Mali as a Hunger Hotspot: Current Events & Lessons From Delisted Countries

I. Introduction

Mali is currently designated as a "highest concern" hunger hotspot by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Hunger hotspots are geographic areas where acute food insecurity is expected to worsen in the near future due to compounding shocks such as conflict, climate change, and economic instability (FAO & WFP, 2023). Mali's situation is emblematic of complex, interlinked crises that require both immediate humanitarian responses and long-term development solutions.

Examining countries that were previously listed as hunger hotspots but have since been delisted, such as Lesotho, Kenya, and Niger, offers valuable insights. These case studies highlight the types of interventions and structural changes that have proven effective in stabilizing food security, even in fragile contexts.

II. Overview: Mali's Current Food Insecurity Crisis

As of mid-2025, Mali has been identified as one of the world's most severe hunger hotspots. According to the FAO and WFP's latest outlook, the country is in the "highest concern" category, with particularly alarming levels of food insecurity in Menaka and surrounding regions (FAO & WFP, 2025). Estimates suggest that over 1 million people in Mali are currently in IPC Phases 4 and 5, Emergency and Catastrophe, indicating urgent needs for food, nutrition, and livelihoods support (FSIN, 2025).

The drivers of this crisis are multifaceted. Armed conflict and ongoing displacement in northern and central Mali have destabilized livelihoods and disrupted supply chains. In addition, erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged drought have sharply reduced agricultural yields. Economic instability—exacerbated by inflation, currency devaluation, and rising global food prices—has made basic staples unaffordable for much of the population. Moreover, humanitarian access is constrained by insecurity, bureaucratic hurdles, and underfunded aid operations, limiting the reach of life-saving interventions (Insecurity Insight, 2024).

III. Comparative Case Study: Countries Recently Delisted

Several countries, including Lesotho, Kenya, and Niger, have recently been removed from the global hunger hotspot list. While each context is unique, their trajectories reveal a series of common drivers that contributed to improved food security.

In Kenya and Lesotho, improved rainfall and timely planting seasons helped stabilize agricultural production. Governments in these countries, often in coordination with donors and NGOs, expanded access to critical inputs such as drought-resistant seeds and fertilizer, and invested in small-scale irrigation systems (USAID, 2023). Additionally, anticipatory action

mechanisms, including early warning systems and targeted cash transfers, enabled timely responses before seasonal shocks escalated into full-blown crises.

However, vulnerabilities persist. Despite short-term improvements, many of these countries continue to face structural risks, such as poverty, youth unemployment, and climate fragility. Consequently, the durability of their recovery depends on sustained, long-term investment and institutional support.

IV. Recommendations for Mali

These recommendations are grounded in interventions that proved effective in countries recently removed from the hunger hotspot list (Lesotho, Kenya, Niger), and tailored to Mali's 2025 context:

1. **Scale up investment in climate-resilient, smallholder agriculture**
    In Kenya and Niger, food security improved significantly through subsidized drought-resistant seeds, fertilizer, and small-scale irrigation systems (USAID, 2023). In Mali, FAO reports that enabling immediate agricultural assistance could help 1.1 million people resume production amid conflict and displacement (FAO, 2025).

2. **Strengthen early warning, data-sharing, and surveillance capacity**
    Lesotho and Kenya implemented real-time monitoring systems that facilitated timely responses. Mali can build on this by integrating food security data with peace and conflict monitoring, especially after the Insecurity Insight briefing in 2024 recommended anticipatory conflict-informed action in regions like Ségou (Insecurity Insight, 2024).

3. **Launch anticipatory action programs ahead of seasonal shocks**
    Niger, Lesotho, and Kenya deployed pre-positioned food aid, cash transfers, and livestock interventions before crises hit. In Mali, the World Food Programme and FAO's June–October 2025 hotspot warning underscores the need for anticipatory measures now, given the high risk of Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) (FSIN, 2025).

4. **Foster multi-sectoral partnerships across humanitarian and development actors**
    Successful delisted countries often credited strong coordination between governments, UN bodies, NGOs, and donors. FAO and WFP analyses call for joint programming in Mali to integrate emergency response with sustainable resilience-building (FAO, 2025).

5. **Address systemic drivers of instability: conflict resolution, inflation control, market access**
    Even with technical fixes, Kenya and others struggled until broader structural reforms were implemented. For Mali, tackling conflict, especially in Menaka and the central regions, along with inflation and market disruptions, is essential. Conflict-driven violence in Ségou has hindered production, particularly through the looting of livestock and the burning of granaries (Insecurity Insight, 2024).

V. Conclusion

The crisis in Mali demands urgent, coordinated, and preventative action. The country's current status as a hunger hotspot reflects not only immediate needs but also years of underinvestment in resilience. Lessons from recently delisted countries show that progress is possible—even in fragile states, when governments, communities, and international actors align around long-term solutions. Mali's food security crisis is not inevitable; with the right interventions, it is both preventable and solvable.

VI. Bibliography

FAO. (2025). *Mali: FAO in emergencies*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. https://www.fao.org/emergencies/where-we-work/MLI/en

FAO & WFP. (2025). *Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity*. https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc7709en

FSIN. (2025). *Global Report on Food Crises 2025*. Food Security Information Network. https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2025/

Insecurity Insight. (2024). *Applying an Anticipatory Action Mindset to Addressing Conflict and Food Insecurity in the Ségou Region, Mali*. https://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Applying-an-Anticipatory-Action-Mindset-to-Addressing-Conflict-and-Food-Insecurity-in-the-Segou-Region-Mali-Nov-2024.pdf

USAID. (2023). *Global Food Security Strategy: Kenya Country Plan 2022–2026*. https://www.usaid.gov/kenya/food-security-strategy