

# Rethinking Food Security in International Relations: Famine, Vulnerability and Conflict in Somalia

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| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Food Security; Human Security, International Relations; Non-Traditional Security, Somalia</p> <p><b>DOI:</b><br/><a href="https://doi.org/10.22437/jssh.v10i1.56055">10.22437/jssh.v10i1.56055</a></p> <p><b>Received:</b><br/>April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026</p> <p><b>Reviewed:</b><br/>May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b><br/>June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026</p> | <p>Food security has increasingly become an important issue in International Relations, particularly within non-traditional security studies. This article aims to rethink the concept of food security by examining the relationship between famine, vulnerability, and conflict in Somalia. Traditionally, understood as a humanitarian and development issue, contemporary global challenges such as armed conflict, political instability, climate change, and economic inequality demonstrate that food insecurity also constitutes a significant international security concern. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and literature-based analysis, this study explores how chronic famine in Somalia reflects the interconnectedness between food insecurity, state fragility, human vulnerability, and violent conflict. This study focuses on the 2020 and 2024 period, particularly covering the 2011 famine. To ensure the empirical reliability, the analysis relies on reports and datasets from key international institutions, including UN, FAO, WFP, IPC, the World Bank, and relevant scholarly publications. The findings reveal that famine in Somalia is not solely caused by natural factors such as drought, but is also deeply influenced by prolonged political instability, armed conflict, weak governance, and unequal access to resources. Furthermore, food insecurity contributes to social instability, displacement, humanitarian crises, and the expansion of extremist groups, thereby threatening both national and regional security. This article argues that food security must be viewed as a multidimensional security issue linked to international stability. By using Somalia as a critical empirical case, this study contributes to the broader discussion on non-traditional security and offers a deeper conceptual understanding of food security within International Relations studies.</p> |

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## 1. Introduction

Food security has increasingly emerged as one of the most critical issues in contemporary International Relations, particularly within the broader discussion of non-traditional security. Traditionally, security studies focused primarily on military threats, territorial defence, and interstate conflict. However, the end of the Cold War significantly transformed the understanding of security by expanding its scope beyond military dimensions toward economic, environmental, health, and humanitarian issues. Within this evolving framework, food insecurity is no longer understood merely as a developmental or humanitarian challenge, but

also as a security issue capable of threatening social stability, political order, and international peace (Buzan et al., 1998).

The growing importance of food security in international security discourse is closely linked to the increasing frequency of global crises affecting food systems. The 2008 global food crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, armed conflicts, and disruptions in global supply chains have demonstrated the vulnerability of international food systems. The Russia–Ukraine war further intensified these concerns because both countries play significant roles in global grain and fertilizer exports. As argued by Marzęda-Młynarska (2022), contemporary food insecurity has become closely interconnected with international security due to its capacity to generate instability, migration, conflict, and geopolitical competition.

In this context, food insecurity should not be viewed solely through the lens of food availability. Contemporary studies increasingly recognize food security as a multidimensional issue encompassing economic access, political stability, environmental sustainability, and human survival. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food necessary for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 1996). This definition demonstrates that food security extends beyond agricultural production and involves broader structural and political dimensions.

The relationship between food insecurity and conflict has become particularly evident in fragile and conflict-affected states. In many developing countries, food insecurity contributes to social unrest, displacement, political instability, and violent conflict. Conversely, armed conflict itself often destroys agricultural systems, disrupts distribution networks, and weakens state capacity to ensure food access. This cyclical relationship between hunger and insecurity positions food security as an increasingly important issue within international security studies.

Somalia represents one of the most significant contemporary examples of this phenomenon. For decades, Somalia has experienced recurring famine, chronic food insecurity, prolonged armed conflict, weak governance, environmental degradation, and humanitarian crises. According to the United Nations and the World Food Programme, millions of Somalis continue to face acute food insecurity due to drought, conflict, displacement, and economic vulnerability. The famine crises of 1992, 2011, and the continuing humanitarian emergency in recent years illustrate how food insecurity in Somalia cannot be separated from broader issues of political instability and conflict.

The Somali case also demonstrates that famine is rarely caused solely by natural disasters. Although drought and climate change contribute significantly to agricultural failure, political violence, state fragility, armed insurgency, poverty, and restricted humanitarian access play equally important roles in worsening food insecurity. In this regard, famine should be understood not only as an environmental or economic problem, but also as a political and security issue deeply embedded within domestic and international power structures.

