hunger.

## Case Study: Fostering resilient communities in Ghor, Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the impact of climate change<sup>19</sup>. Extreme weather, glacier melting, protracted and more frequent drought and floods, unpredictable rainfall patterns, desertification and aridification occur increasingly often. Droughts, floods, land degradation and declining agricultural productivity **threaten agriculture-based livelihoods** which more than 80% of the Afghan population depend on<sup>20</sup>. Our teams have seen first-hand the impacts of changing weather conditions: in 2023, **25 out of 34 provinces experienced either severe or catastrophic drought conditions, affecting more than 50% of the population**<sup>21</sup>. These conditions have led to social disruption and displacement, exacerbating protection risks especially for women and girls.

In May this year, unprecedented heavy rainfall caused flash floods in the **Northeast region** of Afghanistan. Ghor province was severely affected: reports indicated that over 2,000 homes were totally destroyed, 8,000 households affected and 50 people lost their lives. Action Against Hunger responded by deploying two **emergency mobile health and nutrition teams (MHNT)** to provide health and nutrition services and multi-purpose cash assistance. Embedded in this response was the provision of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services, including **Psychological First Aid (PFA)**, to provide immediate support, ensure well-being and promote resilience amongst communities affected by the flooding.

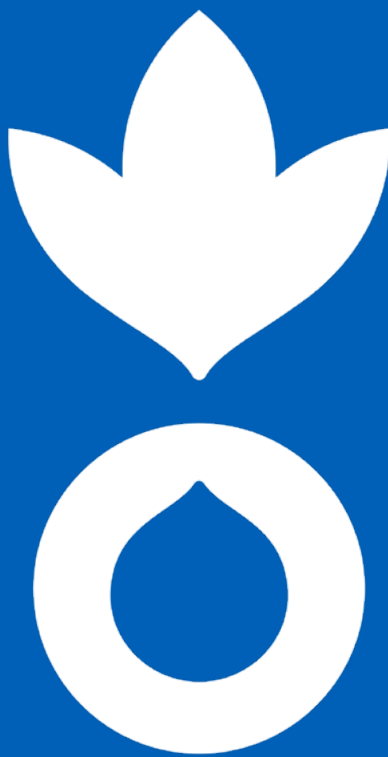
209 beneficiaries received **counselling** to support them through the immediate psychological impact of the flooding. In addition, the two MHNTs also conducted **psychoeducation sessions covering topics such as stress management and positive coping mechanisms** for anxiety and depression. The sessions also informed the community about MHPSS services such as **Action Against Hunger's toll-free hotline number**, which is open to all Afghans across Afghanistan. Through the awareness sessions, 1,600 people were reached with the necessary information and resources to seek and receive the psychosocial support needed as a result of a climate-induced shock.



Women and children attend a health education session in Ghor, Afghanistan. Photo by Action Against Hunger



- 1 Data from FAO et al. 2024: [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#)) and ND-GAIN 2024: [Rankings](#) compared to produce these statistics, looking at countries with 30% or greater prevalence of undernutrition.
- 2 IPCC 2019: [Special Report on Climate Change and Land, Chapter 5: Food Security](#)
- 3 Niles et al. 2021: [Climate impacts associated with reduced diet diversity in children across nineteen countries](#)
- 4 IPCC 2019: [Special Report on Climate Change and Land, Chapter 5: Food Security](#)
- 5 UN Women 2024: [How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected](#)
- 6 Action contre la Faim 2023: [Gender & climate change induced impacts on women's/girls' psychosocial, socio-economic and nutrition security condition in Asia region](#)
- 7 UN Women 2024: [How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected](#)
- 8 UNICEF 2024: [Evidence on the linkages between gender-based violence and nutrition](#)
- 9 UNFCCC 2022: [Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women. Synthesis report by the secretariat](#)
- 10 Climate Action Network 2024: [Submission on the New Collective Quantified Goal \(NCQG\)](#)
- 11 See also: World Resources Institute: [Principles for Locally-Led Adaptation](#)
- 12 See also: Gliessman 2016: [Transforming food systems with agroecology](#)
- 13 See the [2015 Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni](#)
- 14 Rotz et al. 2019: [The Politics of Digital Agricultural Technologies: A Preliminary Review](#); Friends of the Earth Europe, FIAN International, Centre for Agroecology Water and Resilience at Coventry University 2023: [Remote Control and Peasant Intelligence](#)
- 15 WMO 2023: [2023 shatters climate records, with major impacts](#); ICRC 2024: [How is "Armed Conflict" defined in IHL?](#)
- 16 Using data from ND-GAIN 2024: [Rankings](#); SIPRI: [Yearbook 2024](#)
- 17 Development Initiatives 2023: [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023](#)
- 18 Opitz-Stapleton et al. 2023: [Rapid assessments of the hunger-climate-conflict nexus](#)
- 19 UNOCHA: [Afghanistan: The alarming effects of climate change](#)
- 20 UNDP 2023: [Afghanistan is on the brink of climate catastrophe, we must act now](#); FAO 2023: Afghanistan: [Cold Wave Assessment on Livestock - Data in Emergencies Impact Report](#)
- 21 UNOCHA: [Afghanistan: The alarming effects of climate change](#)



Created in 1979, our Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) – Action Against Hunger – is fighting against hunger and malnutrition in the world, in more than 55 countries with over 8000 staff. Its aim is to save lives and eradicate hunger through the prevention, detection, and treatment of malnutrition, in particular during and after emergency situations caused by conflicts and natural disasters. Action Against Hunger advocates to tackle the root causes of hunger and malnutrition: conflicts, the climate crisis, and inequalities.