Several previous studies have examined food insecurity in Somalia from humanitarian, developmental, and environmental perspectives. Research has extensively discussed drought, climate vulnerability, humanitarian assistance, and poverty as major causes of famine in the region. Other studies have analysed the role of international organizations in addressing food crises in Somalia. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining food security within the broader framework of International Relations and non-traditional security studies, particularly in understanding how famine, vulnerability, and conflict interact as interconnected security issues. Moreover, many existing studies continue to treat food insecurity primarily as a humanitarian emergency rather than as a multidimensional international security concern. Consequently, there remains a research gap regarding the conceptualization of food security as part of non-traditional security discourse in International

Relations. Existing literature also tends to separate discussions of famine, conflict, and human insecurity, despite the fact that these phenomena are deeply interconnected in fragile states such as Somalia.

This article seeks to address this gap by rethinking food security through the perspective of International Relations and non-traditional security studies. Using Somalia as a critical empirical case, this study examines how famine, vulnerability, and conflict mutually reinforce one another and contribute to broader security challenges. The article argues that food insecurity should be understood not merely as the absence of food, but as a multidimensional security issue closely linked to political instability, armed conflict, human vulnerability, and international insecurity. By situating Somalia within the broader discussion of non-traditional security, this study contributes to the conceptual development of food security in International Relations. Furthermore, it highlights the need to understand contemporary famine not only as a humanitarian tragedy, but also as a critical challenge to human security and international stability.

## **2. Literature Review**

Food security has increasingly become an important issue within International Relations (IR), particularly after the transformation of security studies following the end of the Cold War. Traditionally, security was primarily associated with military threats, territorial defence, and interstate conflict. However, contemporary security studies have gradually expanded the meaning of security beyond military dimensions toward broader issues such as economic instability, environmental degradation, migration, public health, and humanitarian crises. In this context, food insecurity has emerged as one of the most significant non-traditional security issues because of its direct relationship with human survival, political stability, and international order (Buzan et al., 1998).

The concept of food security itself has undergone significant evolution. Early approaches to food security focused mainly on food availability and agricultural production. During this period, food security was understood as the capacity of states to ensure adequate food supply through domestic production, food reserves, and trade mechanisms. However, this perspective was later criticized for being overly state-centre and insufficient in explaining why famine and hunger continued to occur even in situations where food was physically available. One of the most influential critiques was developed by Amartya Sen (1981), who argued through the entitlement approach that famine is often caused not by the absence of food itself, but by the inability of individuals or groups to access food due to economic, political, and social inequalities. Sen's argument fundamentally shifted discussions on food security from mere food supply toward issues of accessibility and vulnerability.

This broader understanding was institutionalized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which defined food security as a condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food necessary for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). The FAO definition demonstrates that food security is multidimensional, encompassing food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Consequently, food insecurity cannot simply be interpreted as agricultural failure, but must also be understood within broader political, economic, and social structures.

The expansion of security studies in International Relations further strengthened the relevance of food security as a security issue. Scholars associated with the Copenhagen School, particularly Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), argued that security should no longer be narrowly confined to military threats. Their broader framework of security included economic, societal, environmental, and political sectors, thereby opening conceptual space for analysing food insecurity within international security studies. In parallel, the

emergence of the human security framework introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasized that security should focus not only on protecting states, but also on protecting individuals from chronic threats such as hunger, poverty, disease, and environmental degradation (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

Within this evolving framework, food insecurity increasingly came to be recognized as a source of instability capable of generating social unrest, displacement, conflict, and humanitarian crises. Contemporary global events have reinforced this understanding. The 2008 global food crisis, for example, demonstrated how rising food prices and shortages could trigger political instability and mass protests in various countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of global food supply chains and highlighted the interconnectedness between health crises, economic disruption, and food systems. More recently, the Russia-Ukraine war has intensified global concerns regarding food security because both countries are major exporters of grain and fertilizer. According to Katarzyna Marzęda-Młynarska (2022), these developments demonstrate that food insecurity is no longer merely a humanitarian issue, but also a matter of international security due to its capacity to destabilize political and economic systems at both domestic and global levels.

Recent studies have further strengthened the understanding of food insecurity as a multidimensional security issue closely connected to conflict, governance, and climate vulnerability. Hendrix and Brinkman (2013), for example, argued that food insecurity and violent conflict are interconnected through cyclical dynamics in which hunger intensifies instability while conflict simultaneously worsens food access and agricultural production. Similarly, Raleigh and Urdal (2007) emphasized that environmental degradation and climate-related stress may increase the risk of social unrest and political violence, particularly in fragile states with weak institutional capacity. More recent global assessments published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) and the World Bank (2023) further demonstrate that climate change increasingly functions as a “threat multiplier” capable of intensifying poverty, displacement, food insecurity, and political instability in vulnerable regions, including the Horn of Africa.

The relationship between food insecurity and conflict has become a central discussion in contemporary literature. Existing studies generally identify a cyclical relationship in which conflict contributes to food insecurity, while food insecurity simultaneously increases the risk of instability and violence. Armed conflict often destroys agricultural infrastructure, disrupts food distribution networks, displaces populations, and weakens state institutions responsible for ensuring food access. Conversely, severe food insecurity may intensify social tensions, increase public dissatisfaction, and contribute to political unrest. In fragile states, chronic food insecurity may even facilitate the growth of extremist groups and armed violence.

Environmental factors have also become increasingly important in discussions of food insecurity. Climate change, drought, desertification, water scarcity, and environmental degradation significantly affect agricultural production and food distribution systems, particularly in developing countries that remain heavily dependent on climate-sensitive agricultural sectors. Many scholars therefore argue that environmental degradation acts as a “threat multiplier” that intensifies existing economic, political, and social vulnerabilities. As a result, food insecurity today is understood not simply as a problem of insufficient production, but as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction between environmental stress, political instability, economic inequality, and institutional weakness.

These interconnected dynamics are particularly visible in Somalia, one of the most prominent cases of chronic food insecurity and famine in the contemporary world. Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, the country has experienced prolonged political instability, civil conflict, weak governance, recurring droughts, and severe humanitarian crises. Somalia’s

food insecurity therefore cannot be separated from the broader context of armed conflict and state fragility. While environmental factors such as drought and climate change contribute significantly to agricultural failure and livestock losses, many scholars argue that famine in Somalia is fundamentally political in nature. Alex de Waal (1997) and Indriastuti et al. (2024) for example, emphasized that famine should not be viewed solely as a natural disaster, but rather as a political phenomenon produced through violence, institutional failure, and unequal access to resources and humanitarian assistance.

Contemporary studies on Somalia also reinforce the argument that famine and food insecurity are deeply political and security-related in nature. Maxwell and Fitzpatrick (2012), in their analysis of the 2011 Somalia famine, argued that drought alone could not explain the humanitarian catastrophe because conflict, governance failure, restricted humanitarian access, and political fragmentation significantly contributed to mass starvation. Likewise, Menkhaus (2012) demonstrated that armed conflict and Al-Shabaab's restrictions on humanitarian operations became critical factors that intensified food insecurity and delayed international humanitarian responses. These studies suggest that famine in Somalia should be understood not merely as an environmental crisis, but also as a manifestation of state fragility and chronic insecurity.

The Somalia case demonstrates how famine, vulnerability, and conflict reinforce one another. Armed groups such as Al-Shabaab have disrupted humanitarian operations and restricted access to food assistance in conflict-affected regions. At the same time, weak state institutions have undermined the government's capacity to provide public services, regulate markets, and respond effectively to humanitarian emergencies. Consequently, millions of Somalis remain dependent on international aid for survival. Food insecurity in Somalia has also generated broader regional and international implications, including forced migration, refugee flows, piracy, and the expansion of violent extremism. This demonstrates that chronic food insecurity in fragile states is not merely a domestic humanitarian issue, but also a challenge to regional and international security.

Although previous studies have extensively examined famine and food insecurity in Somalia, much of the existing literature continues to approach the issue primarily from humanitarian, developmental, or environmental perspectives. Numerous studies focus on drought, poverty, humanitarian assistance, climate change, and governance failures as the primary causes of food crises. Other studies emphasize the role of international organizations and humanitarian agencies in responding to famine. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to conceptualizing food insecurity within the broader framework of International Relations and non-traditional security studies. Existing literature also tends to analyse famine, conflict, vulnerability, and human insecurity separately, despite the deeply interconnected nature of these phenomena in fragile states such as Somalia.

Recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the importance of integrating food security into broader discussions of Human Security and non-traditional security studies. Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2007) and Lusiani & Nisadina (2024) argued that human security frameworks are essential for understanding contemporary threats that directly affect individual survival, including hunger, poverty, displacement, and environmental degradation. However, despite the growing recognition of food insecurity within security studies, much of the literature still tends to examine humanitarian crises, climate vulnerability, conflict, and governance as separate issues rather than interconnected dimensions of insecurity.

Therefore, a significant research gap remains regarding the conceptual understanding of food security as a multidimensional security issue within International Relations. This study seeks to address that gap by rethinking food security through the perspective of non-traditional security studies. By focusing on Somalia as a critical empirical case, this article argues that

famine and food insecurity should not be understood merely as humanitarian emergencies or developmental failures, but rather as multidimensional security issues closely connected to conflict, political instability, human vulnerability, and international insecurity.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the relationship between food insecurity, famine, vulnerability, and conflict in Somalia. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because this study seeks to explore and interpret complex social and political phenomena related to food security within the broader framework of International Relations and non-traditional security studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lamont, 2015). Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, this research focuses on understanding how food insecurity functions as a multidimensional security issue connected to political instability, armed conflict, environmental stress, and human vulnerability.

The study adopts a case study approach by focusing on Somalia as a critical empirical case. Somalia was selected because it represents one of the most severe and prolonged examples of famine and chronic food insecurity in the contemporary international system. The Somali case illustrates how environmental crises, state fragility, armed conflict, weak governance, and humanitarian emergencies interact in shaping food insecurity. By utilizing Somalia as a case study, this research aims to provide a deeper conceptual understanding of food security as a non-traditional security issue within International Relations.

This research also applies a literature-based research strategy through extensive document analysis. Academic books, journal articles, institutional reports, and international organization publications were utilized to analyse the conceptual development of food security and its relationship with international security. The study particularly draws upon literature concerning non-traditional security, human security, famine studies, conflict studies, and food security governance.

#### **3.2 Participants**

Since this study utilizes qualitative library research and document analysis, it does not involve human participants in the form of surveys, interviews, or experiments. Instead, the primary sources of data consist of academic and institutional documents relevant to the research topic. The study employs purposive sampling in selecting sources and documents. Purposive sampling was chosen because the research specifically targets literature and reports directly related to food security, famine, conflict, and Somalia. The selected materials include: academic journal articles, scholarly books, reports from international organizations, humanitarian assessments, and policy documents.

The criteria for selecting documents were adapted from qualitative document analysis approaches developed by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Lamont (2015), which emphasize the importance of relevance, credibility, contextual significance, and analytical contribution in qualitative research. Therefore, the selected sources were chosen based on several criteria: (1) direct relevance to food security, famine, conflict, and Somalia; (2) conceptual relevance to International Relations and non-traditional security studies; (3) empirical credibility derived from peer-reviewed publications or official institutional reports; and (4) contribution to understanding the relationship between food insecurity, human vulnerability, conflict, and governance. Institutional reports from organizations such as the FAO, WFP, IPC, UNOCHA, UNICEF, and World Bank were also prioritized because they provide internationally recognized empirical data and humanitarian assessments concerning food insecurity in Somalia.

### **3.3 Instruments**

The primary instrument employed in this study is document analysis. Document analysis was used to systematically examine and interpret academic literature, institutional reports, statistical publications, and policy documents related to food security and famine in Somalia. Collected documents were analysed to identify: conceptual understandings of food security, relationships between food insecurity and conflict, causes of famine and vulnerability, and the implications of food insecurity for international security.

Academic books and journal articles were mainly used to construct the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, particularly regarding non-traditional security, human security, and food security studies. Institutional reports from international organizations were utilized to provide empirical data and contemporary assessments regarding famine, displacement, humanitarian crises, and food insecurity in Somalia.

The study also used content analysis as an analytical instrument to identify recurring themes, arguments, and patterns within the literature. Through content analysis, the research examines how food insecurity is conceptualized within International Relations and how Somalia is represented within discussions of famine, conflict, and human vulnerability.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

The data in this study were analysed using qualitative content analysis and descriptive analysis techniques. The analysis process began with collecting relevant academic literature, institutional reports, and policy documents concerning food security, famine, conflict, and Somalia. After data collection, the documents were categorized based on major themes, including food security and non-traditional security, famine and vulnerability, conflict and political instability, environmental factors, and humanitarian crises in Somalia.

The researcher then conducted an interpretative analysis to examine the relationships between these themes and identify how food insecurity is connected to broader security issues within International Relations. Particular attention was given to identifying patterns demonstrating the interaction between famine, conflict, state fragility, and human insecurity.

The analysis also involved comparing theoretical perspectives from International Relations and security studies with empirical conditions in Somalia. Through this approach, the study seeks to explain how food insecurity functions not only as a humanitarian problem but also as a multidimensional security issue with implications for regional and international stability. Finally, conclusions were drawn by synthesizing theoretical arguments and empirical findings in order to provide a broader conceptual understanding of food security within the framework of non-traditional security studies.

## **4. Findings**

The findings of this study demonstrate that food insecurity in Somalia is not caused by a single factor, but rather emerges through the interaction between environmental crises, armed conflict, political instability, weak governance, and economic vulnerability. Somalia's recurring famine therefore reflects a multidimensional security problem in which humanitarian, political, environmental, and security dimensions are deeply interconnected. Within the framework of International Relations, these conditions indicate that food insecurity should no longer be understood merely as a humanitarian or developmental issue, but also as a non-traditional security threat capable of undermining human survival, state stability, and regional order.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Somalia Acute Food Insecurity Situation Overview (2023), approximately 6.6 million people in Somalia experienced acute food insecurity during the prolonged drought crisis between 2022 and 2023.

The World Food Programme (WFP) Somalia Country Brief (2023) further reported that millions of Somalis remained dependent on humanitarian food assistance due to drought, armed conflict, displacement, and economic instability. In addition, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview (2023) and UNICEF Somalia Nutrition Situation Report (2023) identified a significant increase in acute malnutrition among children, particularly within internally displaced communities during the 2020-2024 humanitarian crisis. These findings demonstrate that food insecurity in Somalia has evolved into a structural and chronic condition rather than a temporary humanitarian emergency.

One major finding of this study is that prolonged armed conflict has significantly contributed to the worsening of food insecurity in Somalia. Since the collapse of the Somali central government in 1991, continuous civil conflict has weakened state institutions responsible for regulating markets, maintaining infrastructure, and ensuring food distribution. Armed violence has repeatedly disrupted agricultural activities, damaged transportation networks, displaced rural communities, and restricted humanitarian access to famine-affected areas. In several regions, militant groups such as Al-Shabaab have obstructed humanitarian operations and limited the delivery of food assistance to vulnerable populations (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 2023).

From the perspective of non-traditional security studies, these findings demonstrate that conflict and food insecurity reinforce one another in fragile states. This supports the argument developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998), which argues that contemporary security threats extend beyond military aggression and include political, societal, economic, and environmental threats. In the Somali context, famine and hunger therefore function not merely as humanitarian problems, but also as security threats capable of weakening political legitimacy, intensifying instability, and threatening regional security in the Horn of Africa.

The findings also indicate that environmental degradation and climate change have intensified food insecurity in Somalia. Recurrent droughts, desertification, irregular rainfall patterns, and water scarcity have severely affected agricultural production and pastoral livelihoods. Since a significant portion of Somalia's population depends on agriculture and livestock for survival, environmental shocks directly reduce household food availability and income generation. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Somalia Food Security Situation Report (2023), millions of Somalis continue to experience acute food insecurity due to prolonged drought combined with conflict-related disruptions.

These conditions reinforce contemporary discussions regarding environmental security and climate vulnerability within International Relations. Environmental degradation in Somalia acts as a threat multiplier by intensifying pre-existing political instability, poverty, displacement, and institutional fragility. Consequently, climate change and food insecurity should be understood as interconnected security challenges rather than isolated environmental issues.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between poverty and food accessibility. The study finds that famine in Somalia is not solely caused by the absence of food supplies, but also by limited economic access to food. Many Somali households lack stable income, employment opportunities, and purchasing power, making them unable to secure sufficient food even when food products remain available in local markets. Internal displacement caused by conflict and environmental crises has further weakened household resilience and increased dependency on humanitarian assistance.

This finding strongly supports Amartya Sen's entitlement theory in *Poverty and Famines* (1981), which argues that famine often occurs not because food is entirely unavailable, but because vulnerable populations lose the economic and social capacity to access food. In

Somalia, structural poverty, displacement, and institutional weakness therefore become central drivers of food insecurity. From the perspective of Human Security introduced in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 1994, these conditions represent direct threats to individual survival, dignity, and well-being rather than merely economic problems.

The findings additionally reveal that weak governance and institutional fragility remain central obstacles in addressing food insecurity. The limited capacity of state institutions has undermined the Somali government's ability to coordinate food distribution, manage humanitarian responses, stabilize food prices, and implement long-term agricultural policies. Consequently, Somalia remains heavily dependent on international humanitarian aid and external assistance programs. This institutional weakness reflects the broader problem of state fragility within International Relations, where weak governance reduces state capacity to provide security and basic public services, thereby increasing social vulnerability and instability.

This study also finds that food insecurity in Somalia has broader regional and international implications. Chronic famine and instability have generated large-scale displacement, refugee flows, social instability, and increased vulnerability to extremist recruitment. Food insecurity has therefore contributed not only to domestic humanitarian crises but also to regional instability in the Horn of Africa. The Somali case demonstrates that food insecurity may evolve into a broader international security concern when prolonged humanitarian crises interact with armed conflict, political instability, and transnational insecurity.

Within the securitization framework developed by the Copenhagen School, these findings demonstrate that food insecurity can be understood as a security issue because it threatens societal stability, political legitimacy, and regional order (Floyd, 2007; Lusiani & Nisadina, 2024). Food insecurity in Somalia therefore extends beyond the realm of humanitarian governance and enters the sphere of international security. This confirms the central argument of this study that food security should be rethought as a multidimensional security issue closely connected to human security, conflict, governance, environmental vulnerability, and international stability rather than merely as a question of food availability.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that food security in Somalia should be understood as a multidimensional issue that extends beyond the traditional understanding of food availability. Contemporary discussions of food security increasingly emphasize that food security involves not only sufficient food production, but also accessibility, utilization, stability, and institutional capacity. The Somali case strongly illustrates how the absence of these interconnected dimensions produces chronic food insecurity and recurring famine. The concept of food security developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 1996) identifies four major dimensions of food security. They are food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and food stability.

These four dimensions provide an important analytical framework for understanding the Somali famine. First, regarding food availability, Somalia has experienced severe disruptions in domestic agricultural production due to prolonged drought, environmental degradation, and armed conflict. Recurrent climate shocks have significantly reduced crop yields and livestock productivity, particularly in rural regions dependent on rain-fed agriculture and pastoral activities. Armed conflict has further damaged agricultural infrastructure, transportation systems, irrigation networks, and local markets. Consequently, food supplies in many areas remain highly unstable and dependent on international imports and humanitarian aid.

However, the Somali case demonstrates that food availability alone is insufficient to explain famine. This finding strongly supports Amartya Sen's (1981) entitlement theory, which argues that famine often occurs not because food is entirely unavailable, but because vulnerable populations lose access to food. In Somalia, many households remain unable to purchase or obtain sufficient food due to poverty, unemployment, displacement, and market instability. Therefore, food accessibility becomes one of the most critical dimensions of food security in fragile states.

Economic vulnerability significantly shapes food accessibility in Somalia. Chronic poverty, inflation, weak market systems, and limited state protection mechanisms reduce household purchasing power and increase dependence on humanitarian assistance. Internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable because displacement frequently disconnects communities from traditional livelihoods, agricultural land, and social support systems. As a result, famine in Somalia reflects structural inequality and vulnerability rather than merely agricultural failure.

The third dimension, food utilization, also reveals important challenges within the Somali context. Food utilization refers not only to food consumption, but also to nutrition, health conditions, sanitation, and access to clean water. In Somalia, prolonged humanitarian crises have weakened public health infrastructure and increased malnutrition rates, especially among children and vulnerable populations. Poor sanitation, limited healthcare access, and water scarcity further undermine nutritional outcomes even when emergency food assistance is available. Thus, food insecurity in Somalia cannot be separated from broader human development challenges.

The fourth dimension, food stability, is particularly important in understanding the recurring nature of famine in Somalia. Food stability refers to the continuity and reliability of food access over time. Somalia's prolonged political instability, recurring conflict, and environmental vulnerability create persistent disruptions that prevent sustainable food security from being achieved. Temporary humanitarian interventions may alleviate immediate crises, but they do not eliminate the structural causes of chronic food insecurity. Consequently, Somalia repeatedly experiences cycles of famine and humanitarian emergencies.

According to IPC and WFP reports, repeated droughts between 2020 and 2023 displaced millions of Somalis and severely disrupted rural livelihoods. These conditions demonstrate that food instability in Somalia is not temporary but structural and recurring, thereby reinforcing chronic human insecurity. Beyond the FAO framework, the Somali case also demonstrates the relevance of non-traditional security studies in International Relations. Traditional security approaches primarily focus on military threats and territorial defence. However, the Somali famine illustrates that threats to human survival, economic resilience, and social stability may generate consequences comparable to conventional security threats. Food insecurity in Somalia has contributed to migration, displacement, violent extremism, regional instability, and humanitarian crises extending beyond national borders.

This finding aligns with the broader security framework developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), who argued that security should encompass military, political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors. From this perspective, food insecurity should be recognized as a security issue because it threatens social order, political legitimacy, and human survival. The Somali case further reinforces the importance of the human security framework introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (United Nations Development Programme, 1994) Human security shifts the focus of security from protecting states toward protecting individuals from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, poverty, and violence. In Somalia, chronic food insecurity directly threatens human survival and undermines social resilience. Hunger, displacement, and vulnerability therefore become central security concerns rather than secondary humanitarian issues.

Another important discussion emerging from this study concerns the relationship between food insecurity and conflict. The findings confirm the existence of a cyclical relationship in which conflict intensifies food insecurity while food insecurity simultaneously increases instability and vulnerability to violence. Armed conflict disrupts agricultural production, damages infrastructure, and restricts humanitarian access. At the same time, chronic poverty and food insecurity create conditions that facilitate recruitment into extremist organizations and armed groups.

This cyclical relationship demonstrates that food insecurity in Somalia cannot be addressed solely through humanitarian assistance or emergency food aid. While humanitarian interventions remain essential for preventing mass starvation, long-term food security requires broader structural transformation involving political stability, conflict resolution, institutional strengthening, economic resilience, and environmental adaptation.

The findings also suggest that food insecurity should increasingly be viewed as part of international security governance. Contemporary global crises such as climate change, pandemics, geopolitical conflict, and disruptions in global food supply chains demonstrate that food insecurity is no longer confined within national borders. The Somali case illustrates how localized famine may generate regional instability through migration, refugee flows, transnational insecurity, and humanitarian emergencies.

Ultimately, this study argues that food security should be conceptualized not merely as an agricultural or humanitarian issue, but as a multidimensional security issue embedded within political, economic, environmental, and social structures. Somalia demonstrates that famine is not simply the result of insufficient food production, but rather the outcome of interconnected vulnerabilities shaped by conflict, institutional fragility, poverty, environmental stress, and unequal access to resources.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that food security is a multidimensional issue deeply linked to political instability, conflict, and human insecurity. The case of Somalia reveals that famine is not solely caused by environmental factors like drought. Instead, environmental degradation interacts with structural poverty, weak governance, and restricted humanitarian access, driving chronic hunger, displacement, and regional instability. Ultimately, these findings confirm that food insecurity in fragile states is fundamentally political and structural in nature.

By applying the FAO's four dimensions, this study argues that the framework alone cannot fully explain conflict-driven crises. Therefore, it integrates Amartya Sen's entitlement approach and non-traditional security perspectives to analyse famine in Somalia. The findings confirm that food insecurity drives displacement, extremism, and regional instability. Consequently, food security must be recognized as a core issue within international security studies. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its attempt to bridge food security studies with non-traditional security approaches in International Relations. Rather than treating food insecurity solely as a developmental or humanitarian problem, this article conceptualizes food insecurity as a multidimensional security issue embedded within political, economic, environmental, and social structures. The study therefore contributes to the growing discussion on how famine, vulnerability, conflict, and governance interact within fragile states and produce broader international security implications.

Finally, this study suggests that addressing food insecurity in Somalia requires approaches extending beyond emergency food aid and humanitarian interventions. Long-term food security depends upon political stabilization, conflict resolution, institutional strengthening, environmental adaptation, economic resilience, and inclusive governance. Without addressing these structural dimensions, Somalia will likely remain trapped in recurring cycles of famine

and humanitarian crisis. Future research may further explore the relationship between food insecurity, climate security, and geopolitical competition in other conflict-affected regions in order to deepen the conceptual development of food security within International Relations and security studies.

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